

The London School of Economics and Political Science

**Practicing Urban Commons
between Autonomy and Togetherness:**

A genealogical analysis of
the urban precariat movements in Tokyo and Seoul

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Abstract

This thesis examines practices of urban commons developed by precariat movements in Tokyo and Seoul. While the global rise and expansion of capitalist cities have produced precarity through ever-changing modes of governance, the urban precariat around the world has sought alternatives in each context. This study takes a comparative look at how the urban precariat's alternative practices simultaneously shape and are shaped by the uneven and fluid processes of urbanisation.

Drawing on 17 months of ethnographic research, 70 in-depth interviews, and extensive archival data, this thesis provides three sets of comparative analysis regarding situated value struggles of the urban precariat at different times. Firstly, it investigates how day labourers in Tokyo and housewives of shacktowns in Seoul were not only the source of the most precarious forms of labour power in constructing these cities in the post-war period, but also emerged as agents of urban movements contesting social norms around work and home. Secondly, it explores the value struggles of youth who decided to live as the “voluntary poor” when Japan and South Korea began neoliberal restructuring. Desiring to escape wage-labour relations, the precariat in Tokyo and Seoul chose work and home as strategic terrains in value struggles over *surplus*. Lastly, the thesis analyses contemporary precariat movements in Tokyo and Seoul in historical perspective. By tracing enduring traits of social movements in each city, it explores how the precariat in these cities has developed different strategies around autonomy and community to confront the ideology of self-reliance.

This thesis contributes to broader discussions around commons and the precariat that challenge the capitalist production of *subjectivity* by adding a view from Global East. Producing an unprecedented genealogical cartography of precariat movements in Tokyo and Seoul, the thesis empirically unpacks the persistent tensions between autonomy and community that mark the precariat's situated production of urban commons.

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List of Abbreviations

CAGG	Citizens' Action for Gyeong'ui Railway <i>Gongyuji</i>
CKKR	Committee for Keeping Kobama Ryo
CPUH	Committee for Publishing the Urban Poor Movement History
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNI	Gross National Income
GNP	Gross National Product
IMF	International Monetary Fund
JPY	Japanese Yen
JRP	Joint Redevelopment Programme
KRNA	Korea Rail Network Authority
KRY	Korean Won
NHI	National Health Insurance
NUR	National Unemployed Regiment
PF	Project Financing
SLWCAC	San'ya Labour Welfare Centre Activity Committee
SMG	Seoul Metropolitan Government
TMG	Tokyo Metropolitan Government
USD	US Dollar

A Note on Korean and Japanese Language Convention

In this paper, I follow the Revised Romanization of Korean (2000) in transcribing Korean into Roman writing system, and Hepburn romanization in transcribing Japanese into Roman writing system, unless the original citations follow different transcription systems or there is already a widely accepted spelling.

Chapter 1. Introduction

Quite simply, we think the world from our misfitting. (Holloway, 2010, part 2, para. 5)

Everything is expressed in action, not in some empty words. (Kashima, a former member of Akino-Arashi, in Toyama & Kashima, 1997, p.118)

1.1. Developing ideas around precarity

I graduated from university in 1998 as a student activist at a time when South Korean society had been hit hard by the Asian financial crisis. The media talked about new social phenomena such as “homelessness” and “family break-ups” side by side with the national financial disaster. My family, having literally broken up upon the impact of the crisis, fit the description, and I had to find a job. While working as a “salaried slave”, as I often put it, I continued to engage in the social movement. Around the early 2000s, a new kind of activist scene started to emerge in Seoul, albeit on a small scale, with characteristics that clearly distinguished it from the older leftist movement. Many of my friends whom I met in the scene refrained from working as much as possible, leading a life of the “voluntary poor”. “I definitely would do the same thing if I didn’t have to worry about debt”, I thought to myself. However, when I finally settled the family debt after twelve years of working, the last four years of which I spent in China, I was hesitant to quit my job. I thought about the reality of needing to earn my own living, and was scared of being completely free from wage-labour relations.

I went back to university. “I’ll receive a scholarship and do field research on the movement”, I thought – a compromise I made to defuse the battle between my divided selves. After years of painful and lonely struggle to acquire English, academic skills, and knowledge, which were never quite acquired to my satisfaction, I finally came back to Seoul to conduct pilot research for this doctoral project in 2017. It was after a 10 years’ absence, except for the 4 months’ fieldwork for the master’s dissertation in 2013 and a couple of short visits, and I was confronted with a social atmosphere that was significantly transformed.

At the end of the 1990s, the Korean media clamorously announced the official arrival of globalised neoliberalism. While everyone felt uneasy about the flood of words such as “restructuring” and “labour flexibilisation”, nobody seemed to have clearly grasped what these words meant except for those who were actually laid off. During the 2000s, feelings of precariousness became more widespread, though it was not that the whole of society plagued by these anxieties. In spite of severely violent state policies and socio-economic inequalities, there was also a sense of hope. People around me were enthralled with the ideas of anarchism, autonomia, and movements of freely assembled individuals. This culminated in the so-called “Candlelight Protests”, the name given to a four month-long occupation of central Seoul in the summer of 2008. Such movements demonstrated how rebellious bodies were still active in society at the time. In the 2000s, many of my friends and I organised and engaged in various networked and decentralised movements, creating and expanding connections. David Graeber, the late anthropologist who passed away in 2020, visited the activist

scene in Seoul in 2006, accompanying a team of anti-globalisation activists, and also made a return visit in 2008. That same year, my friends began a collective living experiment, called “Bin-Zib”, which I address in Chapter 5. In June of 2008, there was an anti-G8 camp in Hokkaido, Japan, where many of my Korean friends met Japanese activists and made enduring connections: I also learned that many Japanese activists then came to see the activist scene in Seoul, and some of them stayed at Bin-Zib.

By 2017, however, I vividly felt how society and the bodies that circulate in it had actually been changed in concrete ways. The appearance of the university I had attended, for example, changed in a shocking manner. It now looked like a shopping mall with lots of franchise shops and no traces of the student society rooms in which we used to drink and sleep, and the students’ behavior seemed different as well. A friend of mine, who worked as a part-time lecturer at a university, told me how students made furious complaints about their grades. It was not only about grades: many youths invested in themselves as human capital as well as in the real estate market, stocks, by “even scraping together souls (*yeonghonkaji keureomoa*)” as they expressed. “Financial technology (*jaeteken*)” became a crucial skill for the youth. In other words, they struggled really hard and put enormous “*nooooooryeok* (effooooort)” to survive and secure their future, and wanted to know the reasons for receiving lower grades than they had expected.

In this context, “fairness (*gongjeong*)” appeared as the most important value for the youth (see Pak and Jo, 2019; Pak et al., 2020). The youth believed that a fair assessment should be made about how much effort was put by individuals. On the one hand, the discourse of “fairness” is deeply interconnected with the meritocracy that shores up neoliberal capitalism (Park et al., 2020). For instance, “protecting the rights of irregular workers” is, from the perspective of many Korean youth today, not only unfair “free riding” but also extremely discriminative (see Oh, 2013). In other words, this discourse of fairness vividly shows how neoliberalism permeated the soul of Korean youth.¹ On the other hand, however, “fairness” might be understood as a final line of defense, or as a means of security, for precarious young people who have nothing but their bodies to secure their lives. Indeed, the discourse of fairness emerged together with the youth’s criticism of the privileged, older generation, who had developed nepotistic networks to illegally support each other and pass on their

¹ Following Foucault (2008), I understand neoliberalism as a specific rationality, or art of government. As a complex set of governmental technologies, neoliberalism produces specific forms of subjectivities, social relations, and societies dedicated to a rationality of the market.

wealth and social status to their offspring.² For example, Jo (interviewed by Yoo, 2021), a 28-year-old job applicant, says the following about fairness: “We cannot solve the issue of polarisation or inequalities immediately. That is why we desperately argue to please keep fairness at least”.

These two aspects, the youth’s internalisation of neoliberal ideology and their pursuit of a means of individual security, are strongly intertwined in the reality pushed by what Lorey (2015) calls “precarization”. The discourse of fairness shows the collective anxieties of the precarious youth. They seek fairness as an attempt to secure their future. In doing so, however, they paradoxically accelerate the capitalist game of “*gakjadosaeng* (literally meaning ‘each attempting to survive on their own’), the Korean version of “self-reliance”, which turns their lives into a war of all against all.³ How can we draw lines of flight from this self-destructive Moebius strip formed by the desire for security or survival, and from the further precarisation produced by that very desire?⁴

My research is an attempt to find an answer to this question. As a point of departure, I chose the experiments that I had never been able to fully join in the 2000s. Not only in Seoul, but also in other Asian cities, small-scale experiments sprung up by young people who chose to attempt to break away from capitalism rather than seek security within it (see Cassegård, 2013; Egami, 2017; 2018; Han, 2015; Jia, 2017). Shirōtono-ran (Amateurs’ Riots) in Tokyo, Bin-Zib (Empty/Guests House) in Seoul, and Gonyuzhijia (The Migrant Workers’ Home) in Beijing were the cases I initially chose when I began to design the project. All three cases emerged in the 2000s protagonised by those who were born in the mid-1970s, and their experiments were ongoing when I designed the project. Rather than trying to achieve security by following social norms, they actively chose to live differently by forming autonomous spaces, cultivating a distinct culture and sensibility that diverged from those of the mainstream. In other words, these cases were built by urban youth who desired to create alternatives in the present.

² It has been pointed out that a prominent element of the candlelight protests of 2017, which led to the impeachment of former president Park Geun-hye, was the “fairness discourse” (see Park, 2017). Chae (2019) discusses how slogans of “peace” and “order” dominated the candlelight protests in 2017 and how the political event was hijacked by Democratic Party, which currently holds power with President Moon Jae-in (as of 2021).

³ The term *gakjadosaeng* appeared as a keyword to describe the severely competitive atmosphere of the society in the 2010s. In the same vein, H Kim (2015) discusses how the Korean youth have internalised a culture of “competition” and, by doing so, created what he calls “survivalism” as the collective structure of the mind.

⁴ *Line of flight* is a term developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (2013) to refer to the moment of deterritorialisations of an assemblage.

My initial enquiries dealt with how urban youth were able to construct such spaces and relations under circumstances in which they still needed to earn money to buy food and pay rent. How did they go beyond wage-labour relations and reclaim autonomous activities within the capitalist system? Moreover, the idea of labour in the capitalist system is fundamentally intertwined with the notion of the free individual and the family as the personalised reproductive unit, based on the dichotomy of work and home (Federici, 2020; Marx, 1976).⁵ How did they seek to navigate possible alternatives while contesting the capitalist notions and practices which characterise both of these spheres?

Based on these questions, I sought to investigate how the urban precariat contests the dominant notions of work and home in different social, cultural, and geographic contexts in their endeavour to create alternatives to the capitalist way of life. As the research evolved and after conducting two sets of preliminary research visits, however, I was able to grasp the nuanced differences existing regarding the ways in which the urban precariat imagined and practiced alternative movements in each national context. Even when they used a similar language such as “anti-capitalism”, “communism”, or “citizens”, the meaning varied from one experiment to another – there was a much more complicated and longer history of social movements and critical knowledge behind each case. In addition, I encountered urban movements in which people collectively tried to build alternatives with earlier generations of the precariat. These realisations and encounters pushed me to re-design the whole research project so that I could also trace the genealogy of urban precariat movements inspired by anarchist impulses in different cities. Eventually, having considered the revised scope of my research and available resources as well as the constraints faced in Beijing (see Chapter 3 for more details), I decided to focus on cases in Tokyo and Seoul. The concept of “precariat” and “urban commons” provided me with a theoretical frame through which I could embrace multiple cases across space and time.

1.2. Framing research by defining the precariat and urban commons

As an increasing number of workers have become engaged in insecure, casualised, or irregular work, the concept of precarity has emerged to explain unstable, insecure, and contingent labour conditions

⁵ In this thesis, I use the term labour and work interchangeably, following Marx’s (1976, p. 284) definition: the labour process are (1) purposeful activity, that is work itself, (2) the object on which that work is performed, and (3) the instruments of that work. At the same time, I use terms, “wage labour” or “wage work”, when I need to specify it in the given context. With the term “home”, I refer both to norms/practices around family and dwelling based on which people reproduce their everyday lives and to the performative process through which people collectively appropriate and modify their ideas and practices.

brought about by neoliberal hegemony in labour policies. While the labour process has been increasingly disseminated throughout society beyond factories (see De Angelis, 2007; Gill & Pratt, 2008; Hardt & Negri, 2005; Prodnik, 2012), the real estate market and financialisation have emerged as significant forms of capital accumulation (Harvey, 2012). Under such circumstances, a significant body of literature has focused on commons and the precariat as conjoining key words for social transformation, but their meanings differ according to different political perspectives (Bauwens & Niaros, 2017; Caffentzis & Federici, 2014; Hardt & Negri, 2009; Linebaugh, 2008; Ostrom, 1990). In this section, I introduce the concept of the precariat and urban commons and discuss how I use them in this thesis.

1.2.1. The precariat

Precariousness emerged as a key word for social movements in Italy in 1977, especially to distinguish the movement from union-based party politics (Berardi, 2009; Shukaitis, 2003). With Euro May Day held in 2001 as the sign of a return of the precarity movement, scholars have paid attention to how precarity became “an organizing focus for a range of groups across Europe” (A Robinson, 2011). The precariat movement arose, however, not only in Europe, in which people experienced the decline of Fordism and state welfarism, but also in East Asian countries. For example, since the mid-1990s, vernacular neologisms have been used to refer to a whole new level of precarity confronted by the young generations in Japan and South Korea (hereafter Korea). In Japan, words such as NEET, (“not in education, employment, or training”), freeter,⁶ net-café refugee/cyber-homeless (referring to “people who sleep in 24-hour internet cafes”), and parasite singles (“single persons who live with their parents beyond their 30s”) have been used to refer to precarious youth.⁷ In Korea, in a reflection of how the youth view their own lives, a lot of cynical terms have been coined by young people. Some words refer to where they live, like *hell-josun* (meaning “hell-Korea”) or *jiokgo* (meaning “the pain of hell”).⁸ Some words are self-referential, such as *ingyeo* (meaning “surplus” or “residue”). Even in China, a nominally socialist country, there is an emerging generation that finds itself

⁶ Freeter (*Furitā*) refers to irregular (often unskilled) workers aged 15-34. The word is a combination of the English word “free”, the German word “Arbeit”, and the suffix “-er”. In 1986, the *Asahi Shimbun* newspaper introduced the word “free arbeiter” as a new coinage. In 1987, a recruitment magazine titled *Foromu A* promoted the word, emphasising its free and casual relationship to work.

⁷ Between 1980 and 2005, the rate of parasite singles increased from 23.9% to 42.6% for those aged 25-29, and from 7.6% to 24% for those aged 30-34 (Roland and Hiroyama, 2009). In 2017, an estimated 4.5 million unemployed and unmarried 35-54 years-old parasite singles (England, 2017).

⁸ *Jiokgo*’s pronunciation combines the first syllable of *jihabang*, *oktapbang* and *gosinwon*, all of which symbolise the most precarious forms of residency in a city.

extremely precarious without decent jobs or a proper place to live, and thus without any future. Although they do not use the term precariat, many self-mocking terms such as *diaosi* (“losers”), *yizu* (“ant tribe,” referring to those who are living in extremely small spaces like ants), and *ken lao zu* (“a tribe biting the old” – in the manner of a parasite – and which refers to those who are still living with parents) demonstrate the fact that similar subjectivities are formed in different national contexts. It was in this context that activists from Japan and Korea began to introduce the term precariat. In other words, the term precariat appealed to these countries’ rebellious, precarious youth.

Putting the sense of “precarity” into the idea of “proletariat”, the term precariat ambiguously points to a newly emerging class (Standing, 2011) or generation (Foti, 2017) affected by the changing economic landscape. Frase (2013) points out, however, that those affected include “too many different heterogeneous strata of population”. Thus, it appears that precarity as a class category or as a term for a generation does not adequately address the neoliberal social condition (see also Wright, 2016). Moreover, others point out that the discussion of precarity as a phenomenon under the flexibilised labour market is Eurocentric, as it fails to reflect the “much longer history of precarious work in the Global South” and other regions (Scully, 2016). For instance, precarity as a social condition existed in Japan even during the period of the economic boom. While the norm of lifetime employment in Japan produced the widely circulated notion of a middle-class society, the workforce that helped build Japan’s modernised infrastructure largely led precarious lives (Aoki, 2006, p. 2).⁹ In other words, it is more apt to view precarity as an ontological experience of the capitalist mode of production rather than as a particularly neoliberal condition (Lorey, 2015). Furthermore, the understanding of precarity as “the standard experience of work in capitalism” is more poignant when we think of the generalised life conditions of women as well as workers in colonies (Mitropoulos, 2005, p. 92). In other words, precarity has been more of a rule than an exception for life under capitalism for the majority of the global population; only male breadwinners and their families in industrialised societies under Fordism were protected from it.

As Papadopoulos (2017, p. 141) points out, the precarious movement in the 2000s was a kind of revival of the autonomous politics of the 1970s and 1980s, in particular “the refusal of work and the self-organisation of social reproduction”. The precariat is those who organise themselves “in the workplace, in the streets, and on the net, developing a distinctively anarcho-populist ideology and eco-queer culture” (Foti, 2017, p. 14). In other words, the precariat is a political subjectivity who attempts to collectively flee from the reality imposed by the capitalist value system. Instead of simply

⁹ In this regard, Aoki (2006, p. 7) suggests the word “new poor” to refer to the precarious population made up by the globalised neoliberal economic restructuring.

remaining victims or desiring to return to the Fordist sense of security, they reconstruct solutions of their own at the grassroots level by constructing autonomous spaces and creating something new (Berardi, 2009; Gill & Pratt, 2008; Neilson & Rossiter, 2006).

From this perspective, I do not follow the view of the precariat defined either as a class or as a generation. I also reject the view that interprets the precariat as anxious subjects who embrace an identity of “entrepreneurial self” (Bröckling, 2015) or subjects who aim to restore the protections and models of the welfare state (Ebbinghouse, 2007). Moreover, the precariat encompasses what Butler (2004) calls the “precariousness” of human beings, establishing an ethical ground from which we can see “the precariousness of the Other” and accept “precarious being-together” as fundamental preconditions for human beings. In other words, the potentialities of the precariat, as a radical political subjectivity, do not stem from the refusal of labour alone. They necessarily also grow out of the different attitudes and practices related to how they reproduce their lives, creating a different sense of working and living together.

The precariat, as I encountered in my fieldwork in Tokyo and Seoul, consist of the political subjectivities that collectively draw lines of flight from the capitalist value system in their endeavor to live and work together with the Other. They are political subjects that are involved in value struggles to transform work and home in the very heart of capitalist cities. In my study, I characterise their attempts of changing the mode of production of subjectivity in relation with the Other as urban commons, to which I turn my focus below.

1.2.2. Urban commons

As radical scholars have discussed, commons has been a much wider and longer practice/process of human history (De Angelis, 2007; Linebaugh, 2008) than capitalism. Capitalist relations has been created and reproduced through constant process of enclosures of commons or what Marx (1976) calls the “means of production”. In order to enact this system, capitalism needed free individuals who solely rely on their own bodies as the source of labour-power to earn a living. “Primitive accumulation”, in this context, refers to the process of creating free individuals by separating people from various social and physical commons (ibid.).

In this regard, capitalism is considered a specific mode of production that operates based on privatising/commodifying commons. It produces not only commodities, but also specific bodies, habits, affects, emotions, and desires. In other words, capitalism is a specific mode of production of subjectivity. Analysing capitalism as a mode of production, Marx (1973, p. 26) makes this point

clearly by stating that “production ... not only creates an object for the subject, but also a subject for the object”. He also argues that in advanced capitalism where “real subsumption” takes place, everything appears as a commodity: “The advance of capitalist production develops a working class which by education, tradition, and habit looks upon the requirements of that mode of production as self evident natural laws” (Marx, 1976, p. 899). From this perspective, commons can be defined as modes of production of subjectivity different from capital and the state.

The term commons has, however, been strongly intertwined with an image of natural resources, like forests, waters, and lands that are collectively owned and managed by members of a community, i.e., traditional forms of commons (Ostrom, 1990). Needless to say, protecting and reclaiming such forms of commons are important (see Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen, 2001). However, we also need to imagine and practice commons in an entirely new way in an era in which urbanisation is “becoming a general planetary condition” (Hardt & Negri, 2009, p. 252; see also Brenner & Schmid, 2015; Lefebvre, 2003; Merrifield, 2013). In this context, the concept of urban commons offers us a theoretical framework to see commons as “complex, relational and dynamic rather than bounded, defensive or highly localized and thus weave together a rich tapestry of different times, spaces, and struggles” (Chatterton, 2016, p. 626).

With the concept “urban commons”, I am not simply referring to commons in urban settings. Instead, I see the urban as an actually existing form of commons, inspired by Lefebvre’s (2003) concept of the urban as well as Hardt and Negri’s (2009) discussion of the metropolis as the common. The concept of urban/metropolis reflects a new mode of production in which the creation and the exploitation of surplus happens throughout the whole society. The urban is produced as the common in the social process and expropriated and privatised by capital. It is where “the accumulation of knowledge, technologies, things, people, wealth, money and capital” occurs, while being appropriated and controlled by the powerful few (Lefebvre, 2003, p. 24). The urban thus itself turns into a major battlefield of value struggles over commons (Harvey et al., 2009). Creating radical urban commons cannot help but engage in a concrete form of value struggle against the urbanism of capital. Inspired by Lefebvre’s understanding of the urban as “a terrain on which various strategies clash” (Lefebvre, 2003, p. 87), I define urban commons as modes of production of subjectivity (ways of being/working/consuming/living in relations with others) through encounter with heterogeneity. This is to say, urban commons is not only different from capital and the state but also distinguished from a closed community, which is often traditionally inflected based on the establishment of norms and rules.

1.3. The aim of research and research questions

This research aims to explore the development and production of the discourses, practices, and subjectivities evolving within the urban precariat movements to produce urban commons. By conducting comparative research on the urban precariat movements in Tokyo and Seoul across time, this project traces how the radical urban is imagined and practiced in different socio-political, economic, and geographic contexts.

This research pursues a theoretical, an empirical, and a methodological objective, although all three objectives are inherently intertwined with each other. Theoretically, it aims to re-articulate the theory of precarity and urban commons beyond the dichotomy of individualism and collectivism. Existing discussions around commons tend to emphasise “community”, “collectivity”, or “cooperation” as the crucial aspect of commons to overcome the individualism promoted by capitalism. However, by taking a community as a basic dimension of commons, we tend to disregard issues of violence and hierarchy embedded both within traditional communities and existing communities, and which are especially pronounced in patriarchal families. Also, collectives are now exploited by capital as a new feature of capitalism (see Dowling & Harvie, 2014; Barman, 2016; Van Dyk, 2018).

What we should be aware is that capital itself is a giant machine of cooperation which produces specific relations. How are we to invent “the modalities of ‘sharing’ ... between the ‘individual’ and ‘collective’ poles of personality” as Balibar (in Curcicion and Özselçuk, 2010) puts it? As Read (2011, p. 119) points out, “[i]ndividuals are individuals of the collective, of particular social relations and structure, just as collectives are nothing other than a reflection of the individuals that constitute them”. Any individuality is articulated and produced only within society and as a part of it. Therefore, the issue is what we can do differently to produce commons while we are still within the collective machine. My hypothesis is that we need to rearrange the relations between individuals (or dividuals, which include things and values attached to them) that compose commons right in the midst of precariousness. By articulating the discussion of precarity, precarisation, and precariousness and urban commons as an overarching theoretical frame, this project aims to elaborate the concept of urban commons as the mode of production of “the organic social body within which individuals reproduce themselves as individuals, but as social individuals” (Marx, 1973, p. 751).

Empirically, this project aims to provide a concrete base from which to critically contemplate the political possibilities and limitations of the urban precariat’s situated value struggles to overcome capital, state, and community. Commons is collectively created and shared in diverse value forms while being captured and circulated in the market as the omnipresent capitalist value form, i.e., money. Value

struggles are at the centre of commons. As the capitalist value system has begun to valorise the deepest human relationships, the precariat need to engage in the practice of what De Angelis (2007) calls “counter-enclosures” in order to actualise radical commons. However, there is a dearth of analysis on actually existing value struggles. Addressing this necessity, this thesis analyses the actually existing commoning practices of the urban precariat as concrete practices of value struggle. I particularly look at how precariats in Tokyo and Seoul contest the capitalist time and space as well as the dichotomy of work and home in their pursuit of constructing urban commons. I also explore how they practice commons that diverge from the normalising, closed tendencies of the community.

Methodologically speaking, this project is an attempt to conduct comparative research which is “open to thinking with elsewhere”, to borrow Robinson’s (2016, p. 188) expression. Although Japan and Korea are geographically adjacent to each other in East Asia, these countries manifest significant differences in how they arrange values within political systems, economic structure, and forms of urbanisation. How can we compare urban movements formed in the capital cities of these seemingly incommensurable nations without bringing back a universalistic narrative? Or how can we avoid assuming what Varley (2013, p. 125) calls “unbridgeable difference”? On the one hand, urban transformation propelled by capital has spread across the globe (Shin, 2016; Smith, 2002). The spread of urbanism is, on the other hand, also an uneven and fluid process, taking root differently in specific contexts (Peck et al., 2009). Various factors, including state involvement, traditional/informal financial practices, and the flow of global capital have varied effects on the process in each context (Kadi & Ronald, 2014; Shin & Kim, 2016; Song, 2014). My research will trace how the urban precariat’s practices are affected by specific political, economic, and regulatory realities, while simultaneously appropriating the legacy of commons in each of the given societies. By conducting comparative research between Tokyo and Seoul, I seek to understand the multiple processes at work in precarisation, as well as imagine possible alternatives without imposing a normative narrative on alternatives.

With these goals in mind, my research questions are as follows:

How does the urban precariat, engaged in urban movements in Tokyo and Seoul, contest the capitalist value system and create different relations and values?

- (1) How has precarity been historically produced and governed in Tokyo and Seoul? How has the precariat formed urban movements in each geographical context?

- (2) How has the urban precariat engaged in value struggles? How are their value struggles not only affected by the social, cultural, and geographical realities they are embedded in but also appropriating the existing practices and legacies of commons?
- (3) How has the urban precariat imagined and practiced work and home differently in their endeavour to create the radically different urban, i.e., urban commons?

In an attempt to answer these questions, my project will focus on the precariat movements in Tokyo and Seoul for two reasons. First, as the capital cities of Japan and Korea, these cities demonstrate highly extensive precarisation through the evolving processes of industrialisation and urbanisation. Grassroots urban movements sprang up with the urban precariat as the main subjects in these cities, contesting the dominant forms of the capitalist production of urban space. At the same time, however, these cities display significant differences, especially in terms of their paths of modernisation. While both cities are located in the Global East (see Shin, 2021 for the concept of the Global East), sharing histories of modernisation, they occupy very opposite positions in terms of the history of colonialism as well as in terms of their geopolitical location regarding the politics of Cold War dynamics. How have different positions and pathways to modernisation affected the production of precarity, precarisation, and the precariat practices of producing urban commons? While previous studies have emphasised the cultural aspects of the urban precariat's prefigurative experiments (Cassegård, 2014, Kim, 2013a; Lee, 2017; Mōri, 2013), they have paid less attention to how the urban precariat contests the dominant forms of work and home by appropriating and transforming existing spatial and financial practices. By looking at Tokyo and Seoul, this thesis offers a comparative perspective on how the precariats have created distinct urban commons in these disparate cities even though they have come into contact with each other – particularly during the past two decades during the waves of global and local protest movements against neoliberal capitalism.

Second, both in Japan and Korea, traditional “villages (*mura/maeul*)” had long been a basic social unit in which people produced commons, having relative autonomy from the central state (Befu, 1965; 1967; Chung, 2008; Ha, 2010; Ju, 2006). Many examples show how people collectively organised common resources and labour power within village communities. However, both in Japan and Korea, the concept of “community” has occupied odd positions. Many villages were organised based on strongly gendered hierarchies. Moreover, both Japanese and Korean governments mobilised villages as the basic unit of the project of making a modern, military state. This was done not only by promoting notions of community, but also by substituting traditional organisations, which had autonomous and egalitarian characteristics. By doing so, the government turned communities into terminal units of bureaucracy (Koh, 2006; Kim, 2010; Lim, 2004; Sato, 1972; Smethurst, 1974).

Consequently, for many critical thinkers and activists in post-war Japan, community has not been a value to pursue since it reminded them of the Japanese Empire as well as what is wrong with various strands of Marxist orthodoxy. In the case of Korea, the concept of “community” was imported from the West and re-imagined in a popular movement by religious activists in the 1960s but has created complicated tensions throughout the history of Korean social movements, as I discuss in Chapter 6.

Considering the aforementioned qualities, I believe that this thesis can contribute to the critical knowledge production by offering the view from the Global East to the existing discussions around precarity and commons. This project will provide three sets of comparative research, focusing on different periods. Although each research set entails a focus on separate case studies, I do not examine each case separately and in isolation but relationally, arranging them within a framework of more historical breadth and depth in relation to the urban precariat movements. By tracing the moving constellation, this thesis will not only examine the similarities and differences found in each case, but also ask if and how the similarities/differences communicate with each other and give clues for the future of commoning practice across the region and beyond.

1.4. Thesis overview

The rest of the thesis is divided into six chapters. Chapter 2 presents the theoretical framework that informs the main discussions in this thesis, and recent discussions around precarity, commons, and urban commons provide a theoretical lens for the entire thesis.

In Chapter 3, my methodological chapter, I discuss how encounters at an early stage of research enabled me to redesign this project as relational comparative research. I also describe how I came up with my field sites not as independent cases but as a generative field of relational networks through tracing historical conjunctures and disparities between them with an eye to the geography of the urban precariat movement against capital. This is followed by descriptions of research sites, research participants, and collected data. Finally, I discuss how “the heterolingual address of translation” suggested by Sakai (2006) happened to be not only a strategy of my research but also a method of analysing data.

Chapters 4 through 6 include research findings and discussions. In Chapter 4, I investigate how surplus labour power was created and governed in the course of building Tokyo and Seoul as modern capital cities. Focusing on San’ya, a day labourers’ auction market (*yoseba* in Japanese) in Tokyo as well as shacktowns (*panjachon* in Korean) in Seoul, I explore how day labourers in San’ya and the urban poor housewives in shacktowns not only made up the most precarious population in

the city during the postwar period, but also emerged as the precariat who contested the ideology of the modern family and understanding citizens of the capitalist city. Both day labourers and the urban poor composed a surplus population who came to Tokyo and Seoul respectively to find jobs but failed to enter the class of the proletariat: in other words, these two groups occupied the same topology in the two societies.

Chapter 5 presents comparative research on the prefigurative experiments that emerged in Tokyo and Seoul before the official emergence of “the precariat” as the generation affected by the pervasive neoliberal ideology of self-reliance with Dameren (The League of Good-for-nothings) (1992-current) in Tokyo and Bin-Zib (Empty/Guests House) (2008-2018) in Seoul as the main case studies to analyse. I contextualise the socio-economic and cultural background in each case to understand how precarisation emerged in each city; how the social movement which departed from traditional left politics developed in each context; and in what circumstances the youth precariat chose work and home as the strategic terrain of their value struggles. I then analyse how Dameren and Bin-Zib conducted value struggles over the capitalist value system as well as how their value struggles entailed changes of work and home.

Chapter 6 presents a comparative and telescopic look into the scenes of the contemporary precariat movements in Tokyo and Seoul. I intend to map the precariat movements in both cities as contentious fields where different generations of the precariat co-exist and analyse how the terrain of each of the movements has been formed by specific values in relation to a longer history of movements in each city. In the case of Tokyo, I discuss how “autonomy” has been the core value of the precariat movement by analysing three interconnected aspects, namely position, action, and space. I then discuss how the value of autonomy is actualised in the precariat’s endeavour to create work and home outside of civil society by examining two cases: (1) Shirōtono-ran (Amateurs’ Riot) (2005-present), a loosely networked community rooted in Kōenji and known for their recycling shops and a series of alternative protest events; and (2) San’ya Sōgidan (San’ya Dispute League) (1981-current), the movement of rough sleepers. In the case of Seoul, I discuss how the precariat movement has developed through exploring the concept of “community”. Discussing how community has at different times been a core issue of the urban precariat movements, I focus on two specific cases in which the urban precariat strived to create a common ground without creating a closed community. The first is Citizens’ Action for Gyeong’ui-railway *Gongyuji* (2016-2020), the movement which occupied an area of state-owned land in the middle of Seoul for four years. The second is the Commune Bank, Bin-Go (2013-present), an alternative financial institution which was launched by residents of Bin-Zib.

Chapter 7 concludes this thesis, providing a summary of the overall thesis findings and discussing the contributions this thesis makes as well as the study's limits and areas for future research.

Chapter 2. The Precariat, Urban Commons, and Value Struggle

Individuals producing in society -hence socially determined individual production- is, of course, the point of departure. (Marx, 1973, p. 15)

It is value that brings universes into being. (Graeber, 2013)

This chapter presents the theoretical framework of the thesis. The conceptual foundations of my research are grounded in an understanding of precarity and commons, which are fundamentally interrelated concepts. While learning from radical scholars' discussions around precarity and commons, I actively engage in this conversation by adding a view from the Global East, where the notion of community has been developed in a complicated manner with active interventions on behalf of (Asian) developmental states. I also articulate the theory of value struggle to articulate the dimension of commons as an ongoing movement to abolish capitalism.

This chapter consists of five main sections. Section 2.1 defines the precariat as a political subjectivity by revisiting existing discussions around precariousness, precarity, and precarisation. Section 2.2 reviews the notion of commons and Graeber's concept of communism and defines two dimensions of commons: as ever-existing forms of life and as an ongoing movement to transform capitalism. Section 2.3 articulates the dimension of commons as an ongoing movement by sharpening the concepts of urban commons. In doing so, the section discusses how the concept of community has developed in Japanese and Korean society. Section 2.4 aims to articulate value struggle and its politics. Section 2.5 provides a summary of the chapter.

2.1. Defining precarity, precarisation, and the precariat

2.1.1. Precariousness, precarity, and precarisation

Precarity has been used to express the unstable, insecure, and contingent labour conditions created through neoliberal work policies (Fudge & Owens, 2006; Kalleberg & Hewison, 2013; Rodgers, 1989; Standing, 2014).¹ However, the concept not only demonstrates how precarity operates in contemporary capitalism, but also grasps a characteristic that it is inherent to capitalism itself (Lorey, 2015; 2017; Mitropoulos, 2005; Neilson & Rossiter, 2008; Shukaitis, 2013). In this regard, my thesis is particularly informed by Lorey's (2015; 2017) theorisation, which distinguishes between precariousness, precarity, and precarisation.

¹ From this perspective, the concept of precarity links to the specific conditions of the labour market, particularly in advanced capitalism. Standing (2014) asserts that the precariat is a new class or "class in the making" whose labour is "insecure and unstable, so that it is associated with casualization, informalization, agency labour, part-time labour, phoney self-employment and the new mass phenomenon of crowd-labour discussed elsewhere". However, the discussion focusing on the changes in the labour market tends to be Eurocentric, ignoring "the much longer history of precarious work in the Global South" and other regions (Scully, 2016).

The notion of “precariousness” describes the existential condition of human beings linked to the fragility and powerlessness of human existence (Butler, 2004; Ettlinger, 2007). Similarly, Lorey (2017) defines precariousness as a “socio-ontological condition shared by every life”. Unlike precariousness, “precarity” involves legal, political, economic, and social dimensions, making different groups in socially distinct positions experience different levels and kinds of insecurity. Precarity, its degree and kind, has been historically and geographically determined very differently in every context. Nevertheless, there is something that is shared across different contexts. That something, which is inherent in the constitution of capitalism, is free labour.

Following Lorey, I understand precarity as an inherent experience in capitalism. In order to make capitalism function, there should be a mass of free individuals who can and are forced to sell their labour-power. The transition to the capitalist mode of production thus inevitably requires a process through which people are freed from the means of (re)production. For example, in his analysis on the rise of capitalist production, Marx (1976) discusses how the enclosure took land, which was communal property, and reallocated it as private property in 16th century England. It is one of the clear examples of primitive accumulation, which is “separating people from their most basic means of reproduction, and generating an all-round dependence on commodity exchange” (Endnotes Collective, 2010, p. 21).

This awareness leads us to understand how the notion of precarity is intertwined with the concept of commons. Capitalism encloses various physical and social commons and, by doing so, creates free labourers separated from the means of (re)production. People who have lost their access to the means of (re)production of their lives cannot help but solely rely on their own body (the source of labour-power) to earn a living by entering into wage-labour relations. This does not mean that people had a pastoral life before the rise of capitalism nor that the ways in which capitalism encloses commons have been a singular process. Also, the rise of capitalism has taken multiple and inconsistent trajectories in different time frames and contexts with various internal registers and external impositions. However, what the process does is the same: turning various forms of commons that people have collectively produced, managed, and shared into private property. Diverse forms of communal or semi-communal ownership have been eliminated, while private ownership has been approved as the only legally legitimate form of ownership (Scott, 2008). People are compelled to work as wage labourers.

In this context, the essence of freedom in capitalist society is “employment”, or more precisely, selling/buying one’s labour (Lordon, 2014). However, the sale of labour is never guaranteed, while other strategies and relations on which people rely to care for and reproduce their lives are

increasingly reduced and enclosed within the family through the development of capitalism. In other words, precarity is at the heart of wage labour. “The very concept of the free labourer already implies that he is a pauper: a virtual pauper”, as Marx (1973, p.526) states.

As it has been widely pointed out, governments of the so-called first world began to implement a welfare system coupled with mass employment industry (aka Fordism) in response to the rise of labour unions, reformist demands, and the threat of socialism. In her study of precarisation, Lorey (2015) points out that this Fordist arrangement protected male breadwinners in the First World. Although this does not mean that no precarity existed in such countries, the model existed in idea and practice as a means of governance.² What is often overlooked, however, is the fact that precarity has been “the standard experience of work in capitalism” in other countries where “social protection was never widely available in the twentieth century” (Mitropoulos, 2005, p. 92). Thus, people living under capitalism, in more cases than not around the world, have had to “rely on complex livelihood strategies that combine wages with non-wage income sources such as subsistence production (of both food and other reproductive needs), petty commodity production for the market, small-scale trading, as well as solidarity and reciprocity in various forms” (Scully, 2016, p. 165-166).

Then, how have we suddenly, and only in recent years, begun to talk about precarity? According to Lorey (2017; 2019), it is because, in the neoliberal regime, we are witnessing a process of normalisation of precarisation, which produces a specific subjectivity. The four decades of neoliberal reforms have demonstrated that there is no more guaranteed social protection and security, even as a form of illusion. Individuals are forced “to take on the full cost of their reproduction” (Federici, 2009). Even though the wage-work system has been significantly dismantled, wage income is still “the condition of direct or indirect participation in capitalist social relations” (Negri in Curcio, 2010, p.315). More and more middle-class families become indebted because of housing, health, and education (De Angelis, 2010).

Precarisation becomes the primary means of governance in neoliberal society. Not only a socially marginalised group (or people in non-Western countries) but also a large portion of the middle class (and the citizens of welfare states) began to worry about financial (in)security. This process has accelerated both through the flexibilisation of labour (Rodgers & Rodgers, 1989; Scully, 2016) and the commodification/financialisation of home and everyday life (Allon, 2010; Langley, 2008; Martin, 2002; Rolnik, 2013). Although the process is diverse, with various registers in each context, the fear of becoming precarious is generalised. By taking place both in the realm of work and home,

² I also discuss this aspect with Japan as a case in the thesis.

precarisation becomes a thoroughgoing process. Hardly any external realm remains for collective security. In order to deal with the anxiety, precarious individuals become “risk-taking investors” (Finlayson, 2009, p. 414). More and more people must rely on their retirement plans, housing, health, and education through indebtedness (Lazzarato, 2012). In line with this tendency, the ideology of self-reliance becomes pervasive as a neoliberal instrument of governance, completing the vicious circle of “governing through precarization” (Lorey, 2017). This takes place both in welfare states and where there has not been social protection, and people have thus relied on more diverse strategies, including non-wage income sources, vernacular finances, and various forms of mutual aid. “Precarization”, in this context, refers to the process that “embraces the whole of existence, the body, modes of subjectivation” (Lorey, 2019, p. 155). Then, who is the precariat in the world where precarity has become a normalised condition?

2.1.2. The precariat as a political subjectivity oriented toward breaking away from capitalism

Standing’s (2014) famous definition of the precariat as “a class-in-the-making” has confronted significant criticisms. Many scholars argue that when we define a class based on labour insecurity, it results in putting illegal migrant workers, low-paid part-time youths, and high paid freelancers in cultural industries into the same category (see Neilson and Rossiter, 2006; Strauss and McGrath, 2017; Waite, 2009).³ While the criticisms point out how precarity becomes a normalised condition under the neoliberal regime, producing every individual as a (more or less) precarious subject, they also seem to be missing the point: the proletariat has also never been a homogeneous group, but has always included various strata of waged and unwaged labourers.

The proletariat refers to the class that does not own the means of production, rather only their own labour power. When we think of the “precariat” in terms of its relations with the means of production, the precariat is not distinct from the proletariat. In spite of the disparity in income, labour security, and social status within the proletariat/precariat, they are those who sell their labour power to earn a living. From this perspective, the term precariat particularly indexes certain elements in the changing composition of the proletariat in which even the middle class becomes increasingly

³ Standing (2014, p. 121) argues that what defines class is emotions, such as a “pervasive feeling of anger, anomie, (or) anxiety”, without considering that such emotions are generated through the process of precarisation, the new instrument of governance. People internalise social divisions and hierarchies while creating various forms of gated communities, from family to country, to protect their own share.

exposed to precarity (see De Angelis, 2010; Wright, 2016). In other words, the precariat cannot be the name of a “new” class that takes the place of the proletariat.

It is with this recognition in mind that I adopt the term precariat to demonstrate a subjectivist dimension of the proletariat in particular.⁴ Marx (1999) defines the proletariat not only as a “class in itself” but also as a “class against capital .. and for itself” (see also Andrew, 1983). The former definition is structural, counting the proletariat as a category of people who do not own the means of production, whereas the latter clearly refers to the proletariat as a political subjectivity; I would argue that the precariat can be defined in the same way. As a class in itself, the precariat can be considered as another name for the proletariat, who do not own a means of production but only their own bodies (labour power) in the period of generalised precarisation. However, regarding the second definition, the precariat diverges from the proletariat especially regarding the ways in which the precariat movement was organised during the 21st century.

According to Marx and Engels (2010), “the organisation of the proletarians into a class, and consequently into a political party, is continually being upset again by the competition between workers themselves”. A class is formed when individuals achieve class consciousness through “a common battle against another class”, the bourgeoisie. In other words, the proletariat as a political subjectivity is formed based on their unified identity. When Marx and Engels (1976) criticises what they call the “lumpenproletariat” as the underclass who are devoid of class consciousness, this aspect of conscious formation is clearly demonstrated. “In so far as ... the identity of their interests begets no community, no national bond and no political organisation among them, they do not form a class” (Marx & Engels, 1976, cited in Andrew, 1983, p. 579). However, the process of the making of the proletariat as a unified, identifiable class inevitably entails the exclusion of the other (lumpenproletariat, for example). The way in which labour unions in South Korea have come under sharp criticism since the 2000s since they often acted against irregular workers to protect their members would be perhaps one of the most depressing cases of the proletariat turning into a closed bond.

In this regard, scholars and activists have emphasised the potentiality of the precariat as a strategic political juncture to build a new kind of political movement beyond the traditional labour union movement and party politics (Berardi, 2009a; Jørgensen, 2017; Neilson and Rossiter, 2006; Shukaitis,

⁴ De Angelis (2010, p. 962) points out that the middle class is “an empirical term to describe” the “*working class*” that is “segmented and divided in a wage hierarchy”. This is to say, as “a stratified field of subjectivity”, the middle class/proletariat can only be performatively defined based on what they do or how they act as a part of the system or through making an outside to the system.

2013). In other words, the call for the precariat as a new political subjectivity resonates with what Deleuze and Guattari (2013) call a “molecular movement”.⁵

From this perspective, this thesis defines the precariat as the political subjectivity that collectively draws lines of flight from capitalist society, yet without forming a united identity. Precarity not only embodies all forms of insecurity as “the oppressive face of post-Fordist capitalism” (Neilson & Rossiter, 2006), but also demonstrates “a greater sense of flexibility and life arrangements, and ability to collectively subtract (at least partially) from capitalism” (Shukaitis, 2009, p. 167). Instead of desiring to return to the Fordist sense of security, the concept of precarity problematises the centrality of work in capitalism.

Two particular aspects of the precariat movement have been discussed. On the one hand, the precariat movement has prefigurative characteristics (Alvarez, Lauzon & Zaiontz, 2019; Berardi, 2009a; Gill & Pratt, 2008; Graziano, 2017; Robinson, 2011). The concept of “prefiguration” was coined in the late 1970s to conceptualise political practices developed in black, students’, and women’s movements (Boggs, 1977; Breines, 1980; Yates, 2020). Pointing out qualities different from the traditional left-wing organisations, Boggs (1977, p. 100) defines prefigurative politics as “the embodiment, within the ongoing political practice of the movement, of those forms of social relations, decision-making, culture, and human experience that are the ultimate goal”. The term began to be actively used in the context of alter-globalisation and social justice movements in which participants put a great effort into self-organising, performing direct actions, and developing egalitarian decision-making processes (Maeckelbergh, 2011; Smucker, 2014). According to Graeber (interviewed by Klein, 2011), activists were “creating a vision of the sort of society you want to have in miniature” in these movements. The precariat movement shares these qualities. Abandoning the idea of the whole sweeping revolution, which would come in the future, the precariat attempts to reconstruct their own solutions at the grassroots level by constructing autonomous spaces here and now and reclaiming the ability to create something new (Berardi, 2009a; Robinson, 2011).

On the other hand, the precariat movement operates the politics of commons in two senses. First, the precariat does not affirm a strong identity based on any (imagined) unified existential condition. The precariat is different from the proletariat as “it cannot be a unified class, linked to ‘molar and linear concepts of revolution’” (Raunig, 2007). As an emergent political subjectivity, the precariat

⁵ In the same vein, Rancière (1999, p.38) argues that “[t]he proletariat are neither manual workers nor the labor classes” but “the class of the uncounted that only exists in the very declaration in which they are counted as those of no account”. His definition of the proletariat is clearly different from that of Marx in resonating with the precariat, the political subjectivity which is not based on a united identity.

creates “new forms of political struggle and solidarity that reach beyond the traditional models of political party or trade union” (Gill & Pratt, 2008, p. 3). In this regard, Lorey (2010) pays attention to how diverse groups of people, from migrant workers to cultural producers, come together on Euro May Day. Neilson and Rossiter (2008, pp. 55-8) also assert that precarity is the “solutions and alliances” to build “commonalities across the diverse situation” and thus hold “the potential to contribute to a political composition of the common”. Second, as the precariat not only fights against precarity but also actively accepts the ontological precariousness as our fundamental precondition, the precariat is defined by becoming “precarious being-together” (Butler, 2014). In other words, the precariat is the subjectivity that negates the individualism embedded in the capitalist system by inventing “new forms of living and new social relationships” (Lorey, 2010; see also Neilson & Rossiter, 2006). Communities of care beyond a unit of family have sprung up throughout the world (Han, 2015; La Deriva, 2004; Lorey, 2017; Richter, 2017).

These two strands of politics are clearly different from what Wendy Brown (2001) calls “rights-based justice”, which have been the centre of the leftist movement since the “end of history” declared by Francis Fukuyama (1989). According to Brown (2001, pp. 10-2), rights-based justice is epistemologically intertwined with the concept of sovereign individuals and states requiring fixed boundaries and identities. She also points out how the politics of rights has developed an increasingly administered liberal society.⁶ Nevertheless, how the precariat pursues a politics in their activism and daily lives is a matter of investigation. Defining the precariat as the subjectivity that produces commons here and now, my research investigates how the precariat tries to (re)produce life differently from capitalism in the cities. In doing so, I utilise the concept of commons, urban commons, and value struggle as critical lenses through which to analyse these experiments.

2.2. Commons and communism as forms of life and as a movement

Commons are “*use value* for plurality”, to use De Angelis’ (2017) words. This objective characteristic of commons should also be combined with the subjective quality that is “self-governing”, as he (ibid.) points out.

We should note that commons are not defined by the inherent characteristics of something but by the mode of production and distribution. Commons are embedded in social relations and practices that produce and share things in certain ways. Linebaugh (2008, p. 279) thus suggests that “[i]t might

⁶ For other critical views on human rights discourse in liberal democracy, albeit from various positions, see Agamben (2000; 2002), Badiou (2002; 2015; 2012), and Rancière (2001; 2004).

be better to keep the word as a verb, an activity, rather than as a noun, a substantive”. In the same manner, Negri (in Negri & Casarino, 2008, p. 83) defines “the common” as “the activity that builds things together”. Different terms, such as communities (Ostrom, 1990; De Angelis, 2003) and communism (Dauvé & Martin, 2015; Dyer-Witherford, 2009; Endnotes Collective, 2010; Graeber, 2011; Hardt, 2010) are used to express the relations of commons, while terms such as commoning and communising (Dauvé & Martin, 2015; Endnotes Collective, 2010) are used to grasp commons as verbs.

The term “communism”, as defined by Graeber (2011), is helpful to understand commons as social relations rather than resources or systems to produce/govern resources. Communism can be summed up “in the single phrase: Abolition of private property” (Marx & Engels, 2010). This phrase has reminded people of specific images; a repossession of private property by the authoritarian state and/or a revolutionary program for the future without private property. However, communism is neither based on the dichotomy of private/public property ownership nor any project to set up a utopia in the future. Using another famous quote from Marx (Marx & Engels, 1970b), Graeber (2011, p. 94) defines communism as “any human relationship that operates on the principle of from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs”. In other words, communism does not mean “some magical utopia” but “something that exists right now – that exists, to some degree, in any human society” (ibid., p. 95). Indeed, history shows that communism, or commons, have been the basic principle by which human beings have organised their livelihoods (Caffentzis and Federici, 2014; Linebaugh, 2019). As various forms of solidarity, mutual aid, conviviality, or help, communism has always existed as “*the foundation of all human sociability*” (Graeber, 2011, p. 96).⁷

On the other hand, the idea of reciprocal exchange has become the predominant moral principle in capitalist society. According to Linebaugh (2019, p. 315), there was even a real word, “discommoning”, in the 18th century, which meant “privatising” in today’s world, demonstrating the change of the hegemony amongst different moral principles of economy inscribed in the word usage.

⁷ There have been three different moral principles at the basis of human economies, always actualised as a mixed form under one dominant form amongst these three in a society (see Brandt, 2012; Graeber, 2011; Karatani, 2014). Graeber (2011) names these principles as communism, hierarchy and exchange. Communism is constituted out of a set of relations in which people do not calculate gains and losses but help and collaborate with one another. Exchange is what people do in a market based on the premise of equivalence. Exchange requires two equal sides that try to get the most out of the process. Hierarchy does not operate through reciprocity but according to the logic of precedent. When each side of an exchange belongs to different classes, the things given by each side are not only different but also incommensurable. While hierarchy and communism often slip into each other, it is difficult to shift relations based on communistic sharing to relations based on equal exchange (ibid., p. 116).

As discussed, capitalism was born by large-scale enclosures and the privatisation of various commons, and privatisation and commodification are now proceeding into the most intimate areas of the lives of living beings. Not only resources from the earth, but also socially (re)produced things such as ideas, knowledge, language, codes, affections, and social relations that have been produced as commons of humanity are exploited by capital for free (Fuchs, 2012; Midnight Notes Collective, 1990).

The concept of commons (re)emerged, in this context, as a radical keyword not only contesting capitalist reality but also actualising alternatives. In this context, communism, or commons, happens to have two meanings. First, it refers to ever-existing relations/practices in which human beings live together in relation to nature (Graeber, 2011; Marx & Engels, 1970a; Yi, 2010). Communism had referred to endogenous relations in which people depend on each other, creating a society to reproduce their everyday lives. However, in capitalist society, nearly all aspects of life have turned into a commodity, and even “sense’ has been colonised by the sense of capital” (De Angelis, 2017, p. 171). Communistic relations have been significantly diminished in capitalist society, and commons have become “*situated* outsides ... in an environment in which predator capitalist systems are ready to enclose or subordinate” (ibid., p. 33). Here, commons happens to have its second meaning. As relations/practices against the capitalist process of commodification, communism appears as an imminent movement (rather than an end-goal to achieve in the future) to transform our everyday lives (Dauvé & Martin, 2015; Endnotes Collective, 2010). As Marx and Engels (1970) express, communism is “the real movement which abolishes the present state of things”.

Two things are essential to note. First, as various forms of life, commons are not only produced in and through communistic relations but also produce those very relations (see Caffentzis & Federici, 2014; Han and Imamasa 2015). In other words, commons are a mode of production different from the capitalist mode of production, which produces subjectivity. One of the most impressive examples is found in the speeches made by Tuiavii (in Scheurmann, 1977), the chief of Samoan Island. Upon his visit to Europe, Tuiavii was shocked to find the people suffering from hunger when markets were full of stocked food. Coming from a culture which lacked a word for “mine” or “yours”, while “lau”, the word for “ours” or “gods”, took centre stage, the Samoan chief could not understand how stupid the Europeans were. This episode demonstrates the prevalence of the notion of communism in the way Samoans related to one another in contrast to Europeans, who had come to take the notion of private property for granted and thus became subjugated to it. Communism, thus, refers to relations in which people do not calculate gain and loss in a way family members or good friends do for each other, rather than an ideology that is grasped in relation to a program of a party state. This is what I plan to locate in the practice of the urban precariat in their defiance to “neoliberal policies

[that] produce human capital and ‘entrepreneurs of the self’ who calculate every single gain and loss” (Lazzarato, 2012, p. 94).

Second, there is “an infinite variety of commons, the collective administration of common resources” (Graeber, 2008, p. 7). However, commons are neither necessarily radical nor anti-capitalist (see Caffentzis, 2010; De Angelis, 2013). On the one hand, as Graeber (2011, p. 115) points out, “communistic relations can easily start slipping into relations of hierarchical inequality—often without anyone noticing it”. It is not because of a lack of morals but because of different abilities and needs between community members. On the other hand, capitalism is now co-opting the idea of community, cooperation, and care (Barman, 2016; Dowling & Harvie, 2014; Vrasti, 2011), while many communities exist in a capitalist system without having significant conflicts, as in the case of a family or a gated community (Egerer & Fairbairn, 2018; Unnikrishnan & Nagendra, 2015). Marx (1976, p.451) explains how “the socially productive power of labour develops as a free gift to capital” in a specific arrangement of capital and, by doing so, how capital organises commons. Federici (2020) also discusses how capital enclosed females and used them as “communal goods”. Capital has developed what Caffentzis (2010) calls the “capitalist commons” even further by utilising concepts like “social capital”, “sharing economy”, and “innovations” and enclosing/commodifying realms that had not been commodities (see also Midnight Notes Collective, 1990). What matters is how to create commons which not only operate differently from the capitalist commons but also encroach on the capitalist terrain in order to deterritorialise it.

These insights lead us to revisit the concepts of the individual and the collective since capitalism itself is a machine of creating commons for capital. Capitalism is a form of “social cooperation” like all other forms of production (De Angelis, 2007, p. 36). As Read (*ibid.*, pp. 116-9) asserts, “individuation is an unavoidably social process”. Balibar (2018, p. 8) also points out that capitalism is problematic not because it alienates relations but because it creates “alienation as relation”. This is to say, capitalism is, like all other forms of communities, a specific mode of what Marx calls (1973, p. 15) “socially determined individual production”.

From this perspective, I propose that we need to reconsider the broadly accepted grammar of commons, which suggests three constitutive parts: common resources, institutions (commoning practice), and communities (commoners) (Ostrom, 1990; Dellenbaugh et al., 2015). Scholars have emphasised how the practice of commoning cannot be separated from the process of becoming (Singh, 2017) and how communities are not pre-given entities, but ongoing processes facilitated by the act of commoning (Mies, 2014; Han & Imamasa, 2015). Nevertheless, the formulation based on this grammar divides subject and object; individualism and collectivism, thus strengthening the

epistemological dichotomy. Also, in the formulation, the term commons is strongly intertwined with an image of natural resources, which are collectively owned and managed by members of a community, i.e., traditional forms of commons.

This, of course, does not mean that every form of commons based on communities is reactionary. On the contrary, as De Angelis (2003) says, commons are created and sustained by communities, i.e., “by social networks of mutual aid, solidarity, and practices of human exchange that are not reduced to the market form” (p. 1). Communities are created inevitably and constantly by way of the practices of commons, i.e., self-governing. The problem is that communities often turn into closed circles in which people share norms, habits, and beliefs. From this perspective, community can refer to two different vectors. Community, on one hand, is a political space/process toward constantly renewing commons, or what Korean activists call “communityness” (see Chapter 4), by transformation through working together with others. On the other hand, “community” can signify a closed group ruled by what Rancière (2010, p. 100) calls “police” and which conceives of community “as the accomplishment of a common way of being”. As Stavrides (2016, p. 32) points out, when “dispute or polemic over the common is silenced” by shared belief, norms, and habits, “community ossifies”, turning into “an ordered social universe rather than a process”.

As Linebaugh (2008, p. 44) states, “commoning is embedded in a labour process; it inheres in a particular praxis of field, upland, forest, marsh, coast”. If so, what is the labour process of our era? Also, practices of commons cannot help but be embedded in particular social, cultural, and geographical contexts. Not only “base and superstructure” but also “anthropological differences” produce “an essential plurality of agencies”, borrowing Balibar’s (in Curcio & Özselçuk, 2010, p. 324) words. This is to say; we also need to imagine and practice commons in the era of planetary urbanisation characterised by “encounter, assembly, simultaneity” in Lefebvre’s (2003, p. 118) words (see also Brenner & Schmid, 2015; Hardt & Negri, 2009; Merrifield, 2013). How can situated practices of commons build what Negri (in Curcio, 2010, p. 327) calls “a cosmopolitical common” beyond bounded communities? In this context, I propose the concept of urban commons as a theoretical lens to analyse the ideas and practices around commons embedded in specific contexts in our era. The history around commons and community in East Asia pushes us to articulate the discourse of urban commons, asking how to deal with the constantly recurring tendency of policing communities as well as the dichotomy of individuals and collectives, as I discuss in the following section.

2.3. From a village community to urban commons

While there is a similarity between the discourses about community in both Japan and Korea, scholars (and activists) relate to the concept of commons differently. In Japan, most studies on commons are done from the New Institutional view, focusing on how people collectively govern certain common pool resources (see Abe, 2019; Inoue, 1997; 2001; 2005; Mitsumata, 2000; Murota & Mitsumata, 2004).⁸ Meanwhile, studies on commons in Korea have combined with various social movements (see An, 2020; Han, 2018; Kwon, 2020; Yi, 2020). According to Jeong (2020, p. 239), this disparity reflects the different social contexts: Japan still has traditional systems collectively governing resources. However, there are barely any remaining examples of traditional commons in Korea, on top of severe, ongoing gentrification. In his endeavour to critically synthesise the new institutional perspective and the theories of commons as a part of radical social movements, Jeong (*ibid.*) argues that commons have two dimensions: (1) commons as universal rights for all; and (2) commons as governed resources within a bounded territory/community. According to him, these dimensions appeared in response to a modernisation that resulted in the abolition and/or alteration of local and vernacular practice of commons. He argues that we thus need to bring politics into the existing discourse of commons to critically restore its conceptual unity.

While Jeong's attempt to capture a fuller perspective on commons is edifying, I take a different view for three reasons. First, I disagree with how Jeong conceptualises the political dimension of commons as universal while demarcating its economic dimension into a bounded territory. In my view, the dimensions of commons cannot be neatly separated into the dichotomy of the universal and particular. Also, the economy cannot be separated from politics.⁹ As I discussed above, I believe that commons take: (1) infinitely diverse forms of life that cannot be completely captured by state and capital; and (2) an actually existing movement to go beyond state and capital. While commons appear as a singularity in the living relation of human beings and nature, under the totalising force of capitalism, this cannot help but become a movement. Second, Jeong points out the disparate social contexts of Japan and Korea as reasons for different trends of studies on commons. However, in doing so, Jeong fails to critically examine what is entailed in the notion of "community", particularly

⁸ New Institutionalism is an approach to analysing institutions, focusing on the effects of formal and informal rules on the behaviour of individuals and groups (see DiMaggio, 1998). Elinor Ostrom's work is associated with New Institutional Economics.

⁹ From this perspective, the New Institutional studies fail to account for the political dimension of the traditional forms of resource management. This is a major flaw when their ambition to preserve or reinstate the traditional forms of resource management would necessarily run into questions regarding governmentality under neoliberal conditions that continue to pervade throughout the world.

in Japanese and Korean contexts, and how this affects the urban commoning movements in each context. In my fieldwork in Tokyo and Seoul, I have encountered an urban precariat who has tried to escape from the traditionally shared idea of community in different ways. Last but not least, the politics of commons can hardly correspond to the discourse of rights, which is inevitably premised on, and therefore turns to, assurances and coercion in relation to state power.¹⁰

In this section, I focus on the second point, namely, community, to understand the unique sensibilities of the precariat in Tokyo and Seoul toward “urban commons”. This is followed by an articulation of the concept of urban commons.

2.3.1. Developing community in Japan and Korea

Both in Japan and Korea, the concept of community is strongly combined with traditional “villages (*mura* in Japanese / *maeul* in Korean)” and has aroused contradictory sentiments. On the one hand, villages have been delivered as an image of a closed, suffocating, and hierarchical community. At the same time, villages have been idealised because of their communistic characteristics and traditional systems of commons. These contradictory images reflect the complicated process of transformation that the premodern community underwent in both societies. In the following, I note three points that are particularly notable in the context of this research.

First, villages had long been a basic social unit that had relative autonomy from the central state in Japan and Korea, as histories of various riots against the feudal authorities demonstrate (see Befu, 1965; 1967; Chung, 2008; Ha, 2010; Ju, 2006). A vast number of studies across social, historical, anthropological, and economic fields also demonstrate how people collectively organised common resources, including labour-power, within village communities in both societies (Fukuta, 1982; Hong, 2002; Jeong & Kim, 2004; Kwon, 2017; Naoe, 1949; Wada, 2006). Villages were the unit that controlled commons outside of the premodern state powers, albeit based on different levels of autonomy (see Befu, 1965; 1967).

Second, the forms of villages as well as how individuals positioned themselves in a village significantly varied (see Scott, 1977; Wolf, 1957). According to Matsumoto and Chung (2008), Korean villages had more egalitarian forms than Japanese villages, where the process of primitive

¹⁰ Lefebvre and Harvey, in their discussions on the right to the city, try to reappropriate the term, “right”, beyond the liberal epistemology. For example, Harvey (2012) argues that the right to the city is the collective “right to change ourselves by changing the city”. Here, the word “right” is used to defend the practice of collective direct action beyond state powers rather than a politics of demand and recognition by the state.

accumulation had taken place during an extended period. Villages of Korea took the form of “open peasant communities” rather than “closed, corporate communities” (see also Chung, 2008; Ha, 2010).¹¹ In the same vein, P. Kim (1992) analyses how the traditional form of association “*gye*” was autonomous not only from the state but also from the village community (see also Ahn, 2014).¹² The Japanese villages, on the other hand, tended to be closed as a strong corporate unit to defend their autonomy from the feudal government (see Matsumoto and Chung, 2008; Befu, 1965; 1967). However, even in Japan, the structures of villages varied, demonstrating different relations between individuals and communities. Studies show that villages in the Tohoku region, which is the northeastern part of Japan, had a rigid and hierarchical structure based on a kinship (*dozoku*) system, while fishing villages in the southwestern regions had egalitarian and open structures based on various age-set groups (*kumi*) taking charge of various communal works and festivals in a village (see Emori, 1976; Hikutake, 1949; Kaomo, 1952; Ueno, 1986).

Last but not least, in both societies, villages were captured and mobilised in building the modern, military developmental state as its smallest unit. In Japan, the so-called “family state” based on the imperial system was found during the Meiji period (Garon, 2010). Upon the foundation of the modern state, the “government fashioned a notion of national community” to create “shared morality and civic virtue” (Borovoy, 2016, p. 475; see also Gluck, 1985). In doing so, the imperial family state not only adopted the order of the hierarchical kinship-based system of traditional villages but also judicially approved it by legally establishing “the institution of the patriarchal family” (Isono, 1988; Lim, 2004). On the other hand, the egalitarian age-set group-based systems were banned and dismantled, if not subsumed into basic administrative units of the nation, such as youth associations, women’s associations, or volunteer firemen associations. This coincided with the enforcement of disciplines on the body and on the disposition of the women as well as the young people. As Japan began a series of wars, the age-set group-based system was incorporated and institutionalised as a basic unit of the war-state (Lim, 2004, see also Sato, 1972; Smethurst, 1974).

¹¹ An anthropologist, Wolf (1957), who researched peasant communities, categorised them in two types: “closed, corporate communities” and “open peasant communities” based on family organisations and various systems such as forms of land ownerships.

¹² *Gye* (a rotating credit association) is a credit system. While there are variations, the most general operation of *gye* is as follows. An organiser (*gyejin*) gets an appointed amount of cash from members every month. The sum of cash is given to one of the members each month based on a predetermined rotation order.

In Korea, the Japanese colonial government destroyed the structures of autonomous traditional villages in spite of significant resistance (Kim, 2007; Ha, 2009).¹³ This coincided with the impoverishment of farming villages (Jeong, 1990; Ji, 1999). The Korean War (1950 – 1953) also contributed to the further dissolution of farming villages. Here, two things are noteworthy. First, after the Korean War, farming villages became increasingly conservative, strengthening the hierarchical kinship systems to protect themselves from extreme poverty and violent state authorities (Kang, 1999; Lee, 2014). Second, in the 1970s, the military government began to mobilise villages as an integral part of the state through the so-called “New Village Movement”. Emphasising “nation” in order to integrate communities into the “imagined community” (Koh, 2006), the government adopted “selective incentives” to facilitate competitions between villages (Kim, 2010).

To sum up, both in Japan and Korea, the concept of “community” has occupied odd positions. In building modern states, both Japanese and Korean governments mobilised communities by incapacitating autonomist aspects of villages. In Japan, the “family state” was established by structuring society based on the hierarchical order of kinship-based villages where the emperor rules his sons (heads of families). According to Karatani (2000), in Japan, a strong idea of society=community imposes responsibility upon individuals and their families who are afraid of being excluded from the community.¹⁴ In Korea, the concept of “community” has developed in an even more complicated way. In the 1960s and 1970s, religious activists began to organise the urban precariat movement based on the concept. In other words, the community was re-invented not only by the military government but also by the social movement. Thus, unlike in Japan, in Korea the concept of community has remained on the terrain of the social movement, creating complicated tensions.

The histories mentioned above have pushed activists and radical scholars in Japan and Korea to imagine commons beyond a community even when they use the term community, as I discuss in the thesis. In this context, the precariat movements in Tokyo and Seoul offer the most vivid examples of how the precariat in these cities has developed somewhat similar sensibilities that can be described as “the urban”. Just as rural village communities of the premodern era maintained their autonomy

¹³ Between 1907 and 1911, there were 2,852 confrontations against colonial authorities. 141,185 Koreans participated, according to Japanese recordings (Jo, 1989 cited in Ha, 2010).

¹⁴ Karatani (2000) problematises what he calls the “Japanese characteristics” demonstrated in the discourse of “parents’ responsibility (toward society)”. Whenever a sensational crime takes place, the Japanese society, represented by the media, asks the criminals’ families to take responsibility toward society. What this discourse demonstrates is that there are neither individuals who take responsibility for their own acts nor clear moral values established in Japan (Karatani, 2000).

against the state powers, these urban movements today embody the sensibility of contesting capital and state. But they do not stop there. They also insist on keeping the values of commons, which are not adequately appreciated by the widely shared notions and practices of the community. In the following section, I try to define the urban/commons through which I analyse the specificities of the precariat's practice of commoning in Tokyo and Seoul. I also discuss how urban commons necessarily engage value struggles.

2.3.2. Urban commons as the field of value struggle

Scholars have discussed how production has become increasingly autonomous from capital, and forms of exploitation have become different from that of industrial capital. One of the most significant modes of capital accumulation of our era is taking place in the form of rent, real estate, and finance through the process of urbanisation (Hardt & Negri, 2009; Harvey, 2012). It is where capital captures and privatises commons (Hardt & Negri, 2009, p. 250) as the urban is where people live together, share resources, communicate, and exchange goods and ideas, that is, where commons is produced. In other words, the urban is “field, upland, forest, marsh, and coast” of our era, to borrow Linebaugh's (2008, p. 44) expression. Commoning cannot help but be imagined and practised differently among specific social, cultural, historical, and geographical urban strata.

In conceptualising the urban, I follow the work of scholars who distinguish the city and the urban (see Brenner and Schmid, 2015; Hardt & Negri, 2009; Lefebvre, 2003; Stavrides, 2016). Confronting the strong tendency of treating “the city” as a terrain, which constantly recalls the urban studies of the concrete concept of the urban, Brenner and Schmid (2015) propose “a new epistemology of the urban”. The urban does not refer to a bounded, territorial settlement. It is “a collective project” of socio-spatial restructuring. Not only the power of the state and capital but also various collective practices continually remake the urban itself through everyday use and the contestation of urban space (Brenner & Schmid, 2015, p. 177).

Lefebvre's (2003) concept of the urban and Hardt and Negri's (2009) discussion of the metropolis as the common are especially helpful to conceptualise the urban as a variegated and contested biopolitical process that reflects a new mode of production. There are essential commonalities between Lefebvre's (2003) theory of the urban and Hardt and Negri's (2009) discussion of the metropolis. First, what Hardt and Negri (2009) call the metropolis or “metropolitanization” is not a fixed site but a process, which is “becoming a general planetary condition” (p. 252). Second, the urban/the metropolis reflects a new mode of production where the creation and the exploitation of surplus happen throughout the whole society. Lefebvre (2003) clarifies the urban as a historically

specific period, or a field, which is produced by a distinct mode of production. The urban comes after the rural (peasant) and the industrial, yet being accompanied by “emergences and interferences, shifts, advances and delays, various inequalities of development” (p. 28). Similarly, Hardt and Negri (2009) assert that there was “a shift from the *industrial* to the *biopolitical metropolis*” (p. 154). In doing so, both Lefebvre and Hardt/Negri find that what Marx (1976) calls the “real subsumption of labour” is transfigured into the real subsumption of the society. Third, urban commons appear to be a complicated biopolitical terrain on which various sensibilities and strategies clash. The urban is a “factory for the production of subjectivity” (Hardt & Negri, 2009, p. 211). It produces specific “modes of thoughts, action, and life” (Lefebvre, 2003, p.32). While the urban is collectively produced, it is constantly captured and re-territorialised by capital. Therefore, the urban turns itself into both commons and a biopolitical battlefield over commons. Value struggles appear as an inevitable process of actualising the radical urban commons.

I conceptualise the urban as commons also based on what I learned from the people I encountered in my fieldwork. In my understanding, urban commons are not a way of collectively governing resources (i.e., saturated space) with strangers, as Huron (2015) suggests (see also Park, Shin, & Kim, 2020). Although Huron’s approach differentiates urban commons from traditional commons, it is still based on Ostrom’s (1990) theoretical proposition, which is premised on common resources, institutions, and communities as the basic dimensions of urban commons. Instead, I see the urban as an actually existing form of commons in our era, which is not an object but consists of multiple and contentious processes. The specificity of the urban as commons lies in its fundamental heterogeneity and encounters across differences rather than a level of saturation, i.e., high densities of a population in a relatively small space. The urban is distinguished from a community based on shared norms and face-to-face proximity and thus easily closed. As Lefebvre (2003, p. 118) states, what characterises the urban is “encounter, assembly, simultaneity”.¹⁵ In this regard, what Casarino (2008) states captures the specificity of urban commons: “the common is defined in terms of communication rather than in terms of community” (p. 12). Creating the radical urban commons thus is a matter of how we break existing boundaries, norms, symbols, identities in and through simultaneous encounters with others and (re)produce ourselves and relations – i.e., the very reversal of enclosure (see also Stavrides, 2016).

¹⁵ Here, the urban clearly resonates with how autonomist scholars conceptualise commons: Commons is distinguished by unpredictable, spontaneous “encounters” which bring differences together and create a way of life (Harvey et al., 2009, p. 252). Commons is formed based on “singularity”, a form of irreducible difference. Heterogeneity is crucial in producing commons. Commons are constituted in and through collective activities of different people, producing creativity (Casarino & Negri, 2008).

According to Lefebvre (2003, p. 41), we are entering “a period that is no longer part of history, a time when particularities confronted one another, when uniformity struggled with heterogeneity”. This declaration requires us to discard the old idea of a whole-scale revolution to enter a new passage of history. The urban is already commons. Yet, the radical possibility of urban commons is actualised only through changing our lives as well as micro-relations between human individuals and groups in our daily life. Based on this conceptualisation, I see the urban precariat movement as the frontline of struggle in which the wager is to actualise the radical urban commons. As a movement to abolish the present state of things, the urban precariat movement cannot help but take a form of value struggle to transform how we (re)produce our lives through producing/sharing/consuming values (see Endnotes Collective, 2010; De Angelis, 2007; Graeber, 2013; Marx, 1976; Massumi, 2018; Karatani, 2020).

2.4. Value struggle and the politics of urban commons

2.4.1. What is value struggle?

I understand “value”, following Graeber (2011, p. 45), as “the way people represent the importance of their own actions to themselves”. Value, however, is never an individual choice but socially articulated. “[B]y pursuing value ... we reproduce wholes, that is webs of co-production” (De Angelis, 2007, p. 25). Then, how is value socially articulated as a whole in capitalism?

Marx (1976) discusses how value and surplus value is produced and circulated in capitalism by analysing the value-form. Notably, his intention of analysing the value-form is not to develop the classic economists’ argument, i.e., the *labour theory of value* (see Ricardo, 1990; Smith, 1981), but to implode the logic of the capitalist value-form by following its internal logic, as I detail below.¹⁶ In order to grasp the gist of Marx’s discussion on value and surplus, three things are crucial to note.

First, in his analysis of the capitalist value-form, Marx (1976, p. 174) makes it clear that the capitalist form of value is not ahistorical, but rather a form that “stamps the bourgeois mode of production as a particular kind of social production of a historical and transitory character”.

Second, Marx (*ibid.*, p. 129) states that various goods and their use-values happen to have quantifiable value in capitalism “only because abstract human labour is objectified or materialized” in the goods, while the quantity of labour is measured by “the labour time”. To put it differently,

¹⁶ My discussion in this part is based on my own reading of *Capital*. The interpretation is also greatly indebted to Karatani (2020) and the Japanese Marxian economist, Kōzō Uno’s (1980) understanding of Marx’s theory of value. Later, I found this view resonates with the post-workerists’ interpretation of value, surplus, and labour (see Massumi, 2018; Negri, 1991).

capitalist value (the fundamental premise of reciprocal exchange) is possible only when human labour becomes a commodity. We can exchange different goods (incommensurable use-values) because of the fact that “in the form of commodity-values, all labour is expressed as equal human labour and therefore as labour of equal quality” (ibid., p. 152). Surplus value is then produced by extracting a part of value from workers’ labour and appropriating it as a form of profit.

Finally, what Marx tries to articulate in his analysis is not that people can exchange different commodities because the commodities include homogeneous human labour. On the contrary, Marx (ibid., pp. 166-7) clearly notes that “[t]he reverse is true”:

[B]y equating their different products to each other in exchange as values, they equate their different kinds of labour as human labour. They do this without being aware of it. Value, therefore, does not have its description branded on its forehead; it rather transforms every product of labour into a social hieroglyphic.

Labour appears to be abstract because people equate it by exchanging different values. At the same time, abstract and quantifiable human labour is what enables the capitalist form of value (and thus surplus value) to function. In other words, Marx demonstrates a circular logic inscribed in the capitalist value-form: abstract labour, i.e., labour as a commodity, is not only the premise of reciprocal commodity exchange but also what generates surplus value (ibid., p. 279). Taking abstract labour as both a premise and a result of commodity exchange, the logic of the capitalist value system omits how human labour became a commodity through the historical process of primitive accumulation.

This logical lacuna of the capitalist value-form is seen more clearly in Marx’s following schema (1976, pp. 138-62). Although the four value-forms might appear successive, they are not. There is a fundamental logical gap between (2) and (3) (see also Endnotes Collective, 2010; Karatani, 2020 (Original work published 1978)). Value suddenly becomes quantifiable only through what Marx (1976, p. 200) calls the “commodity’s *salto mortale*”, or “fatal leap”.

- (1) The simple value-form: a good – let us say, a necklace – expresses its use-value through the use-value of another good. For example, this necklace has the worth of those two rings.
- (2) The expanded value-form: The necklace expresses its value diversely by being exchanged with specific things, for example, a pot of honey, a sweater, or two rings. This, however, does not mean that the pot of honey, the sweater, and two rings have the same value. The owner of the sweater may not exchange her sweater with the rings. This is to say, value is neither fixed in advance nor intrinsic to goods but relational and singular.

- (3) The general value-form: When we flip the left side and right side of the diagram of the expanded value-form, the pot of honey, a sweater, and two rings suddenly happen to have the same value while the necklace appears as the general equivalence.
- (4) The money value-form: Money takes the general value-form as the universally exchangeable form.

Mainstream economists have considered the four value-forms as successive and, by doing so, promote the famous myth that money, the general equivalence, emerged naturally in the development of bartering in human history. They ignore both a logical failure and historical facts.¹⁷ The generalised value-form is a reversed form of the expanded value-form. However, Marx (ibid.) points out that the reversion is a “salto mortale”, which is carried out without any logical ground. The leap creates an entirely different space in which things and activities lose their singular qualities embedded in specific relations and turn into quantitative value to be compared by one yardstick.

To sum up, the capitalist value system is sustained by assuming that value is by nature quantifiable, and exchange is reciprocal. This is a false assumption. Capitalism is “*fundamentally speculative*” (Massumi, 2018, p. 17). The market logic of getting a good deal clearly demonstrates that exchange is never an equal process. The desire of “getting *more* value for your money is actually a stronger engine” in the market (Massumi, 2018, p. 6). Capital generates surplus value by forcing people to enter the process of imaginary reciprocal exchange by making them “free labourers”. Nevertheless, the origin of free labour (and the fundamentally uneven relations of labour and capital) are erased while the myth of fair exchange enacts a world where everything, including human labour, turns into a commodity to validate its value. Labour appears as a source of economic value, and “we, as subjects of labour, are produced by capital” (Endnotes Collective, 2010, p. 94). The problem is that, in the value system of capitalism, we have come to “believe that only certain forms of labour (waged

¹⁷ Historically, money did not spontaneously emerge through barter-based market exchange. Anthropological evidence shows that transactions in most human societies did not take place according to the principle of equivalence (Graeber, 2011b). “No example of a barter economy, pure and simple, has ever been described, let alone the emergence from it of money; all available ethnography suggests that there has never been such a thing” (Humphrey, 1985; see also Chapman, 1980). Primitive monies did not function as universal equivalents (Neale, 1976; Dalton, 1981). Reciprocal exchange (or the idea of it) only became possible when the general equivalent appeared. It was the state that imposed what Wray (2015) calls “modern money” through national taxations (see also Knapp, 1924; Minsky, 1986). The general equivalent violently quantified values of various goods, creating the flattened space of the economy.

labour, or at best, labour that contributes to produce marketable commodities) produce value” (Graeber, 2013, p. 224).

We might be able to say that we are faced with two different grammars of labour, value, and surplus at work. One is that of the capitalist norm, and the other is of its outside. In the former, labour appears to be objectified, abstract labour, wherein “capital ... creates a specific surplus value” as Marx (1973, p. 261) states. In the latter, on the other hand, where labour is not objectified, human activities and interactions --what Marx (1973, p. 200) calls the “*non-objectified labour*” of “the *living subject*”-- create irreducible, qualitative use-values (see also Casarino & Negri, 2008). In this regard, with *surplus*, I refer to material, affective, and emotional excess produced in concrete activities beyond abstract quantification. While *surplus* is produced by living labour, it appears to be objectified surplus value, i.e., profit, generated by unpaid abstract labour in the capitalist value system. By enforcing *surplus* to be exchanged via the money form to validate its value, the capitalist mode of production not only produces materials but also defines what value is and how value is produced and exchanged.

From this perspective, value struggle is essentially a struggle over *surplus*. When we see the value struggle as an act of “articulating social co-production according to different values” pursuing “different types of wholes, of different self-organising systems, of ‘societies’” (De Angelis 2007, pp. 24-25), we can seek liberation through the destructuring of the epistemological ground of capital rather than requiring fair wages in the capitalist value system, thus, turning objectified labour/value back into living labour/irreducible singularities. As Marx (ibid.) states, “[t]he only *use value*, therefore, which can form the opposite pole to capital is *labour (to be exact, value-creating, productive labour)*”.¹⁸

¹⁸ This perspective resonates with autonomist scholars’ analysis of how ideas, affections, codes, languages, communications, and subjectivities are produced in society and captured by capital (Berardi, 2009b; Fuchs, 2012; Lazzarato, 1996; Negri, 1989; Tronti, 2019; Terranova, 2000). This, however, does not mean that I neither dismiss the ongoing enclosures of people’s communal lands, homes, water sources, forests, and other struggles against these processes arising across the world (see Midnight Notes Collective, 1990; Moyo & Yeros, 2005; Olivera & Lewis, 2004), nor disregard bodily work done by women and workers from the third world that sustains the everyday life of advanced capitalism (Federici, 2009; 2012). On the contrary, I see reproductive labour as the fundamental form of affective labour which (re)produces bodies, relations, and subjectivities in their utmost materialist sense (see Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2003; Federici, 2004). For example, Federici (2004, p. 63) discusses how capitalism pursued a “transformation of the body into a work-machine, and the subjugation of women to the reproduction of the work-force” through the destruction of women’s “reproductive knowledge and control”. In doing so, she clearly shows how women’s bodies have been a battlefield over reproduction. When Fortunati (1995) argues that home is the factory, she shows how value is produced directly (without the mediation of wage-work) at home and captured by capital. My research participants intuitively understood this aspect, regardless of whether they referred to such intellectual works or not, and reclaimed their activities and their time as pure *surplus*

In order to sharpen the concept of the value struggle as a theoretical tool to analyse the existing value struggles of the urban precariat, I suggest three crucial, interrelated aspects of value struggle.

First, value struggle must entail a transformation of capitalist time-space.¹⁹ A considerable body of literature shows how time/space has been perceived in significantly different manners (Mumford, 1961; Munn, 1992; 1996; Scott, 2008; Thompson, 1967). Capitalism was launched together with the invention of a new temporality/spatiality in which time and space appear secular, abstract, and homogeneous (Gruppe, 2007; Koselleck, 1981; Lefebvre, 1991; Sahlins, 2004; Thrift, 1990). Rigorous ideological promotions and severe disciplines were utilised to synchronise people's bodies to the rhythm of schools and factories (Thompson, 1967). At the same time, space was divided based on different functions and, by doing so, ordered "relations between people" in a specific manner (Hiller & Hanson, 1984). The notion of a private individual and his family is a product of a specific organisation of modern space based on multiple divisions: work and home; private and public (Aries, 2003; Aries & Duby, 2011; Dibley, 1994; Friedman, 2007; Yi, 2000). The recreation of time-space has produced "a new human nature" to borrow Thompson's (1967, p. 57) words. Time and space are not only turned into something we can divide, calculate, and exchange. They have become robust moral pressure we should pursue to increase and accumulate surplus (see Konings, 2018; Langley, 2006; Lotz, 2014; Lazzarato, 2012; Martin, 2002).

Second, value struggle requires abandoning the dualistic grammar of the capitalist value system. The capitalist mode of production is set on various divisions such as economy/livelihood; production/reproduction; production/consumption; work/home; and subject/object. However, production and reproduction were not distinguishable in the economy when it signified what Polanyi (1977) calls "the livelihood of men".²⁰ When the English enclosure produced people as free labourers

directly produced and shared/socialised with others. When Marx defines labour, value, and also population with the notion of surplus, the term "surplus" appears to have an ambivalent meaning. While labour produces "surplus" and thus increases "surplus value", i.e., economic value, the *surplus* population is those who remain outside of the economic value system. In Chapter 5, I discuss how the precariat tried to transform the meaning of *surplus* using this very ambivalence, as well as how they tried to create "home" as the place of creating/sharing values differently from capitalism by reorganising reproductive/affective work.

¹⁹ Following Lefebvre, I do not consider time, space, and social bodies separately. According to Lefebvre (1975, p. 195, cited in Stewart, 1984), the "spatial body ... as produced and as the production of a space, is immediately subject to the determinants of that space". At the same time, as Stewart (1984) points out, Lefebvre emphasises how the spatial body is "determined by its physiological rhythms, as well as the rhythms of social practice".

²⁰ The term "economy" has a Greek root; *oikos* (house, dwelling place, habitation) and *nomos* (law, order, manage) while sharing the same prefix with the term "ecology" (Merriam-Webster Dictionary).

by separating them from what Marx (1976) calls “the means of production”, the deprived means of production had been used for reproducing livelihoods throughout the whole of social relations. It was only after enclosure that lands became the means of production of capital, and sheep began to “devour men”, as More (1912) puts it. As the capitalist economy posited itself as a separated realm from livelihood by dividing production and reproduction, human subjectivity was separated from “objectified labour” (Endnotes Collective, 2010, p. 80; see also Holloway, 2010). The grammar of capitalist economy vividly demonstrates the subject/object split: value signifies only exchange value; production means the act of increasing value (profit=capital); labour means activities that officially contribute to capital accumulation. This value system separates individuals from each other, from their own labour, from nature, and from commons, and creates what Marx (1976) calls the “fetishism of the commodity”. Every relationship is mediated by money. People cannot “become *directly* social” (Endnotes Collective, 2010, p. 81).

Last but not least, value struggle is not done to achieve a so-called fair exchange by eliminating surplus.²¹ On the contrary, all human actions and transactions “always contain[s] a surplus, always constitute[s] surplus” as Negri puts it (in Casarino & Negri, 2008, p. 159). In other words, the problem is not the existence of surplus, but the way in which surplus produced by activities is captured, exploited, and accumulated in the capitalist system. As Marx (1973, p. 261) states, “Capital ... creates a specific surplus value because it cannot create an infinite one all at once; but it is the constant movement to create more of the same”. Thus, value struggle is essentially a struggle over surplus. It is to create “another way of living surplus” (Casarino, 2008, p. 35), how we collectively produce and circulate *surplus* in commons. According to Massumi (2018, pp. 20-25), surplus should appear as the purely “qualitative *surplus-value of life*”, “something that is *lived for its own sake*; something that is *a value in and of itself, in the unexchangeable “currency” of experience*”.

From the perspective of value struggle that I have articulated, value struggle over reproductive labour should not be just a struggle for so-called unproductive labour to be validated for its capitalist value. It should “dissolve production relations as separate and re-integrate[s] them within the whole of social relations” (Dauvé & Martin, 2015, p. 53). In the grammar of commons, labour would appear

The origin of the term economy demonstrates that the human economy is essentially about making a living by (re)producing home and habitation, or the world in which we live.

²¹ Some scholars try to overcome the issue of hierarchy and exploitation in commons/community by inserting “reciprocity”, often based on time, and eliminating precariousness (see Meretz, 2013; Mies & Benholdt-Thomsen, 2001; Wainwright, 2013). However, the idea of reciprocity is based on the principle of equivalence itself and seems to remain within the logic of market exchange.

“not as an object, but as activity ..., which proves itself as such in action”, borrowing Marx’s (1973, p. 223) words.

2.4.2. Politics of value struggle

Based on the theories I presented above, I analyse how the urban precariat conducts value struggles over urban commons by conflicting and transforming the capitalist value system. Commons, or communism, as the abolition of private property, means “we cease to constitute value, and it ceases to constitute us” as the Endnotes Collective (2010, p. 105) simply put it. Then, how do we directly participate in producing and enjoying *surplus* without any mediation of capital and the state? The capitalist value system was enacted by the “commodity’s salto mortale”. This is to say; we should make a “salto mortale” in a reversed direction, to cease to be part of the system and begin something else. Nevertheless, unlike the salto mortale of the commodity, the reversed salto mortale will take numerous forms as it is the action of returning the homogeneous and abstract value into the fullness of incommensurable, singular qualities.

Two things are important to note. First, the realm of reproduction has emerged as the crucial strategic point for value struggle (De Angelis, 2010; Endnotes Collective, 2010; Federici, 2009; Linebaugh, 2008). Feminist scholars’ work on social reproduction and the gendered nature of primitive accumulation is extremely valuable in this regard. They analyse how the production and exploitation of value took place beyond the confines of the factory from the beginning of capitalism (see Federici, 2004; Fortunati, 1995; Mies, 1998). They also show how various hierarchies and divisions have been inserted into objectified labour based on the capitalist notion of productivity (which signifies only profit-making activities), as Fortunati (1995, p.8) states below:

Under capitalism, reproduction is separated from production; the former unity that existed between the production of use-values and the reproduction of individuals within pre-capitalist modes of production has disappeared and now the general process of commodity production appears as being separated from, and even in direct opposition to, the process of reproduction. While the first appears as the creation of value, the second, reproduction, appears as the creation of non-value. Commodity production is thus posited as the fundamental point of capitalist production, and the laws that govern it, as the laws that characterise capitalism itself. Reproduction now becomes posited as ‘natural’ production.

While the division of labour hierarchy has not been static but constantly recreated and modified to maximise profit in ever-changing circumstances, the realm of reproduction has been located at the bottom of the labour hierarchy. Now, reproductive and affective labour have become a new domain of profit (Fantone, 2007; La Deriva, 2004). In this regard, the realm of reproduction has been re-

illuminated as a major battlefield of the value struggle over commons. Scholars have emphasised the need for a paradigm shift from the capitalist model of work based on the division of waged labour (productive work) and unproductive activities to work as commons (see Federici, 2020; Wainwright, 2012; 2013; Walker, 2013). According to Wainwright (2013), this paradigm shift requires “a double transformation, on the one hand away from the commodification of labour and on the other hand overcoming the gendered division of labour in its reproduction”.²²

Second, the value struggle towards urban commons should be different from the politics premised on sovereign individuals and states. Rancière’s notion of politics and Agamben’s discussion of “middle voice” particularly resonates with the politics of value struggles and urban commons beyond the grammar of liberal politics. Rancière distinguishes politics from police, which is the art of governing a bounded community. As “the law” of a community, police define “a party’s share or lack of it” (1999, p. 29). The law is established based on a specific sensory order that allocates proper ways of doing, being, and saying in a given community. In a community, there is always the nameless such as “workers, women, people of colour, or others” (Rancière, 1992, p. 59). However, they are invisible in the existing sensory order. On the other hand, politics is an act of recalling the exiled and asking the community to see what had been unseen. Politics, therefore, is fundamentally a process of difference; a process of disidentification/subjectivation (Rancière, 1999; p. 36). In order to see what had been invisible, one needs to change her entire sensibilities and the world she had belonged to. The process of subjectivation takes place only in “an interval or a gap: being *together* to the extent that we are *in between* –between names, identities, cultures, and so on” (1992, p. 62). The essential work of politics is the configuration of “a common place where the existing sensory order is disturbed” (Rancière, 1992, p. 62). Rancière’s conceptualisation of community and politics asks us to consider community and commons as an open political process that should be constantly redefined.

While Rancière’s definition of politics enables us to see politics beyond the grammar of sovereignty, Agamben’s (2014) discussion of the “middle voice” provides an epistemological ground on which we consider politics beyond the dichotomy of subject and object. In his critique of Western politics,

²² In my view, the work of feminist materialists and autonomist Marxists have complementary affinities, as some feminist scholars suggest (see Oksala, 2015; Weeks, 2007; 2011). The feminist materialist scholars not only sharpen the Marxist analysis of capitalism by including the role of reproductive labour, but also critically articulate post-workerists’ work by showing how the “social factory” has a longer history. At the same time, the autonomists’ development of the concept of affective labour provides a valuable tool for analysing the shift of capital’s strategy of accumulation through which reproductive work (including care and affection) is largely transformed into the service sector, while emotional labour and affective labour appear to be new frontiers of capital accumulation (see also Zhang 2015; Lukacs, 2015).

Agamben pays attention to Benveniste's (1971) research on the middle voice, which no longer exists in English. The middle voice is "neither active nor passive, but the two together". As middle voice, a verb denotes a process in which the subject of the verb is affected. For example, the Greek verb *chresthai* can be translated as "to use" but as a middle voice verb, it denotes a process in which a subject does not use an object but "constitutes itself only through the using, the being in relation with an other" (ibid., p. 69). Agamben (2014) asserts that the middle voice enacts a "radical transformation of ontology" in relation to the concept of the subject. On the one hand, "the subject does not stand above the action but is itself the place of its occurrence" (p. 68). On the other hand, the verb (the action) is the "*affection that a body receives inasmuch as it is in relation with another body (or with one's own body as other)*" (ibid., p. 69).

Rancière and Agamben's discussions around politics provide a useful theoretical lens in relation to the analysis of the urban precariat's value struggle in Tokyo and Seoul. The urban precariat clearly opposes the dominant sensory order and its way of counting parts/shares of the community. At the same time, they try to open the movement without setting up a screening system to protect the movement from inside. Consequently, the precariat movement scene becomes an extremely argumentative space where different sensory orders collide with each other. In doing so, participants are affected in the process in relation to others. This thesis aims to empirically examine how the ongoing value struggles in the precariat movement constitute (or fail to constitute) a politics beyond rights.

2.5. Summary

Throughout this chapter, I have tried to theorise the precariat movement and urban commons as actions to activate different value systems. First, I defined the precariat as the political subjectivity that strives to collectively break away from the capitalist system by commoning the urban. Then, I conceptualised two dimensions of commons: the infinitely various forms of ever-existing human relations in which people produce/distribute various resources, labour, and *surplus*; and the ongoing movement to expand communistic relations to abolish capitalist reality. This was followed by the conceptualisation of urban commons as the ongoing movement of commons corresponding to the mode of production in the era of planetary urbanisation. Then, finally, I tried to theorise value struggles as acts that arrest the capitalist value system and create different times and spaces here and now by becoming directly social.

Chapter 3. Methodology

The central challenge is how to articulate effectively the *we do* that is the core of the cracks: how to articulate the *we* that is the subject of the movement, as a cohesive and yet open we, and how to articulate the *do*, the *we* as subject, as doer. (Holloway, 2010, part 7, para 15)

Lefebvre (1991, p. 59) asserts that “without the production of an appropriate space”, any idea of changing life or society just remains an idea. Social movements, or any attempt at navigating possible alternatives, in this regard, must involve an alternative spatial practice. My research was, with what Lefebvre says in mind, designed to trace the urban precariat’s alternative space production in “discovering new uses for the city” (Kohso, 2013) in disparate contexts. In undertaking the research, I pursued “comparative urbanism” to use each city as a lens to comparatively interrogate the other cities in dialogue with a range of theories (see Mcfarlane, 2010; Peck, 2015; Robinson, 2015; Roy, 2003; Ward, 2010). This chapter describes how I came to utilise “relational ethnography” (Desmond, 2014) and what I call “becoming a translator” as a core methodology of my research inspired by comparative urbanism.

This chapter consists of four sections. In Section 3.1, I explain how my research has essentially been oriented by relational ethnography, which has enabled me to see my field as a field of generative relations instead of separate, bounded sites that are to be compared to one another. I also discuss how I discovered specific groups as important junctions in mapping the precariat movement in Tokyo and Seoul. Section 3.2 describes research participants and collected data. I also discuss how co-research became the core method of analysing data in my research. Then, in Section 3.3, I discuss how I adopted “the heterolingual address of translation” suggested by Sakai (2006) as a research strategy to engage participants in the field (including myself) in the process of co-research to transgress multiple boundaries: those between different cultures, the boundaries of common senses belonging to bounded sites, as well as the boundaries between theory and practice.

3.1. Doing relational ethnography by tracing conjunctures

When I composed my research proposal, I planned to do multi-site research on alternative communities in three different cities. My initial research question was the following: How does the urban precariat in Tokyo, Seoul, and Beijing contest capitalist space which is based on the work/home binary and create different relations and values from those of capitalist value system? I chose Shirōtono-ran (Amateurs’ Riot) in Tokyo, Bin-Zib (Empty/Guests House) in Seoul, and Gongyuzhijia (Migrant Workers’ Home) in Beijing as research sites.¹

I conducted two sets of preliminary field research in 2017, totalling about five months. These were followed by around 13 months of planned fieldwork from the end of November 2017 to mid-

¹ While I later removed the case of Beijing from my research, I still included it in my discussion of methodology, as the case offered me conceptual reference points in many ways.

January 2019. Then, my fieldwork was unexpectedly extended due to what happened within the activist scene in Tokyo at the end of 2018, and I needed to spend four more months (from April to July 2019) in Tokyo to address the issue.² Overall, I spent five months in Beijing, four months in Seoul, and 13 months in Tokyo. However, it was not that I conducted multi-site field research at chosen fields, with each field isolated from the others. The communities or groups have been engaged with one another, forming a larger field of generative relations, in which each scene has different (and constantly moving) positionalities and thus affects the constellation as a whole. These insights pushed me to re-design the research according to what Desmond (2014) calls “relational ethnography”.

3.1.1. Selected sites on the stage of designing research

The proposed research was based on years of my own personal commitment and activist experience in Korea. Bin-Zib was a project launched by my friends in 2008. In 2013, I conducted four months of ethnographic research on Bin-Zib, focused on internal conflicts and the communicative style of the community. At the time, I learned about other space-based alternative projects in Tokyo and Beijing as well. A group of Japanese youth formed an alternative community called Shirōtono-ran (as well as the Nantoka Network, which includes Shirōtono-ran) in Tokyo. I also learned that members of both communities in Tokyo and Seoul had visited each other. Some members of Bin-Zib and Shirōtono-ran had also visited Gongyuzhijia, an alternative community formed by internal migrant workers in Beijing. Once I learned about these communities, I became increasingly interested in the way in which the urban youth produced alternative spaces and found it fascinating that people who formed autonomous spaces in different cities networked with each other.

I thought that they had significant commonalities, albeit with different socio-economic and geographic contexts. They were each started in the 2000s by those who were born in the mid-1970s and who confronted precarity in their twenties, respectively being faced with the collapse of the bubble economy in Tokyo, confronting Seoul’s financial crisis, or coming to Beijing as migrant workers. Rather than trying to achieve security by following social norms, they actively chose to live differently by forming autonomous spaces, cultivating a different culture of their own and a sensibility that diverged from that of the mainstream, while trying to devise an alternative economy.

² I do not delve into the issue in this thesis but briefly discuss about it in the conclusion related to a future agenda.

In other words, these cases were built by the precariat who wanted to create alternatives for their lives here and now.

Moreover, the people who were involved in the above experiments had formed a loose network beyond national borders which I believed would provide valuable data on how they tried to connect with each other and compare their experiences with one another. While I had worried about a lack of time and considered removing one of the field sites from my research, once I stepped into the field, I realised that it was not composed of bounded sites given in advance, and my research spontaneously turned into relational ethnography.

3.1.2. Grasping the field as a generative relation

Relational ethnography shares an epistemological perspective with comparative urbanism in that both approaches refuse to take objects, events, places, and identities as pre-given, and instead pay attention to the relational processes of interaction between and among identities (Hart, 2002; Ward, 2010; Desmond, 2014). Not only that, relational ethnography provides comparative urbanism with what Robinson (2015) calls “the grounds for thinking across different cases” (p. 188). This is because ethnography is a method for “advancing from the abstract to the concrete” (Hart, 2004, p. 97). The “field,” for an ethnographer, is not treated as a heuristic concept but a material one. A field is “an objective space of relations between positions occupied by agents or institutions” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 97, cited in Desmond, 2014, p. 554). By going to the field, and only then, was I able to see my field as not multiple, bounded sites, but as a generative relational field instead.

In this section, I present two episodes through which I came to realise that my field was not separated entities but multiple processes in which people in different contexts communicate and conflict with each other, either creating commonalities or failing to do so. I also discuss how this recognition gave my research significant momentum, enabling me to finalise the research design.

The first episode occurred in relation to a festival called the “Nolimit Seoul Festival,” hereafter referred to as “Nolimit Seoul”. In April 2017, I visited Beijing to gauge the feasibility of my field research. I stayed at Gongyuzhijia with Yasen, a group of Japanese/Taiwanese/Chinese artists-activists who have held theatre performances with local activists in East Asia. Yasen has been building solidarity with Gongyuzhijia since 2007. A Yasen member J., a journalist from Beijing, told me she and her friend, who was engaged in community-based activism in Shanghai, would go to Seoul to join an event called Nolimit Seoul in September 2017. She said that Nolimit is an Inter-Asian Festival founded by Shirōtono-ran (Tokyo) in 2016. In that year, Shirōtono-ran held a week-

long festival in which various activists, artists, and those who run autonomous spaces in different countries in East Asia got together, communicated, and built solidarity under the slogan, “The Autonomous Zone of the East Asian *Manuke* (Idiots)”. At the time, I was considering the removal of Shirōtono-ran from my research, as I was concerned about the lack of time. However, I still wanted to join in the event to see how “East Asia” would be imagined and activated in the festival. When I visited Seoul for a week in June to join an international symposium, the organiser introduced me to the organiser of Nolimit Seoul who was trying to contact Bin-Zib. Then, from June to September 2017, I stayed at Gongyuzhijia as a volunteer member. As I built rapport with members, I thought it would be great to invite them to Nolimit Seoul. I thus contacted the organisers of Nolimit Seoul. The staff gladly invited activists from Gongyuzhijia, offering a flight ticket and accommodation.

In August 2017, Nolimit Seoul faced harsh criticism by activists engaged in the precariat and anarchist movement in both Seoul and Tokyo. This was because of what happened in an SNS chatroom, where around 50 Japanese people and two Korean organisers discussed how to raise funds for the festival. A male closed to Shirōtono-ran made a tongue-in-cheek proposal to hold an “Asian Host Bar and Asian Girls Bar” for fundraising.³ A Japanese woman, who lived in Seoul, criticised it sharply. While most people in the chatroom agreed with her point, she and another woman left the chatroom. Those who remained in the chatroom organised a pre-event and invited the critics to join in order to address the issue as well. The event was entitled “Gender Talk”, and was held in Tokyo, Seoul, and Taipei at the end of August. On the other hand, those who took a stance with the two critics published two articles on social media that same month. Allegedly, they were angered by some of the organisers’ initial responses and even traumatised by their subsequent perception of becoming the “black sheep” of the group.⁴ The documents accused No Limit Seoul of not fully addressing the issue and being complicit with the commodification of sexuality and the history of Japanese imperialism in Korea, especially in light of the history of “comfort women”.⁵ In other words, Shirōtono-ran and Nolimit Seoul became the centre of a storm of controversy in the small precariat activist scenes in both Tokyo and Seoul at the time.

³ A host bar/girls bar is a type of night club found in Japan and some other East Asian countries. Male/female staff cater to customers (who have the opposite sex of the staff), seeking attentive conversation over drinks.

⁴ This issue will be discussed again in Chapter 6.

⁵ “Comfort women” refers to the victims of the Japanese sexual slavery system mobilised to “comfort” Japanese soldiers during World War 2. Japanese, Korean, Chinese, and other Asian and European women were victims of the system (see Howard, 1996; Tanaka, 2003).

Organisers of Nolimit Seoul published a document regarding the issue, addressing their keen endeavour to create the event as a safe space for participants from different cultures (Nolimit Seoul, 2017). However, many people engaged in the precariat movement scenes in Seoul, including many Bin-Zib members, decided not to attend the event. To be honest, I also hesitated. However, I felt it was strange to boycott the entire event, which consisted of events organised and attended by a much more extensive network than that of Shirōtono-ran. Also, there was an apparent asymmetry in relation to how activists in East Asia joined in the event and how information was communicated about it. For example, except those who came from Korea, Japan, and a few people from Taiwan, most participants coming from China and other countries knew nothing about the disputes, as documents were published only in Korean and Japanese. In addition, members of Gongyuzhijia could not make the trip due to a state institutional constraint on travelling abroad. In this way, the whole event revealed the difficulties of creating “The Autonomous Zone of the East Asian Idiots” and building solidarity across asymmetrical space, namely, in this case, East Asia. At the same time, I did not want to join the event as if nothing had happened. I decided to join it not just as a participant but as an organiser of a session, in which I would invite Shirōtono-ran and openly discuss the issue from inside the festival.

In preparing for the discussion, I thoroughly read and re-read the related documents written by critics, the apologies written by multiple persons in the chatroom (both individually and collectively), as well as the chatroom transcription. I thought that both Bin-Zib and Shirōtono-ran were confronting a similar issue: dealing with internal violence in relation to the movement’s pursuit of “openness”, which was reflected in inviting even those who seemed to internalise mainstream values. I therefore put a considerable amount of time and effort into preparing the discussion, invited Bin-Zib founders, and developed questions. However, the discussion did not go deep due to various reasons, including multiple translations and a limited time. In addition, even though I had communicated my intentions of facilitating a broader conversation to the critics, sharp criticism was eventually aimed at those who still attended the event, including participating Bin-Zib members and myself. Some of the critics disengaged with me on social media, and my attempt at having conversations with them after the event were rejected.

Although the situation deeply frustrated me, I still believe that I made the right decision. Above all things, by joining No Limit Seoul, I knew that the suggestion of the “Asian Host Bar and Asian Girls Bar” was not purely the product of sexist and imperialist culture. A session entitled “Sex Work is Fucking Work!” was organised by a Taiwanese sex worker/activist who believed that the “host bar and girls bar” suggestion was made because of her existence. She had frequently visited and stayed in Kōenji, the neighbourhood where Shirōtono-ran is based, as a close friend of Shirōtono-ran. “If they

had no friend like me, a host girl who appeared in their everyday lives,” she said, “there would not have been such a suggestion made in the first place”. She had been eager to express her opinion and feelings about the criticism when the proposal had been criticised in the chatroom. However, she had not been a part of the discussion because of her physical distance from Japan and the language barrier. She organised her own session as a part of the festival instead. She brought hand-made comic zines translated into three languages (English, Chinese, and Japanese) to share her view and emotions regarding the disputes, although her voice was never able to reach people who boycotted Nolimit Seoul based on the call-out documents.⁶

This series of events prompted me to visit Tokyo to understand what I had encountered in Seoul. I needed to see Shirōtono-ran with my own eyes and meet those accused as “assailants”. In this context, Shirōtono-ran was not a bounded site that I could decide to include or exclude from my research, but an interrelated part of my research field.

The second episode occurred when I began my fieldwork in Tokyo at the end of 2017. A friend, who had been an activist of the General Freeter Union,⁷ asked me to join a conference organised by an activist group named San’ya Sōgidan (meaning “San’ya Dispute League,” hereafter referred to as Sōgidan). San’ya is a *yoseba* (a day labour auction market) developed in the 1950s at the eastern periphery of Tokyo, and was famous for violent urban riots in the 1960s and 1970s. I attended the conference without any research-related expectations, but soon realised that San’ya was the very space of the precariat movement of an earlier generation.

San’ya was where people who had nothing but their bodies to earn a living gathered to find a job during a period of rapid economic growth (Bary, 1997). Hired in the morning and fired at night in the very same day, they had never been a part of the class-formation of the proletariat as such. In the conference, the activists of Sōgidan tried to conceptualise the day labourers of *yoseba* in the same vein as the contemporary precarious labourers. A young woman who introduced herself as a member of the Kyabakura Union,⁸ which was part of the General Freeter Union, actively engaged in the

⁶ Leaving aside any judgment on sex work, I respected her endeavour to dialogue with those who had a view that differed from her own. I also felt deeply sorry that her voice could not reach people who did not join Nolimit Seoul.

⁷ The General Freeter Union, founded in 2003, is a “network for all irregular workers” (General Freeter Union). Regarding freeter, see Chapter 1, footnote 6.

⁸ The Kyabakura Union (founded in 2009) is a branch of the General Freeter Union. Kyabakura (a Japanese term, compounding “Cabaret” and “Club”) refers to “hostess clubs” or “girls bars” where customers drink and chat with young women (see footnote 3). The Kyabakura Union was founded to deal with problems that employees face with their employers, including harassment and unpaid wages.

discussion. After the conference, participants went out to join in what they call a “communal kitchen (*kyōdosuiji*)”, in which people occupied two blocks of neighbourhood alleys and turned the street into a giant kitchen.

What I encountered at San’ya strongly captivated me. In my endeavour to theoretically articulate research questions, I had considered the concept of precarity as inherent in the history of capitalism rather than as a new phenomenon produced under the neoliberal regime (Lorey, 2015; 2017). This thought, however, had remained at the theoretical level, without concrete examples that could be empirically examined. By encountering San’ya, the existing space of an earlier generation of the precariat and their ongoing movement, my research gained significant momentum: San’ya enabled me to see the precariat movement in Seoul and Beijing from a new perspective. In Tokyo, the precariat movements of different generations have been connected in the city, and I could not help but ask where the precariat and movements of earlier generations were in Seoul and Beijing.

These happenings, insights, and inquiries pushed me to re-design my research approach. I stopped worrying about the number of cases and instead strived to map, stereoscopically, the field of the urban precariat movements in East Asia as a working concept by pursuing the relations of people, spaces, and practices that were simultaneously created, distorted, and broken. At the same time, I began to take account of the nuanced differences in how the precariat imagines and practices alternatives in each context. How the urban precariat has related to and negotiated with central and municipal governments, civil society, and academia, has also been different in different times and places. These insights led me to contemplate how the urban precariat’s practices reflected the particular socio-economic dispositions of each society. My research was, in this way, unwittingly turned into relational ethnography, which involves “processes involving configurations of relations among different actors or institutions” (Desmond, 2014, p. 547). In this regard, in the early stages of my research, ethnography functioned not as a method of finding answers in already-given field sites, but enabled me to understand what the field itself is and how it should be explored.

3.1.3. Navigating the field of precariat movements in East Asia

In the mapping of precariat movements in three different cities, I needed to figure out which groups or activist initiatives occupied critical junctions of the generative field of relations.⁹ In my fieldwork, I tried to follow connections and chains of the urban precariat’s practices in each city. In doing so, I

⁹ By “junctions,” I mean sets of people and places that play an important role in establishing and maintaining connections within and between precariat movements.

realised that a pattern of relations I found in one city offered clues for navigating other cities. In this way, the core methods of my research became relational ethnography or what Robinson (2015) calls “natural experiments” designed by “following the numerous interconnections and repeated instances across and amongst cities” (p. 4). The patterns of relations appeared primarily in two ways. The first materialised as historical conjunctures in the process of urbanisation in each city while the other emerged as a set of differences in the practice of the precariat in these cities; the latter can be understood as the outcome of the different course of history in the former set of patterns.

Looking over the conjunctures of the early urbanisation processes of these cities, we can identify a common pattern in spite of the different periods and geohistorical backgrounds. As I discussed, the existence of San’ya and its ongoing movement pushed me to revisit Seoul and Beijing from a historical perspective. Capitalism produced the class of wage labourers, i.e., the proletariat, by separating people from the means of production (Marx, 1976). Furthermore, there has always been a surplus, or what Marx/Engels (2010) and Fanon (2004) call the “lumpenproletariat” who could not enter wage-labour relations (see Chapter 2). In this regard, San’ya, a *yoseba*, is the place of the lumpenproletariat, or what I call the earlier generation of the precariat, in Tokyo. Likewise, Beijing’s urban villages are where farmers-turned-workers (*nongmingong*) – the most precarious social strata in the Chinese society – often settle to form a home away from home.¹⁰ Gongyuzhijia in Beijing is, in this context, a notable example of the precariat’s endeavour to live in the city by creating an autonomous space, or what they called a “commune”. What I realised was that the residents of Gongyuzhijia includes both the earlier generation (who are farmers-turned-workers) as well as the new generation (who do not have any experience of farming) of the precariat as its members, reflecting China’s compressed process of capitalist economic development.

In Seoul, on the other hand, the precariat of the earlier generation who once collectively struggled to produce an alternative space of their own no longer maintain any shared physical places, or any space for that matter.¹¹ When the military government of Korea drove economic growth in the 1960s and 1970s, many people who had worked in agriculture left their hometowns and headed towards Seoul.

¹⁰ Urban villages (*chengzhongcun*) refer to villages originally designated as rural, but which became encircled by the expanding urban area. While the migrants have struggled to survive in the city, various informal settlements in so-called urban villages have provided them with relatively affordable housing (Liu et al., 2010).

¹¹ In my field research in Seoul in 2018, I visited a town named Baecksa village which was called “the last shacktown”. It was undergoing a redevelopment process at the time under the slogan of “urban regeneration to uphold a community” as Dong-woo, a former anti-eviction activist, explained me. He was at Baecksa village as the “Regeneration Support Centre” leader, run by the SMG. I will discuss how the SMG adopted the legacy of the urban poor movement in Chapter 6.

They worked as day labourers or unskilled factory workers as the cheapest labour force in the city. A large number of shacktowns were formed in Seoul with the government's passive consent. In this context, the shacktowns were the space of the early generation of the precariat in Seoul. However, in Korea, where industrialisation developed in tandem with a constant process of speculative urbanisation (Shin & Kim 2016; Shin, 2018), those shacktowns became the subject of redevelopment in order to maximise the real estate value of the dilapidated neighbourhoods. Most of the shacktowns built on state-owned land were destroyed, albeit with significant confrontations by the residents, who did not have any legal property rights. Land and housing speculation continued to develop to an extreme level, and housing started to be considered as the most efficient means of investment rather than as a place for living.

The differences in the precariat's practices reflected the disparities in conjunctures of urbanisation between these cities I discussed above. However, it was more so because of the initiatives that the precariat took in relation to the conjunctures of urbanisation in these cities that produced differences in the practice of the precariat. Clues to understanding these processes were found in the research sites that I had initially chosen.

First, it was only in Bin-Zib (Seoul) that the precariat had consciously tried to devise alternative economic and financial practices to overcome the dominant norms and practices around property and ownership. This was characteristic of the specific context of Seoul, an extremely privatised and financialised city, in which people grew used to financial language way earlier than other cities (see Song, 2014).¹² While Bin-Zib seemed to have already passed its heyday by the time I initiated my doctoral fieldwork, activists continued their financial experiment, "The Commune Bank, Bin-Go" to create what they called *commons*.¹³ This awareness also led me to pay attention to the burgeoning movement called *Gongyuji*, or "Citizens' Action for Gyeong'ui Railway *Gongyuji* (hereafter, CAGG)", in Seoul.¹⁴ This consists of a vacant lot occupied by a group of activists since 2016. Attempting to attack "the rent-seeking city", they invited various evictees in the city (including the early generation of the precariat) to let them continue their struggle under the overarching umbrella of the "right to *commons*". On one hand, *Gongyuji* has demonstrated how the precariat movement in Seoul has

¹² In Korea, only 1% of the population owns more than 54% of the private land in terms of area, while private land occupies up to 70% of the country's total land (Korean Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, and Transport, 2018).

¹³ With the italicised "commons", I refer to the concept of commons (*keomeonjeu*) used and developed by activists of *Gongyuji* and Bin-Go.

¹⁴ The Korean word *Gongyuji* means "common land", but the activists of *Gongyuji* use "*gongyuji*" and "commons" (*keomeonjeu*) interchangeably.

continued through anti-eviction struggles in the city. On the other hand, it has showed how the precariat in Seoul has tried to develop new strategies to confront the dominant logic regarding land and housing in the city, creating a symbolic movement site for the evictees and devising a new logic with the concept of *commons*. In other words, *Gonggyuji* consists of conceptual activism organised to reclaim commons in the middle of a financialised city.

Second, the precariat in Tokyo and Beijing put more effort into creating alternative spaces to valorise their work without being exploited. Yet, Shirōtono-ran in Tokyo and Gongyuzhijia in Beijing did so in significantly different manners, reflecting different collective sensibilities. Gongyuzhijia pursued creating a community in which people made up a big family based on their identity as migrant labourers (as the name of the community, the Migrant Workers' Home, itself indicates). Although there were issues around colliding sensibilities between individuals' desires and collective inspiration to build what they called a "commune", it was always the latter that was emphasised in the members' narrative.¹⁵ On the other hand, Shirōtono-ran is used to refer to a network of individuals in the Kōenji area, which is also a part of what people call Nantoka (meaning "somehow") Network, a loose network of alternative spaces in Tokyo. In this regard, the vagueness of Shirōtono-ran without a clear boundary is similar to that of Bin-Zib. Yet, unlike the precariat in Seoul, the precariat in Tokyo never used the terms "commons" or "commune".

Finally, I realised that Shirōtono-ran was not precisely a counterpart of Bin-Zib, whose appearance in Korea reflected the emergence of new collective sensibilities, as I discuss in Chapter 5. Both Bin-Zib and Shirōtono-ran were initiated in the 2000s by those in their early 30s. However, in Japan, the so-called "cultural turn" in the social movement scene occurred a decade earlier than in Korea. In this context, what marked an emergence of the new kind of urban youth movement was a group called Dameren (1991-present). Dameren began with those who intensely desired to escape from wage-labour relations and ideological leftist movements, just like Bin-Zib. Activists in Tokyo consider Shirōtono-ran (2005-present) a successor to Dameren, especially because of their rejection of the middle-class lifestyle.

Based on the awareness mentioned above, especially regarding the different attitudes toward community, I re-designed the research in its entirety. On the one hand, I decided to remove the case of Beijing to focus explicitly on practices of urban commons. Considering the time and effort I put

¹⁵ Confronting urban redevelopment in their original settlement in Beijing, the central leadership of the community moved to the outskirts of Beijing. They started to run an orchard farm and live together, planning to move the whole community to the new space in a near future. I lived in the community for around four months, working on the orchard.

into building rapport with the people of Gongyuzhijia and my affection and respect for the group, it was honestly quite a painful decision. Yet, I needed to admit that I could not categorise Gongyuzhijia as urban commons as I define it in relation to other cases in this project.¹⁶ Alternatively, at least, I needed more time to understand the dynamics taking place in the community from the perspective of the urban. In other words, removing the case of Beijing from my research was also a practical choice to be able to complete the research in the given amount of time. On the other hand, I expanded the subject of research in Tokyo and Seoul in terms of periods and groups to trace the genealogy of the urban precariat movements in these cities, as I present in the following section.

3.1.4. Focused time and groups

My research consists of three sets of comparative research on the urban precariat movement in Tokyo and Seoul. In all three sets of comparative research, I focus on the prefigurative and anarchist movements in which the precariat pursues the creation of something different here and now by producing what I theorise as urban commons. All three sets of research comparatively and collectively address the research questions I proposed: How has the urban precariat in Tokyo and Seoul contested the capitalist value system based on the work/home binary and created different relations and values?

The first set of research focuses on the precariat movement that emerged together with the construction of Tokyo and Seoul as industrialised capital cities. As mentioned above, San'ya in Tokyo and shacktowns in Seoul were spaces for the most precarious populations in these cities.

Investigating the urban precariat movement active in the 1970s, I focused on a day labourers movement created by an activist group named *Genba Tōsōinkai* (the Worksite Action Committee, hereafter Gentōi) (1972-1974) in San'ya (Tokyo) and the housewives' movement that took place in a shacktown called Nangok (Seoul). During the 1960s and the 1970s, many leftist organisations came to San'ya to organise a day labourers' movement, but failed. In this context, the formation of Gentōi marked a significant event in San'ya's history. Its anarchist and prefigurative qualities resonated with day labourers' collective sensibility and have endured as part of the current precariat movement in

¹⁶ For example, there was a member with whom I was pretty close. While he was one of the founding members, he often clashed with other members for his "individualistic", if not "artistic", characteristics, as people in the community said. This conflict was also related to the fact that he sometimes casually revealed information that was supposed to be kept among core members. From my perspective, in terms of his attitudes with regard to community and individuality, he was someone who would be the most similar to those who composed the precariat in Shirōtono-ran and Bin-Zib. In addition, I did not encounter any "secret information" or "leaders" in Shirōtono-ran and Bin-Zib.

San'ya, as I discuss in this thesis. In Seoul, there were many examples of the urban poor community movement, organised by the religious activists, in the 1970s. However, the case of Nangok is particularly noteworthy: the urban poor housewives, the most precarious source of labour-power in the city, built a network of care beyond a traditional concept of community.

The second set of research explores prefigurative lifestyle movements that emerged when globalised neoliberalism had just arrived in each society. Here, I focus on Dameren and Bin-Zib as the most significant examples of the burgeoning movement led by youth who decided to live as what they called “voluntary poor”, before the neoliberal ideology of self-reliance began to operate in full swing. As I discuss in the thesis, the emergence of Dameren and Bin-Zib reflected a change in collective sensibilities, which I identify with the notion of “the urban” (see Chapter 2). Although some other groups or forms of activism similarly pursued the egalitarian and prefigurative activism at that time, I focus on Dameren and Bin-Zib. It was because, unlike other examples confronting specific political issues, these two groups pursued the creation of a new form of lifestyle and, by doing so, provide examples in which one can observe concrete dynamics of value struggles over capitalist notions of work and home.

The final set of research tries to map the contentious field of urban precariat movement scenes, where different generations of the precariat work together, while investigating the specificities of the precariat movement of each city in its history of social movements. While I try to offer an encompassing map, I also zoom in to analyse value struggles taking place in each context. I focus on Shirōtono-ran and San'ya Sōgidan in Tokyo as well as Bin-Go and *Gongyuji* in Seoul. While these cases show specificities of the precariat movement in each city most vividly, they are also part of a related field. For example, Japanese *yosebas* are historically related to the labour camps where Chinese and Korean labourers were forced to work during the colonial era (Bary, 1997). Naturally, there have been many Korean and Chinese labourers in *yosebas*. Sōgidan activists, in this context, were very concerned about the “anti-Korean” and “anti-Chinese” sensibility aggravated by the media, and also maintained a deep interest in movements in both China and Korea. Sōgidan invited Yasen, the group who has done theatre performance at San'ya since the 1980s, to learn about Gongyuzhijia, the Chinese migrant workers' movement, and also asked me to talk about anti-gentrification struggles in Seoul. On the other hand, some of the young Taiwanese and Chinese Yasen members had a close relationship with Shirōtono-ran. *Gongyuji* was also one of the main organisers of Nolimit Seoul in 2017, and offered the event a main venue because they were “excited by the idea of forming an East Asian activist network”.

Research focus	Tokyo	Seoul
[The 1970s] Urban activism/movements led by the most precarious population in the city.	Genba Tōsōinkai (The Worksite Action Committee) (1972-1974): A militant activist group that worked with day labourers in San'ya.	The movement of poor, urban housewives in a shacktown, Nangok (1974-1988): A movement of poor, urban housewives that built the first medical cooperative in the country.
[The 1990s in Tokyo/ The 2000s in Seoul] Prefigurative experiments of the "voluntary poor".	Dameren (The League of Good-for-Nothings) (1991-current): A group that promoted "unemployed life". It was considered the pioneer of "freeter activism" with the group Akino-Arashi [Storms of Autumn] contesting the Japanese Emperor system.	Bin-Zib (Empty/Guests House) (2008-2018): A collective living experiment; while it was initiated to reduce working time, it turned into a co-housing experiment.
[The 2000s in Tokyo/ The 2010s in Seoul] The precariat movement scene in each city	San'ya Sōgidan (San'ya Dispute League) (1981-present): A day labour activist group founded by former members of Gentōi. Confronting the collapse of the bubble and the dismantling yoseba, the group turned into the "rough sleeping" movement. Shirōtono-ran (Amateurs' Riot) (2005-present) and Nantoka Network: A loosely networked alternative spaces in Tokyo.	Gongyuji, or CAGG (Citizens' Action of Gyeong'ui Railway Gongyuji) (2016-2020): A movement that occupied public land and developed commons as a new strategy for the urban precariat movement against evictions. The Commune Bank, Bin-Go (2013-present): An alternative financial experiment initiated by residents of Bin-Zib to create commons.

Table 3.1. Focused time and groups

The history of the urban precariat movement extends back much longer in time, especially in Tokyo. However, I have made the choice to confine the scope of the research to the post-war period. This made it possible to trace the lineage of people and their memories through engagement with the current precariat movement in each city at the first stage of my research. This is to say, the day labour movement in San'ya and the urban poor housewives' movement in Nangok were not just arbitrarily selected research sites representing the urban precariat movement of Tokyo and Seoul, respectively. Rather, I came to study them through the empirical practice of relational ethnography in relation to the present-day precariat movement.

3.1.5. Emerging field sites

In terms of field research, I was in Seoul for four months, from April to July 2018, and spent almost fourteen months in Tokyo (From December 2017 to March 2018; From August 2018 to mid-January

2019; From April to July 2019). This use of time was the best way for me to conduct this comparative research since I did not need the time to adjust to the society, culture, and language of Korea, and I had already established a considerable level of rapport with Korean activists.

When I conducted MA research, I stayed in Bin-Zib for four months in 2013. By doing so, I learned that residing in a field site, and thus being a part of it, was one of the most effective ways to grasp the daily rhythm of the community as well as the nuanced dynamics amongst people (see Han, 2014).

When it came to my PhD thesis, I aimed to be emerged in the field sites and grasp inner dynamics in the same way. For example, during the four months' fieldwork in Seoul, I asked *Gongyuji* activists if I could stay in *Gongyuji* (the space occupied by the activists) even though there seemed to be no available space at the moment.¹⁷ *Gongyuji* was not a place that could prepare accommodations, but a vacant lot with makeshift spaces and small containers run by what they called "space-keepers" (see Chapter 6).¹⁸ In Tokyo, I stayed at Manuke Guesthouse, run by Shirōtono-ran, for four weeks in December 2017 as a guest, and then for another four weeks in October 2018 as a staff member. Except for the two months at Manuke Guesthouse, I lived in San'ya, where I joined the activism of Sōgidan. They offered me a small room they used to store things and to accommodate short-term visitors. While a newly-joined male activist in his twenties was already occupying the room to save rent, I willingly accepted the offer and shared the space with him.

At each field site, I attended meetings, events, various collective studies, workshops, and protests organised by these activist groups, as well as everyday conversations and spontaneous gatherings both online and offline. Besides the official gatherings in which I could take records without drawing attention, I took short memos to generate field notes after informal occasions or conversations. Above all, I fully participated in activism as one of the activists, often arguing on specific issues to find the best way to deal with confronting issues as any other activist would, but did so as a foreigner. This aspect will be discussed in the last section of this chapter.

¹⁷ *Gongyuji* was not a residential space. There was one male evictee in his early 30s who resided in a container in *Gongyuji* which had no facilities for residency except for one public toilet.

¹⁸ They willingly let me stay in a container that had been run by one of the space-keepers as a boardgame café (Regarding the "space-keeper", see Chapter 6, footnote 52). I soon learned that the space-keeper had been considered the most reluctant one to share space with others (or the one with the strongest sense of attachment to his own space). This is to say, the activists of *Gongyuji* utilised my existence there to a certain extent to challenge people's sensibility around ownership.

3.2. Research participants, data and methods of collection, data analysis

This section presents four main sets of data and methods of data collection used to address research questions throughout this thesis, followed by a discussion of how I analyse data. The main sets of data are: (1) Ethnography; (2) In-depth interview; (3) Recordings, interviews, and field notes generated by other activists/ethnographers; and (4) Archives.

3.2.1. Ethnography

As I have detailed above, ethnography entailed this project's primary method. It was particularly helpful for grasping how the precariat at each field site contests and re-imagines work and home through constant value struggle at/beyond the specific site; every field site is constantly (re)composed in its own way. Without becoming a part of the field, researchers cannot understand the way in which a specific field is constructed. In other words, the fundamental instrument of ethnography is an ethnographer in the field (see Becker, 1996; Wacquant, 2004). During my fieldwork, I strived to grasp the way in which a specific field was collectively produced in a fundamentally corporeal way while trying to transform what I learned into a form of language, just as any other ethnographers do.

3.2.2. In-depth interviews

In order to understand how the urban precariat perceives work, home, and a given social movement, as well as what it values most, I conducted in-depth interviews with 70 people involved in the precariat movement scene in Tokyo and Seoul. Each interview typically took more than two hours. If a person had more experience and thus more relevant information, I occasionally conducted more interviews. All the interviews were recorded based on the participants' agreements. The interviews with Korean participants were transcribed by me in Korean. In the interviews with Japanese participants, I received support from a Japanese friend who can speak Korean for the parts I could not understand well based on my research participants' agreement. I change the name of research participants or use initials to protect their identity whenever needed. In the case of the activists who often publish their name or nickname as opinion leaders, I followed their lead and used names. The complete list of the research participants and their involvement in activism are described in table 3.2. (For the list of interviewees, see Appendix 1).

	Tokyo (34 people)	Seoul (36 people)
1	<p>(1) Seven active/former day labourers who are in their 60s to 80s engaged in Sōgidan. All of them have lived as day labourers their whole lives. Two of them (in their 60s) are still working. Others are living on the street as ragpickers. One of them got sick and received “life protection”, a form of welfare given by the state, during my research period.</p> <p>(2) Four activists of Sōgidan. One of them was engaged in the <i>yoseba</i> movement in the 1970s. After decades of absence, he came back to movement. Two of them have been engaged in Sōgidan from the time of it was founded in 1981; one joined in the 1990s. Except for one, nobody directly experienced the day labourers’ movement in the 1970s, but they had lots of knowledge from collective studies, relationships with elderly activists and day labourers, and/or their own experience of day labouring.</p>	<p>(1) Five activists who have engaged in the urban poor movement. One began her engagement in 1969. Two joined in the 1970s. One joined in the 1980s. One joined in the 1990s. All of them are still engaged in urban poor activism in various ways.</p> <p>(2) Two urban poor housewives who engaged in the anti-eviction movement. One is in her 70s. The other is in her 60s. (I met both through my field research at <i>Gongyuji</i>).</p>
2	<p>(1) Four people engaged in Dameren and a member of Akino-Arashi, an activist group of the time (Two are in their 40s. One is in his 50s. One is in his 20s.)</p>	<p>(1) Bin-Zib: Thirteen active/former residents of Bin-Zib (Three are in their 40s, six are in their 30s, four are in their 20s).</p>
3	<p>(1) Eight precarious people engaged in Shirōtono-ran and the Nantoka Network. Five of them are in their 40s, two are in their 30s, and one is in his 20s.</p> <p>(2) Except for the four activists of Sōgidan I mentioned above, I also have interviews with 7 people engaged the group as active volunteers: Two participants in their 60s, one participant in her 40s, four young participants in their 20s and 30s.</p> <p>(3) Four activists engaged in the General Freeter Union. Three are in their 30s. One is in her 20s. Two of them were women also engaged in the Kyabakura Union. I met them in activities organised by Sōgidan.</p>	<p>(1) 11 people in <i>Gongyuji</i>. Seven activists: One is in her 20s. Four are in their 30s. Two are in their 40s. (One of them is a former member of Neul-Jang (the NGO group which joined <i>Gongyuji</i>). Four evictees in <i>Gongyuji</i>. Two of them are the urban poor housewives I mentioned above. One is a homeless man in his 40s. The other is a youth evictee in his 30s. One former member of Neul-Jang in his 20s.</p> <p>(2) Eight activists of Bin-Go. Three are in their 40s. Three are in their 30s. Two are in their 20s (Seven of them are also Bin-Zib members that I mentioned above).</p> <p>(3) Seven activists who joined the precariat movement scene. (Two are in their 40s, three are in their 30s, and two are in their 20s). One is an organiser of Nolimit Seoul. One is an activist of <i>Gongyuji</i>.</p>

Table 3.2. The research participants in each field site

3.2.3. Recordings, interviews, and field notes generated by activists/ethnographers

While the physical presence I experienced at San'ya and older day labourers living on the streets pushed me to expand my research, in Seoul, the space of the precariat movement of an earlier generation, i.e., the shacktowns, no longer exist. In such a circumstance, my decision to include the precariat movement in the 1970s was quite challenging.

I could hear stories from the activists and two urban poor women, as I listed in table 3.2. Moreover, I was able to get precious data from my research participants. First, Sara (Kim Hye-kyeong, who has actively engaged in the urban poor movement since the 1960s) gave me a book after a long interview with me. The book entails the life stories of the six housewives who actively engaged in establishing the first medical cooperative in Nangok in the 1970s. Their life stories were published as a primary source without any analysis or interpretation. Second, Bouqins, a member of Bin-Go, sent me a book entitled "*Shacktown (Panjachon) Diary*" (Choi, 2012), he found in a used bookstore. It entails three sets of field notes generated in the year 1969 at different shacktowns in Seoul. Finally, I was introduced to Kim Ha-kyeong, a 72-year-old novelist who had joined the anti-eviction struggle in the 1980s as a student activist. While I was unable to interview her because of bad timing, she gave me a CD that contains audio recordings of interviews with four urban poor housewives engaged in the anti-eviction movement in the 1980s. Each recording is 2-3 hours long, entailing an interviewee's life story and her experiences of and thoughts about the engaged struggle. Ha-kyeong permitted me to use the recordings, which had not been transcribed or analysed. These audio recordings, interviews, and field notes were given to me in the form of a primary data source without being analysed. I analysed the data, which provided me with abundant information about how the urban poor housewives perceive and practice work and home.

3.2.4. Archival research

In order to address the question of how precarity has been historically produced and governed in each society as well as to locate the urban precariat's practices in social, cultural, and geographical contexts, I conducted extensive historical archival research. I have collected relevant documents such as academic writings, media presentations, articles, and books written by activists from each group. In Japan, several leftist journals, such as *Modern Thoughts (Gendai Siso)*, *Impaction*, *Hapax*, and *Yoseba*, were exceedingly informative, especially for their interviews, writings, and recordings of talks written and conducted by activists. I was also informed by a considerable amount of archival data (including meeting records and leaflets) from each group (sometimes personally), both in digital and physical formats. In addition, the zines published by each group particularly helped me to understand

not only how people in each project have created urban commons, but also the collective sensibilities that characterise the engaged activists. In relation to past movements, documentary films about the activist groups and related activism also helped me to understand the field sites' atmospheres in their historical moment. The list of zines and newspapers published by activist groups, and documentary films created by activists (or participants of the groups) are presented in the table 3.3.

San'ya Sōgidan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Yamakara</i> (From Yama, which is another name of San'ya): A quarterly newsletter published since 1987 • <i>Attack to Attack</i> (1985): A documentary film shot by activists Sato Mitsuo and Yamaoka Kyoichi.
Dameren	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Sinking Family</i> (2019): A documentary film shot by Kano Tsuchi, a child raised in the joint childcare project in which many Dameren members participated. • <i>Human Liberation (Ningen kaihō)</i>: The zine irregularly published by Dameren (I was only able to see the articles published as books).
Shirōtono-ran	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Amateur Riot</i> (2008): A documentary film shot by Nakamura Yuki, an activist engaged in Shirōtono-ran and the Nantoka Network.
Bin-Zib/ Bin-Go	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Counterattack</i> (2012): A documentary film shot by one of the residents. • <i>Noneun Saram</i> (tong-in-cheek translation of Homo Ludens): Zine published by Bin-Zib during 2013. • <i>Bin-Go Community Newsletter</i>: a monthly newsletter published online since 2013.
Korean anti-eviction struggles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Sang'gyedong Olympic</i> (1988, Kim Dong-won) • <i>Party 51</i> (2013, Jeong Yong Taeck)
<i>Gongyuji</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Gyeong'ui Railway Gongyuji</i>: the quarterly newspaper (2018-2019)

Table 3.3. List of the publications and films of the activist groups

3.2.5. Analysing data through co-research

I did not use any analysing tool (such as NVIVO). Instead, I generated thematic codes myself by repeatedly reading interviews and field notes. I then revisited activists to discuss the generated codes and themes. Such revisiting often took place as forms of personal conversations or collective discussions, which also led me to archival data, such as articles or talks presented by activists at different times. In this regard, my research was inspired by what Roggero (2014) calls “co-research”, in which researchers/activists collectively strive to translate discourse into practices and vice versa. The co-research turned out to be an ongoing process in which collecting data cannot clearly be distinguished from analysing it.

Co-research is often compared with action research due to their common aim to break with the “traditional relationship between subject (researcher) and object (researched)” (De Molina, 2004a; see also Van Beinum, 1999). However, co-research is a much more organic and intuitive process, while action research takes a more programmatic approach, with specific sets of inquiry and goals which often appear oriented toward an improvement of the community (Levin, 1999; Faucheux, 1999). Action research has its roots in the fields of science and education (Herr & Anderson, 2012), developing as a process by way of “a spiral of steps, each of which is composed of planning, action and the evaluation of the result of action” (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1990, p. 8). On the other hand, following Roggero (2014), I consider co-research a common name for how people try to collectively organise themselves in and through political struggles. It is found in the methods of workers’ inquiry employed by Italian *Operaismo* (De Molina, 2004), as well as in the legacy of social movements in Korea. In “*The Making of Minjung*”, Namhee Lee (2007) provides a rich narrative about how Korean students became activists by getting involved in study groups and seminars where they read forbidden Marxist literature; how student activists went to farms or to factories to make alliances with workers in the 1970s and 1980s.¹⁹ One of my research participants in Seoul, who dedicated himself to the urban poor movement for 30 years, told me: “I joined this reading group when I just began to work at the factory. It was mind blowing”. This is to say, co-research is a more endogenous form of research, which actually cannot be separated from the movement itself. Wherever people contest the dominant power and seek alternatives, “all militants conduct co-research”, as Roggero (2014, p. 515) states. At every precariat movement site in Tokyo and Seoul that I attended, the activists were doing co-research by reading academic/activist literature collectively, by inviting leftist scholars to their projects, and by producing knowledge as well as practices and reflecting on what they have done.²⁰

¹⁹ *Minjung* is a Korean word literally meaning “common people” or “mass”. In the *minjung* movement scene, the term has referred both to people who are oppressed and the people who would become the political subjectivity for social transformation.

²⁰ Indeed, I happened to encounter radical scholars such as Seung-woo Ha, Hyo-jeong Chae, Hyun-joon Shin, Bae-gyoon Park, and my own PhD supervisor Hyun Bang Shin through the network of Bin-Zib, Bin-Go, and *Gonggyuji*. Those who have developed autonomist theories in Korea, such as Jugn-hwan Cho, Su-jong Yoon, and Gap-hee Ko also have taken an important part in the legacy of co-research. Su-jong Yoon (2013), for example, took Bin-Zib as an example of the burgeoning autonomist movement in South Korea in his book, “Autonomism and resident communities”. The other two cases in the book are a rag-pickers’ community, which was formed by homeless people, ex-convicts, and war orphans in 1986 for a self-supporting economy, as well as a homeless squat formed in 2004. While I just mention a few names here, many Korean anarchist, autonomist, and leftist scholars have engaged in the social movement. *Siyu+Nomo*, an alternative scholars’ community established in 1998 by independent scholars (some of whom were former student activists), is one of the leading examples of how many Korean scholars/researchers have their roots in social

But, how can the situated knowledge be communicated with each other? My research attempts to explore how “the urban” is imagined and practised as an emergent project by those who are engaged in the social movement (see Chapter 2). By tracing threads and marks that were revealed by the field, I witnessed what Jacobs (2006) calls “repeated instances” across fields. In each field, activists were struggling with the issue of “care” and “violence” in their endeavours to produce alternative space and relations internally. Externally, all the scenes mentioned above confronted the issue of gentrification, albeit on different levels. Before long, as discussed, I realised that there were significant differences between the thoughts and practices embedded in the specific fields of each movement.

For example, the same word had different connotations and values in each context. In the cases of Seoul and Beijing, activists often used the words commons, commune, and communism to express what they were doing or desired to do, although with different nuances. This was not the case in Tokyo. Those who were part of Shirōtono-ran infrequently used the term “community” but never used terms such as commune or commons. Sōgidan’s activists even tended to have a critical attitude toward “community-building (*machizukuri*)”, or the so-called commune movement. Meanwhile, the activists of Bin-Zib and Shirōtono-ran clearly expressed their antipathy toward the concept of labour, while the activists of Sōgidan and Gongyuzhijia used the word “labour” with a sense of respect. For the activists of Sōgidan and active Bin-Zib members, the term civil society (*shimin shakai* in Japanese or *simin sahoe* in Korean) had a negative value, while members of Gongyuzhijia and *Gongyuji* activists used the word with a more positive attitude. What precipitated such differences, and what do these differences mean?

I tried to have conversations with activists in each field about topics such as communism, feminism, labour, care, and activism with the hope of engaging the process of creating common notions beyond boundaries. These practices showed me the firm boundaries and ruptures that existed not only between thoughts and practices based on different historical, socio-economic, cultural, and institutional contexts, but also between different sensibilities. While recognising such boundaries, I raised questions about ideas, concepts, practices, and sensibilities embedded in a specific context by introducing disparate thoughts and attitudes that I had encountered in different fields. For example, I challenged the so-called value of labour held by activists of Sōgidan from the perspective of Bin-Zib and Shirōtono-ran while asking about the value of “civil society” held by *Gongyuji* activists. In this regard, co-research was a method of coding, analysing, and generating data.

movements and continue to create rich collaborations across different identities such as researchers, activists, and subalterns.

Before delving into details about the co-research process, I would like to address certain difficulties and limitations in regard to conducting collaborative research. Engaging in any kind of collaborative research with communities or indigenous groups as an academic researcher immediately raises the question of how to deal with the power dynamics between an authoring researcher and non-authoring participants. What are the implications of doing collective research when a researcher produces and potentially publishes a thesis under their own name? This poses essential difficulties around issues of privileges and power dynamics with which every researcher should wrestle.

Feminist and post-colonial scholarship have reflected on power dynamics within the process of collaborative research, addressing how to navigate the “space-between” academia and communities/indigenous groups (see Gaventa & Cornwall, 2008; Fine, 2004; Morgensen, 2011; Styres et al., 2010). Various suggestions have been made, from practical models and protocols (Bishop & Glynn, 1999) to proposals for decolonising academia by, for example, embracing personal narrative without the interpretation of a researcher (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Smith, 1999), recognising tribal sovereignty (Atalay, 2012; Martin, 2008), and making “thick” reflections on research (Cruz, 2008; Luttrell, 2000). However, the power structure existing in multiple layers of social context constantly recurs regardless of the will of individual researchers and minorities as Muhammad et al. (2015) point out (see also Wildman & Davis, 1996). Moreover, as Trouillot (2003, p. 121) states, “neither guilt nor political stance alone could generate a fecund research program”. Some feminist scholars/activists have analysed the political/ethical projects of addressing the issue of privileges often turning into a politics of recognition and reinstantiating the uneven structure, in which the Native has its designated position as what Chow (2002) calls “protesting ethnic” (see also Smith, 2013).²¹ Then, how can we practice “the autonomy of living labour/knowledge” which transgresses boundaries (Roggero, 2014) without being trapped in what Smith (2013) calls “ethnographic entrapment”?²²

²¹ In “The problem with privilege”, Smith (2013) analyses how a political project that requires participants to “reflect on their gender/race/sexuality/class/etc. privilege” reinstantiates “the structure of domination it was supposed to resist”. The confessing subject is the universal, self-determining Western subject who compares itself to “others” who are not. There is a premise that “others” will become “the human” by being heard and thus known better. However, “the human” itself is a racial project towards universality against the other (Dasilva, 2007). Consequently, a liberation struggle often turns into a project of approving full humanity by proving its worthiness.

²² In the scene of the social movement, hierarchy arises not only between the researcher (who “takes advantage by selling the minorities”, to use a word of a San’ya activist) and the research subjects, but also between a researcher who wants to enter a field to conduct research and activists who might judge or gauge her intention or attitude. In such a circumstance, researchers in the activist scene can easily take a conformist, non-critical stance, ignoring the internal power dynamics of an activist scene, or even strengthening the uneven power dynamics by collaborating with activists who have

I do not have an exact answer for this except to keep “walking while asking questions” with my co-researchers/comrades, to use the Zapatista’s words (see Holloway, 2010). I consider co-research, following Roggero (2014, p. 520), to be a militant political program in which people share a path while questioning in order to transgress existing boundaries by facilitating collective subjectivations and creating “the new institution of life in common”. As Smith (2013) points out:

[T]he undoing of privilege occurs not by individuals confessing their privileges or trying to think themselves into a new subject position, but through the creation of collective structures that dismantle the systems that enable these privileges. (...) If we want to undermine those privileges, we must change the structures within which we live so that we become different peoples in the process.

In this regard, my take as co-researcher is “to learn the new language of struggle and, by learning, to participate in its formation” (Holloway, part 3, para 11).

Co-research is a fundamentally militant process. Sharply defined disputes, or “value struggles”, are an essential part of co-research or “commoning”, to use the words of the activists of *Gongyujì*. It requires one to engage in political struggle with fierce partisanship and thus take risks –of being criticised and/or transforming oneself— through a constant process of collective reflections in order to compose radical knowledge and practices, as I discuss in more depth below.

3.3. Becoming a translator to generate militant comparative urbanism from the ground

Radical scholars emphasise the concept of “militant co-research”, which necessarily requires the process of subjectivation of involved bodies, including scholars, activists, and any other participants (de Molina, 2004; Lorey, 2010; Roggero, 2014). Co-research is a process of knowledge production undertaken to amplify the movement. Indeed, in contemporary activism, activists put great effort into producing radical common notions in each context (see also Osterweil, 2013).²³ Despite their

hegemony or leadership in the field, a question that persists regardless of a given movement’s legitimacy. It is also not unusual that the identity of being an activist or belonging to a minority group can provide access to power within social movement scenes: I once witnessed an activist/researcher morally accuse another researcher in the same field because the latter was presenting her study around the issue of gentrification without having joined the anti-gentrification struggle. The activist/researcher effectively took advantage of being a co-researcher and, by doing so, strengthened existent status-quo power dynamics in the scene. This episode demonstrates one of the difficulties associated with the practice of co-research.

²³ The Spinozian concept of “common notions” is different from common sense, which is the knowledge or judgement accepted in a specific community. In regard to my research, there are two things that are important about this concept. First, common notions are always about how two or

distrust in academia, activists, more often than not, engage scholars with their projects in order to facilitate reflection on their practices for the production of situated knowledge. However, situated knowledge should be translated to communicate with different fields of movements to create common notions beyond boundaries. This is because, in the end, there is a hope to constitute common notions between “many single, already existing pieces, singularities”, as Lorey (2010) puts it.

I believe that this is the same epistemological difficulty that comparative urbanism deals with: how does one bring various singular cases into the same analytical frame when singularity marks “a fact as non-representable: the unique, non-identically repeatable, and not generally classifiable pre-individual event” (Rolli, 2016, p. 203)? In this regard, Robinson (2016) suggests tactics that are “generative”. Inspired by Deleuze’s philosophical work, generative comparative tactics focus on generating concepts by seeing cases as singularities, which are “emergent from an array of interconnected practices, ideas and relationships, and not an example of an already given global process” (p. 14).

From this perspective, my strategy for seeing cases as singularities while generating concepts amongst them was inviting *all of us* to engage in in-depth dialogues, as I discussed above. In other words, my primary strategy for transgressing existing boundaries was to engage participants (including myself) in intensive dialogues to bring together different thoughts and sensibilities and thus to expose the gaps between different fields of movement. In doing so, I tried to act neither as a rational cosmopolitan liberal subject nor as a national subject representing national history, but as a foreigner addressing other foreigners.

The concept of “the heterolingual address of translation” suggested by Naoki Sakai (2006) might grasp the gist of what I intended to do. Contesting the domination of homogeneous translation, which presumes commensurability between different languages and established equivalence, Sakai (ibid.) argues that translation, ineluctably, introduces “an instability into the putatively personal relations among the agents of speech, writing, listening and reading”. It is, before everything else, due to the translator’s ambiguous position of address. A translator (as the addressee) should listen to what the original addresser enunciates. However, there is no supposition that the addresser is

more bodies compose a new body. A body expresses a singular value as long as disparate elements work together, producing common notions. In other words, a body is already a mixture and is constantly forming mixtures with other bodies. What determines the singularities of a body are its relation with externals. Second, in order to make common notions, the encountered bodies should be involved with one another in the process of becoming something new. In doing so, the intensification of this process is necessary for the involved bodies to reach a specific turning point through which they create common notions (composing a new body). In this sense, intensification is the very process of becoming (see Deleuze, 1988; 1991).

speaking to her. A translator thus cannot be “either as *I* or *you*”. A translator is not an “individual” as an undividable unit, according to Sakai, but a “*subject in transit*”. The ambiguity inherent in the translator’s positionality marks “the instability of the *we* as subject” and suggests heterolingual address; a situation in which “one addresses oneself as a foreigner to another foreigner”.²⁴ Translation, in this context, becomes a “*poietic* social practice that institutes a relation at the site of incommensurability” (ibid., p. 75).

Sometimes, conversations amongst the participants (including myself) in the field turned into serious, if not simply frustrating, arguments, demonstrating the absence of commensurability. Even in moments of the most painful failure, however, the process was not entirely meaningless. Either intense discussions or ruptures helped me see the complex and nuanced stances of each member in the field and the stances of each group in a given movement. The more conversations I had with a person or a group, the deeper and richer the dialogues became. The process usually stimulated participants to critically reflect on what they had done, causing what Brecht (1961) calls “the estrangement effect”. When a person looks at what she has done naturally through the eyes of a foreigner, she might realise that what she had regarded as a matter of course is not actually so. Above all things, there were moments, albeit rare, in which everyone involved felt that *we* had moved forward. Neither did different parties finally understand one another, nor did they reach a consensus or compromise, but *we* moved to where all parties had never been through a series of discussions. In this context, the heterolingual address of translation consisted of acts/movements of making fields in which *we* not only encountered differences but also tried to build common notions amongst the differences, not by extracting generality but by becoming what Sakai calls “*subject(s) in transit*”.

Producing common notions is, by definition, a collective process. It can be said that my engagement in the field formed a singularity as a part of the entire constellation while *we* (the encountered singularities) tried to engage in a new form of collaboration through the process of intensification.²⁵ Likewise, this finished thesis will return to the field as a singularity which will again engage in the same process. To be able to encounter as outsiders without commensurability pushes *we* –as a cohesive, yet open process– to reflect on practices and sensibilities which have been taken for granted in a specific, bounded field. The encounters thus ask *we* to engage in the process of intensification to build relations beyond boundaries. Expanding the movements and building

²⁴ This happened even in Bin-Zib, where the members constantly change – most residents I met during my fieldwork were strangers to me.

²⁵ For a clarification of this process of intensification, see footnote 23.

solidarity beyond boundaries means that we intensify *ourselves* to become *subjects in transit* towards producing militant common notions.

Chapter 4. Precarity and the Precariat in Post-War Capitalist Cities

The strategy is always the same: something is divided, excluded, and rejected at the bottom, and through this exclusion, is included as the foundation. (Agamben, 2014, p. 66)

In all of these cases, there is an exclusion from the mainstream which is reversed when those who are excluded declare that they do not want to be included, that they prefer to go their own way. (Holloway, 2010, part 5, para 7)

While Japan and Korea have different pathways of urbanisation, both Tokyo and Seoul had to be rebuilt from scratch after the Second World War and the Korean War destroyed these cities. This chapter addresses the question of how the surplus population, or what Marx (1976) calls the “reserve army”, was created and un/governed in the process of building Tokyo and Seoul as the modern capital cities of both countries in the post-war period. It also explores how the urban movement emerged through the activity of the most precarious population in each city and how this population contested the dominant practices of work and home in each context.

This chapter has two main sections, focusing on Tokyo and Seoul, respectively. Each main section consists of three sub-sections.

In section 4.1.1, I discuss the formation of the so-called “Japanese-style welfare state” and of *yoseba* (an urban day labour auction market), which functioned as what Bary (1997) calls “Japan’s internal colony” in the post-war period. I contextualise how day labourers (*hiyatoi*) appeared to be the most insecure and marginalised population in Japanese society, enclosed in *yosebas*, which were historically developed through Japan’s industrialisation and urbanisation. In section 4.1.2, I investigate how *yosebas* were not only day labour auction markets produced by capital and the state but also an ungovernable space of the fluid underclass (*keaso*); I explore San’ya, the *yoseba* in Tokyo, as a case. I look at day labourers’ unique sensibilities around work and home based on interviews with day labourers I met in San’ya. In section 4.1.3, I discuss how an activist group named *Genba Tōsōinkai* (1972-1974) created a movement of day labourers by forming prefigurative sites of the movement in the 1970s.

Section 4.2.1 explores how shacktowns (*panjachon*) emerged in Seoul as a home for “the urban poor (*dosibinmin*)” in the 1960s and the 1970s through the extensive industrialisation and urbanisation of Seoul. The population that failed to enter the job market and thus was categorised as the urban poor occupied more than 30% of the urban population. In section 4.2.2, I contextualise how housewives among the urban poor emerged not only as the most precarious population but also as the primary agent of the urban poor movement. Then, I discuss how those urban poor housewives in shacktowns also developed urban sensibilities and desires that became the source of disagreements among them. In section 4.2.3, I look at a housewives’ movement in the 1970s at a shacktown located in the area called Nangok, in the southern periphery of Seoul. I discuss how the urban poor housewives created a network of care by contesting capitalist home practices and the gendered community often produced by activists.

4.1. San'ya, the ungovernable space of the drifting underclass in Tokyo

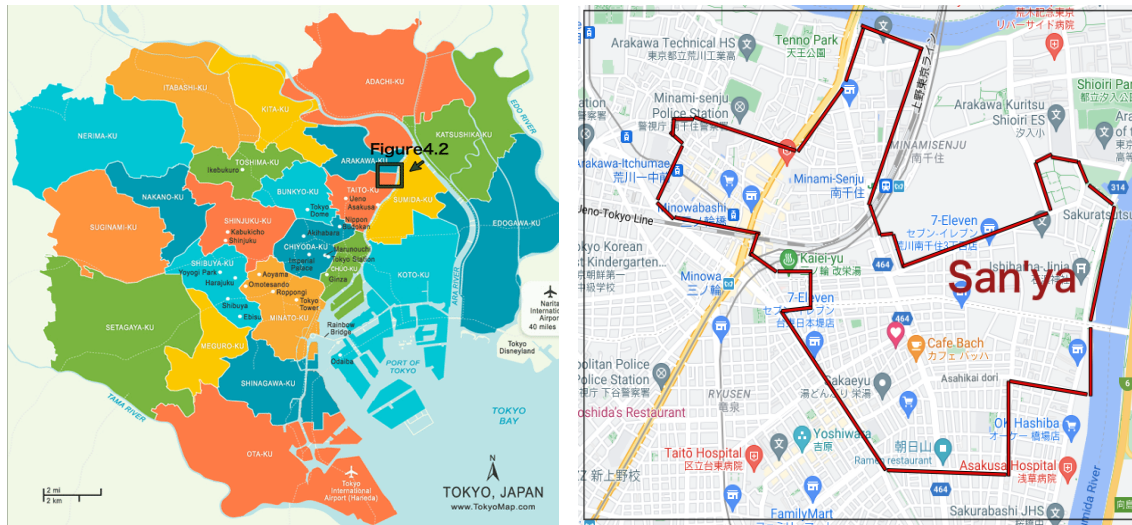


Figure 4.1. San'ya in Tokyo (Source: TokyoMap.com, marked by the author)

Figure 4.2. San'ya district (Source: Google map, marked by the author)

San'ya is an area mostly spanning the north-eastern part of Taitoh borough and covers a portion of Arakawa borough in eastern Tokyo. The area is often seen as unseemly by mainstream Japanese society. Hoodlums drink at a corner of a street from midday while alcoholics sleep in rags on the road in San'ya. The reality on the street still fits this stereotypical description even though gentrification has been slowly but steadily changing the neighbourhood to make it consumer-friendly over the last decade.

In the post-war period, San'ya was one of the four major *yosebas* in Japan.¹ However, not many ordinary young people in Tokyo know the place. A Japanese woman born and raised in Tokyo for over thirty years told me that she had never heard about San'ya. When I met her again, she said, “You know what? My parents actually knew San'ya. They said that San'ya was reported in the papers a lot during the 1960s as a very notorious district. They looked shocked to hear that I had a foreign friend who researched San'ya. Your friend is looking at ‘*ura* (the hidden underside)’ of Japan, they said. But are you really okay being there?” I could not find any words to answer her question. In fact, the name San'ya cannot be found on maps since the government had decided not to use it any longer

¹ Kamagasaki in Osaka, Sasashima in Nagoya, and Kotobuki in Yokohama are the other three major *yosebas*.

in 1962 in its attempt to erase the negative image associated with the area. The locals, however, have kept calling it San'ya.

4.1.1. San'ya as a *yoseba* outside of Japanese-style welfare society

From 1953 to 1971, Japan achieved enormous economic growth, demonstrating an average growth of 10% GDP in this period (Nishimizu & Hulten, 1978). By the 1970s, Japan had become the second-largest economy in the capitalist world after the United States (Glen & Pempel, 1998; Hirayama, 2003). Research emphasises the role of the developmental state and geopolitically favourable factors, such as the Korean War and US aid, in this seemingly miraculous economic achievement (Dingman, 1993). The narrative, however, fails to account for the considerable number of day labourers that had an important role upholding the skyrocketing of Japan's gross national product (Bary, 1997). After defeat in the Second World War, Japanese society needed labour force to rebuild its infrastructure from scratch, particularly in major cities that were literally flattened by the US air raids. The Tokyo Metropolitan Government (TMG) set up facilities, including vagrants' camps, to clean up the city. Over 20,000 homeless people went to the facility in a year and a half from September 1945. For the able-bodied who resisted entering the vagrant's camp, the government helped private entities run tents and flophouses (*doya*) in several areas, including San'ya (Hasegawa, 2012). "Repatriated soldiers, air-raid victims, evacuees retired from the provinces, and others out of a job" were taken to San'ya (Fowler, 1998, p. 40), and these men came to supply the initial pool of flexible labour that rebuilt the city (Bary, 1997; Fowler, 1998).

Post-war reconstruction was followed by the so-called high-growth period beginning in the late 1950s. It was in 1946 when the government opened 83 *yosebas* across the country (Imagawa, 1987).² *Yosebas* were established, with a clearly demarcated segregated appearance, as spaces where day labourers gathered to look for work. Most of them were single males who wandered from place to place to find jobs, mainly as construction or dock workers. Since most of these workers lived in cheap flophouses that offered dormitory-style accommodation, *yosebas* are also referred to as flophouse quarters (*doya gai*). Red-light districts are often found next to these areas.

² While *yosebas* have their origin in the feudal era, it was the post-war industrial period when *yosebas* were institutionalised as they exist today (Bary, 1997; Gill, 1996; Marr, 1997). In the mid-18th century, a series of natural disasters pushed desperate peasants to cities for food and work. In 1790, the *bakufu* government established the first labour camps as *yosebas* in Edo (Tokyo), Nagasaki, and Osaka to confine those who were categorised as "non-criminal homeless", meaning the ordinary peasants who came to cities (Bary, 1997, pp. 83–4).

The government launched a series of developmental plans, which strategically focused on the manufacturing, construction, and infrastructure sectors (Dolan & Worden, 1994). A series of mega-construction projects were launched along with the so-called rationalisation programs, such as the energy policy change and agricultural structural reform. These projects that led to the construction of post-war Tokyo drew from a reserve army of flexible labour (Bary, 1997; Sorensen, 2002; Yashiro, 2014). In the meantime, more investments in the areas surrounding Tokyo, Osaka, and Nagoya resulted in rapid urbanisation of those areas (Sorensen, 2002). About 11 million migrants moved from rural to metropolitan areas of Tokyo, Osaka, and Nagoya during the 25 years spanning from 1950 to 1975 (ibid., p. 174).³

The 1960s marked the heyday of *yoseba* based on “the intensive development of the urban-industrial infrastructure” (Giamo, 1995, p. 28). “Every day, early in the morning, there were so many people on the street up to the point that cars could not pass”, according to a former day labourer whom I met in San’ya (see figure 4.3). “People lined up to find jobs. It was like, you know, we were hired in the morning and fired in the evening on the very same day. Getting a job meant having the meals, drinks, and a place to sleep under the roof for the day”, he said. If day labourers were unrecruited (*aburemu*), they just slept outside (*aokan*). While San’ya’s population was 6,000 in 1953, by the early 1960s, around 250 flophouses had been built in San’ya, accommodating approximately 15,000 labourers (Jōhoku Labour and Welfare Centre, 2019).⁴ San’ya, like other *yosebas*, was also home to Koreans, Chinese, other Asians, Okinawans, Ainu, and the descendants of the outcasts, namely groups that had a long history of being discriminated against in Japan. The “able-bodied poor” were not the subject of welfare and thus came to San’ya seeking manual work and a place to rest (Kennett & Iwata, 2003, p. 65). In other words, San’ya was formed and institutionalised as an excluded enclave of the reserve army of labour through the history of imperialism as well as the process of what Smith (2010) calls the “uneven development” of modern capitalist society.

³ During the 1960s, the central government promoted internal migration to accelerate urbanisation and industrialisation (see Matsuzawa, 1988).

⁴ The population of Tokyo was approximately 16 million in 1960 (Macrotrends, 2021).

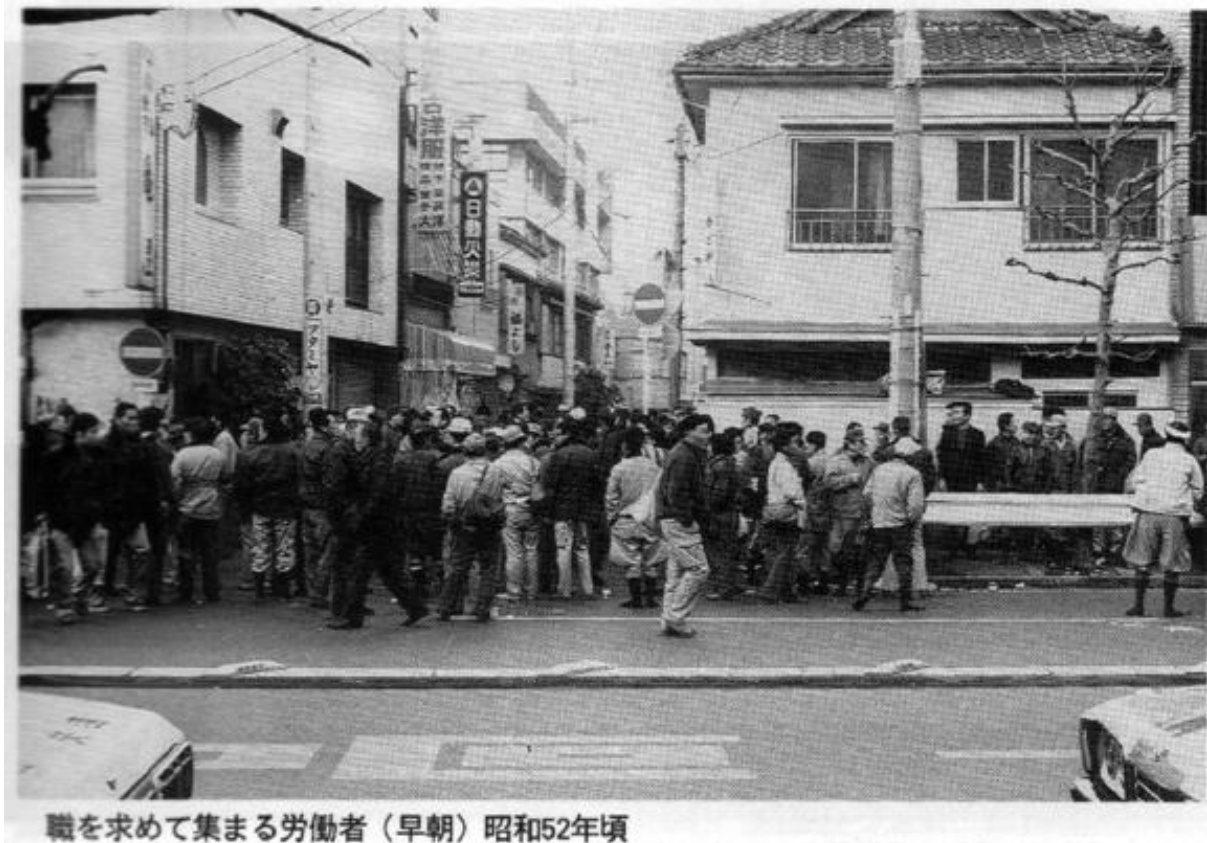


Figure 4.3. Day labourers who gathered for work in 1977 (Source: The Jōhoku Labour and Welfare Centre)

In order to understand how day labourers were systemically excluded from Japanese society, we need to see how the outside of *yosebas* had been produced as a more or less homogeneous, middle-class society based on the so-called “Japanese-style welfare model”. The Japanese-style welfare model had three components: family, housing, and company. While homeownership was promoted as the standard to be met by the proper citizenry (Forrest & Hirayama, 2009; Ronald, 2004), it was family and company that took the responsibility of providing and procuring housing rather than the state (Goldfarb, 2016). The corporate culture, which adopted the lifelong employment and seniority system, played a significant role in supplementing the regime centred on homeownership. The widespread norm was that the family, consisting of father, mother, and children would purchase so-called “my home” based on the male breadwinners’ salary (Hirayama, 2014).⁵ As the family bought

⁵ Although the country provided extensive social security schemes, including universal health care and mass education, Japan neglected the public housing sector. The housing industry and private developers grew with the government’s support and contributed to the popularisation of modern dwellings. As land prices have consistently risen faster than the rate of general price inflation since the 1950s, homeowners realised capital gains from the rising land prices. This trend encouraged residents to seek homeownership (Hirayama, 2003; Kerr, 2002; Oizumi, 1994). The level of homeownership, which was below 20% in the 1940s, hit 71% in 1958 (Hirayama, 2014).

the house with their company's assistance and continued to repay the debt to their employers, the expectation of lifelong employment was crucial (Oizumi, 1994).

Japanese-style welfare provision shared an essential feature with Fordist welfare provision, which safeguards the male breadwinner who works at a factory while domesticating the realm of care and reproduction within the home (Lorey, 2017). What was unique about the Japanese provision was that it also functioned as a powerful tool of governance, producing corporate employees and their families as subjects who would “ultimately serve corporate objectives” (Peng, 2000, p. 96).

By giving corporations the authority to confer welfare, Japanese-style welfare provision effectively enabled the state to shape how ordinary Japanese would think and behave. A strongly work-centred society was formed, reinforced by implicitly gendered divisions of labour and the ideology of the modern middle-class family.⁶ According to Kazue (1994), with the desire for modernisation, the ideas and images of the family in Japanese society had already significantly changed during the Meiji period (1868-1912): home became “the symbol of an affective union of family members (...) and was considered to be the foundation for the development of the Japanese nation state” (Kazue, *ibid.* p. 54). While the Japanese family internalised corporate principles such as long working hours and the absence of men from the home (Estevez-Abe, 2008; Goldfarb, 2016; Gordon, 1997; Peng, 2000), “[d]omestic and familial responsibilities [were] (...) the domain of the women” (Kennett & Iwata, 2003). Welfare provision, in this context, systemically dismissed women's labour in a society where women's wages were substantially lower than those of men (Brinton, 1993; Henshall, 1999).⁷

The expanding economy and welfare provision of post-war Japan, including a universal health care system and mass education, created “the perceptions of Japanese society as middle-class, egalitarian and relatively affluent” (Kennett & Iwata, 2003, p. 64). However, the seemingly egalitarian society was established on the highly homogeneous model of work and home, which operated on multiple hierarchies such as gender, ethnicity, qualifications, and household structure. Inequalities were evident for those excluded from the mainstream labour market and the normative form of family (Goldfarb, 2016; Kennett & Iwata, 2003). Day labourers in *yosebas* were embodiments of this exclusion, and were systematically excluded even from the social safety net. The Public Life

⁶ During the 1950s and 1960s, welfare programs helped create Japan's lifetime employment system by subsidising companies (Estevez-Abe, 2008).

⁷ According to Brinton (1993), 49% of adult females participated in the labour force as of 1987, which was similar to Western industrialised nations. What made the difference was Japanese women engaged in part-time work or family-run enterprises in a high ratio, and were more likely to work as blue-collar workers with a big wage gap compared to males.

Protection Act, launched in 1946 and revised in 1950, declared “the universally applicable relief of the poor” as its definition, but dealt only with those belonging to its own municipal jurisdiction (Iwata, 2008): *Yoseba* labourers who did not have fixed addresses did not fit into the scheme unless they were seriously sick and/or elderly (Iwata, 2008).⁸

Severe inequalities were also evident in the realm of work. The majority of day labourers were engaged in construction, which had played a significant role in the country’s economic development. The success of Japanese construction firms had “much to do with their ability to keep as many labourers as possible off the payrolls” (Fowler, 1998, p. 13). Huge construction companies had an intricate and hierarchical subcontracting system which consisted of the smallest possible regular workforce and a large network of temporal supplements such as subcontractors, sub-subcontractors, supervisors, private recruiters, and, finally, day labours in *yosebas* like San’ya at the bottom of the hierarchy (see Glasmeier & Sugiura, 1991). While the companies took advantage of the highly flexible labour supply, San’ya labourers suffered not only from the subcontracting system but were also exploited by *yakuza* (members of Japanese organised crime) who claimed territorial ownership of the exploitative contract relationship in *yosebas*. While national and local government agencies formally set up labour exchanges in *yosebas*, 70% of the labour contracts were made informally in the black market through negotiation with private recruiters who often had ties with *yakuza* (Bary, 1997; Gill, 1996). Rake-off (*pinbane*) was made at every level in what Bary (1997) calls “a predatory economic network” in San’ya, resulting in the extremely precarious lives of day labourers.

In this historical context, day labourers in San’ya and other *yosebas* were seen as victims of society, which is an undeniable fact. They provided “an otherwise rigid social economy with much-needed elasticity” as the bumper that absorbed the impact of hard times (Fowler, 1998, p. 15). Even at the economic peak before the Tokyo Olympic Games in 1964, it was not uncommon for men in San’ya to sleep on the street or sell their blood for meals. Unemployment and rough sleeping “are a ‘permanent’ phenomenon, typifying their unstable way of life” (Iwata, 2008) in San’ya. When the oil crisis in 1973 hit the country, it was *yosebas* which felt the shock first and hardest. As commonly expressed by day labourers, *yosebas* became “the hell of the unrecruited (*abure-jigoku*)”.

⁸ Before the 2010s, the only effective insurance system for day labourers was the “White handbook (*Shirotechō*)” scheme. Achieved in the early 1970s through a series of aggressive riots in Kamagasaki, Osaka, it guaranteed welfare payment by recording the working days of the day labourers (Haraguchi, 2011). In 1989, a health insurance scheme for day labourers was launched. Nevertheless, the scheme has never been widely used due to the high cost both for employers and labourers (Gill, 1996).

At the same time, however, day labourers were never just passive victims. From 1960 to 1968, fourteen officially recorded riots occurred in San'ya. Some of the revolts lasted several days, with several thousand day labourers standing up against up to ten thousand riot police. Two things should be noted. First, the central government formulated an integrated policy for San'ya to control constant violent outbreaks in the district (Watanabe, 2008). The TMG founded the Jōhoku Labour and Welfare Centre (hereafter the Jōhoku Centre) in 1965 to provide employment and some welfare, such as health consultation and livelihood support. One of the most significant measures was providing 400 families in San'ya with public housing. In other words, the most urgent task for the government was to protect families from disorder, if not immorality.⁹ Second, these uprisings demonstrated the unique sensibilities of day labourers, which were distinctly different from the norms imposed in Japanese society, as I discuss in the following section.

4.1.2. The making of day labourers, the fluid underclass

(1) Living outside of the societal norms of work and home

Nearly all day labourers in San'ya were single males. I had in-depth interviews with seven active/former day labourers who engaged in the activist group, San'ya Sōgidan (1981-present). All the interviewees were between sixty and eighty years old.¹⁰ Except for one, none of my interviewees hinted at a sense of regret for their (lack of) family relations. No matter what kinds of familial relations they had, they talked about it casually as if they had not been affected at all by the relations. Mr J., a rough sleeper, was the only one who used relatively emotional words when he explained the loss of his natural family.¹¹ Mr J. was born in 1947 in Nippori, a district near San'ya. His parents were ragpickers. Mr J. had an older sister, an older brother who had a developmental disability, and a

⁹ While San'ya was initially constructed as an area for single men only, it absorbed some families. In 1961, 27% of San'ya labourers had families (Imagawa, 1987). Notably, the measure focused on families who were relatively a tiny fraction of San'ya. By the early 1970s, *yosebas* became predominantly a single male domain, isolated from mainstream society (Iwata & Nishizawa, 2005). According to Bary (1997), only 1.5% of people in San'ya had a family in the 1970s.

¹⁰ Only two of them in their sixties were active day labourers. Five interviewees lived in blue sheet tents (*goya*), which illegally occupied patches of riverside, and worked as ragpickers. I discuss how day labourers turned into rough sleepers in the course of dismantling *yosebas* in Chapter 6. Besides the day labourers, I also had in-depth interviews with four current activists of Sōgidan. They have engaged in the *yoseba* movement since the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s, respectively.

¹¹ The term rough sleeper (*nojukusha*) refers to those who live in public space. While sleeping rough had already been a part of day labourers' lives, "rough sleeping" became a permanent condition with the dismantling of *yosebas* after the recession of the early 1990s. A significant number of blue tents and cardboard box houses were built by day labourers in parks, by riversides, and in train stations (see Ezawa, 2002).

younger brother who died as a baby. He could not finish middle school because his parents suddenly died. “It was probably due to harsh physical labour”, Mr J. said. Since his older sister had already gotten married and was away, Mr J. and his older brother were left behind. “The neighbourhood helped to put my brother into a facility. I thus became absolutely alone. I was very relieved at the moment. I didn’t have to worry about anything but me”, Mr J. (3 November 2018) said.

All my interviewees lacked a connection with their birth families before entering their twenties, if not much earlier. None of them got married. All of them told me without any hesitation that they never considered starting a family. The reason was that they thought living alone was “convenient (*raku*)” or “ordinary (*butsu*)”; because having a family was “tough (*taiben*)” or “burdensome (*butan*)”; because “it was possible to hang around women without making a family”. Mr A. (2 November 2018), a former day labourer in his eighties, said:

Well, I had some relationships when I was young. But it happened less and less while I didn’t care much about it. This was the way it was in San’ya because everyone was single. If money was saved, we went to *pachinko* (a type of mechanical game popular in Japan) or drank to spend it up. That was the routine of San’ya.

No matter how old/young they were, all other interviewees in Seoul and Tokyo revealed a sense of regret or were emotional about their familial relations, albeit on different levels. The day labourers’ air of indifference, in this regard, was unique. It seemed as if they did not have any reference by which they considered their situation as a deficiency. Only Mr T. (3 November 2018), who had worked as a sailor until he entered the *yoseba*, said, “I heard how other sailors, who had families, fought with their wives all the time. I assumed that marriage was such a thing. If you get to have a baby, it becomes an even bigger commotion”.

While day labourers were isolated from familial relations, it was *yoseba* that offered them affordable resources, as well as a sense of community.¹² The following quote is from a non-academic essay (Kasai, n.d.), describing the unique atmosphere of *yosebas* as day labourers’ living space:

Since flophouses offered only beddings, the whole district of the *yoseba* was made up of functions of domestic life with various facilities such as small eateries, public baths, street vendors, coin laundries, and lockers where labourers put their luggage. Small shops sold a

¹² Studies point out how Japanese *yosebas*, in their heyday, had considerably common features with American skid row communities in the pre-war period (Caldarola, 1968; Gill, 1996; Marr, 1997). First, skid rows and *yosebas* were a place where hobo-style drifting day workers gathered. Second, like *yosebas*, skid rows had labour markets. Third, both provided day labourers with cheap facilities where workers hung around together and, by doing so, it enabled them to have autonomous lives, at least to some level.

variety of foods for single men. From octopus *sashimi*, scallop *sashimi*, sausage, and cabbage to soaps, detergent, and tissues, all kinds of stuff was sold in a small portion for one person. (...) The life of *yosebas* could not help but spread to the street beyond the individual space. The labourers replenished themselves and their lives at cheap eateries, bars, public baths, and coin laundries in *yosebas*. They shared their lives while putting their bodies together in a public bathtub, waiting for one's turn at a coin laundry, and watching a baseball game at a small bar that expanded itself by setting beer boxes as tables on the street. The life of *yosebas*, in this way, naturally created communications.

The excerpt above shows how *yosebas* functioned not only as a space of domestic life but also as a communicative space for day labourers. *Yosebas* were where day labourers ate, slept, and hung around with colleagues (*nakama*) and, by doing so, reproduced their lives. While day labourers were not fussy about the normative image of home in Japanese society, *yosebas* practically functioned as a home for day labourers.

On the other hand, how day labourers were engaged in work was complicated. For example, when I started to conduct my fieldwork at San'ya, I was surprised that the activists often said, "Everybody likes work". Although day labourers did not explicitly say that they liked working, I understood their unique attitude towards work as time went by. My interviewees shared a sense of respect for those who worked to earn a living. This sensibility is, in my opinion, barely related to the orthodox Marxist idea of labour value. Rather than that, it was about living on one's own. For example, Mr T. (3 November 2018), a former day labourer in his eighties, said the following about his parents:

My father was a carpenter, but he just drank all the time. My mother worked at a fishery processing factory. Women got just half the wage of men there. But they were those who worked. In the Iwate area, women were much stronger than men. They were those who made a livelihood. Men just gambled.

On top of the sense of respect for the act of working/living on one's own, day labourers, who worked as *tobi* (a construction labourer specialised in working on elevated scaffolds), hinted at their pride in being artisans (*shokunin*).¹³ This, however, did not imply they were hard labourers. On the contrary, they shared a life story in which they worked for a while and hung around until they felt they "wanted to work" or were "in serious need of money". They hopped from one city to another. Rough sleeping was also nothing out of the ordinary. Mr K. (30 October 2018), who was an active *tobi* in his sixties, told me that he had lived at Ueno Park for around a year:

Me: How come? What happened?

¹³ *Tobi*, in Japanese, literally means black kite, a type of hawk whose collective spectacular flight skills are a part of the Japanese folk imagination.

K: How come? Well ... I don't know what to say. It was not because there was no job, though. It was just ... because it was fun? I went to the Park. It was the night of the summer. There were many rough sleepers. So, I just remained there. I began to collect cans.

Me: You are living in an apartment now, right?

K: Yep.

Me: But, L. (an activist of Sōgidan) told me that you caught a cold as you slept at Ueno Park last week.

K: Well, yeah. I did. You know, when I do not work, I like drinking at Ueno Park.

Me: By yourself?

K: Yeah, by myself. I drink *Chuhai* (an inexpensive Japanese cocktail drink) and sleep there. I like it.

Me: What do you like about it? Is it because there are people around you?

K: Well, because I feel it's like camping?

Me: Even in winter?

K: Well, winter is tough.

Some activists jokingly called him “an elite *tobi*”. Mr K., as a highly skilled *tobi*, did not experience severe difficulties in finding jobs. However, despite his thirty-year career, he got the same wage as entry-level day labourers who just started. Surprised by this fact, I asked why he did not work for a company. He answered, without even thinking, “*Tobi* are artisans; we tend not to be hired. Well, recently some *tobi* seem to work at companies. But I don't feel like it. Day labouring is much better. It's freer. I can stop working whenever I want” (ibid.).

Mr K.'s attitude has something in common with that of Japanese printing labourers in the 1920s, discussed by Kurihara (2015, p. 148) as follows:

How printing labourers worked, their working speeds and rhythms were all different from each other. It is said that they hold the same attitude as artisans in the Edo period. They looked like they were lying down on their job and just fiddling around. However, at the last moment, they suddenly braced their energies and finished their duties on time. This was just how they worked. Skilled labourers were popular and thus wanted by many printing shops. They drifted from one city to another, only bringing their bodies as, namely, wandering artisans.

According to Kurihara (ibid.), printing labourers held the most intensive strikes in the 1920s because they did not accept “the waves of industrialisation, the new norms and rules imposed on labourers based on Taylorism”. In other words, printing labourers refused to become wage labourers produced in the industrialised system. Interviewees who worked as ordinary construction labourers (*dokō*) and

labourers for odd jobs (*zakeko*) did not see themselves as artisans. Yet, they shared the “free”, drifting lifestyle, which is significantly different from that of salarymen or factory labourers.

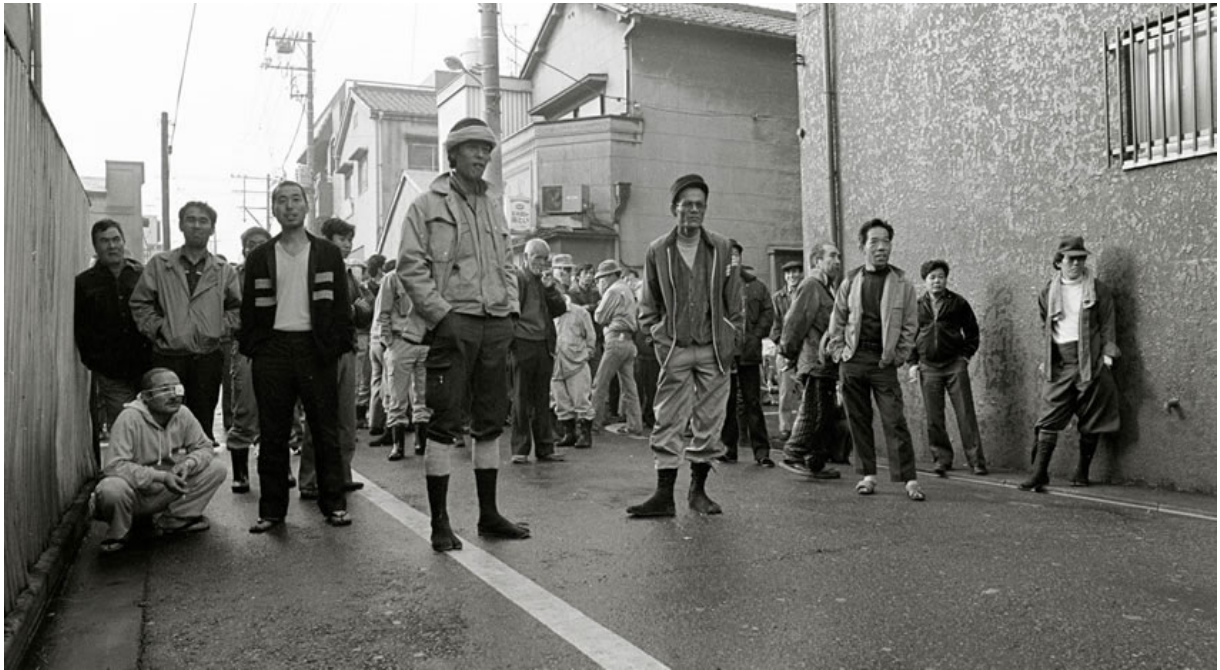


Figure 4.4. A scene of the documentary film, “Attack to Attack” (1985)

Of course, freedom, in the context of day labourers, does not have any relation with the liberal concept of individual choice. Day labourers often called themselves “disposable goods (*tsukai suteru mono*)”, which showed that they were keenly aware of the fact that they were exploited and dumped by the capitalist system to maximise its profit. Existing at the edge of capitalist relations of production, day labourers worked for a day and, in exchange, got money for food and accommodations to sleep for the day. Whether one was able to work or not was directly a matter of life and death in the day labourers’ world. However, this extreme form of precarity and day labourers’ awareness of their precarious existence ironically enabled them to actively go outside of the system instead of remaining as passive subjects or victims. Unlike those who belonged to civil society, day labourers neither had any stability or security, nor pursued such things. In other words, day labourers were not only excluded from the system, but also actively refused to belong to it. This meant there was no reason for them to accept any form of hierarchy. I believe that this tendency led day labourers to form two distinctive sensibilities. The first was a sense of sovereignty over their work, which means living on one’s own. The second was a feeling of camaraderie, which is not based on intimacy or identity but on the shared experience of day labouring.

(2) Forming a unique class-consciousness out of the system

A talk given by the famed martyr activist Funamoto Shuji (1985) aptly captures the sense of autonomy that day labourers exercised in describing how they worked and sabotaged worksites in the 1970s.¹⁴ He (1985, p. 214-215) argues:

Safety work gloves are worn out in three days when we work ordinarily. But they give us just one pair of gloves for five days. Regular labourers would demand that the company, through the union or whatever, provide them with a pair every three days. We, well ... if you ask what we are gonna do, I would say that we never demand such things. Instead, we work so we can use the pair of gloves for five days. Do you know what I mean? The way of struggle is absolutely different. We don't demand it. (...) For example, at worksites, we are asked to pull a wagon full of gravel. The work is very tough. Considering the wage, the work is too much. (...) Since there are plenty of nails and various sharp shards at the worksite, we just go over them. Then, wagons are all broken. (...) Sabotage is much better than strike. (...) We don't need a union. We do sabotage with colleagues.

In the quote, Funamoto describes how day labourers decided what to do, how to work, and how much work to do at worksites. Confronting poor working conditions and excessive work, day labourers neither demanded the company provide better working conditions nor refused to work entirely. They worked, but only to the level they felt was reasonable. In doing so, they were actually and effectively exerting sovereignty over their work at worksites. For day labourers, who lived on their own in the most literal sense, work was not only a means of living. Work was the very way of exerting sovereignty over their own lives.

The unique feeling of the camaraderie of day labourers is hard to grasp at first glance. Some non-Japanese scholars argue that processes of social bonding in *yosebas* were extremely “flexible and changeable; based on choice; not bound by material dependency; and do not involve long-term binding commitments” (Gill, 1996, p. 323), or even that the *yoseba* society is “characterised by an almost complete absence of community life” (Caldarola, 1968, p. 513). These observations might be reasonable, especially considering that day labourers floated around. Even during my fieldwork period, when most of the people in San'ya were rough sleepers or under the life protection, it was not unusual that people who had routinely joined Sōgidan's regular communal kitchen just stopped coming. “People disappeared, all of a sudden. That is ordinary in San'ya. Maybe they went to another city, or ran away from creditors, or died. Who knows? Everybody has situations”, said a member of

¹⁴ Funamoto Shuji (1945-75) is an activist as well as a day worker. He was a core member of Gentōi and Kamakyōtō, which I will discuss later in this chapter. He self-immolated in protest against the prince Akihito's 1975 visit to Okinawa, which suffered immensely during Japan's imperial expansion.

Sōgidan. Day labourers belonged to *yosebas*. This does not mean that they belonged to a specific place. *Yoseba* does not signify a place but a topological space occupying the edge of the capitalist relation of production. As Funamoto (1985) pithily expressed, day labourers are “the fluid underclass labourers (*ryūdōteki kaso rōdōsha*)”.¹⁵ Day labourers’ relations with their colleagues could not help but be temporary, and thus casual.

Under such circumstances, day labourers did not care to build any bonds based on long-term relationships. Yet, they had a strong feeling of camaraderie, according to the activists of San’ya. H., an activist who had worked as a day labourer for around ten years during the 1990s, wrote about her experience in this regard. As discussed, the construction industry has a complex subcontracting system, and a worksite (*genba*) is at the bottom of the hierarchy. A supervisor sent by a general contractor would be the most powerful person at a specific worksite. However, “a supervisor was usually the one who struggled the most at any worksite” according to H. (cited in Mukai, 2016):

A day labourer sells himself for a day for a certain amount of money, and that is everything in the day labourers’ world. Everybody was clearly aware of the fact. Therefore, day labourers treated those who were in the same situation as colleagues. I am not saying that they treated colleagues in a particularly nice way. Nonetheless, they accepted each other as colleagues; that was what I strongly felt. (...) This kind of atmosphere had been pervasive in San’ya. Day labourers clearly defined who were colleagues and who were enemies.

Mukai (2015), another activist and active day labour in his 40s, explains how day labourers’ “strong feeling of camaraderie” is interconnected with their “anti-authoritarianism” in the following article:

Day labourers have something like anti-authoritarianism, absolute hostility to the public officers and capitalists. Those who are educated never can get such things. This anti-authoritarianism has been formed through the accumulated experience of day labouring. What is together with the anti-authoritarianism is a feeling of camaraderie, like “we have always been the most despised ones”. For example, people tend to care what their boss says in a company because they hope to get a better position. On the contrary, day labourers absolutely distinguish colleagues who have lived as day labourers from the others. The most disregarded person in the day labouring site is the supervisor, i.e., the boss of the site. I believe that this tendency is what we should pay attention to.

¹⁵ The “underclass” in Japan is a term that has been used vaguely, often referring to ethnic minorities, such as Japanese Koreans and the Japanese groups of “outcasts” called the *burakumin*. However, here I follow Aoki’s (2006, p. 2) definition: the term urban underclass refers to those found at the “very bottom” of cities and isolated both spatially and by social class. According to Aoki, “the day labourers and the homeless, both of whom are tied to yosebas, and foreign workers” fall into the category.

These quotes from H. and Mukai both imply that day labourers accepted each other as colleagues based on the shared experiences of day labouring.

The attitudes of day labourers described by Sōgidan activists strongly resonate with what Tadao (1978) calls “the morality of the underclass”. Tadao discusses how construction workers in the Meiji period (1868-1912) belonged to a world that is different from what day labourers call the “normal society”. Tadao also mentions a record of a man called Takada, who worked at workcamps on contracts in Hokkaido between 1930 and 1944.¹⁶ In the record, Takada says (cited in Tadao, 1978, pp. 76-7):

Most supervisors of worksites were those who belong to the crew (note: formally employed labourers) or workers who got approved by police (note: to become a supervisor, one must be approved by police). When there was general recruitment for workers to be promoted from *sitahandai* (the lowest group) to the middle-level group, to team leader, and to supervisors (note: the class of construction workers called *sitahandai* is the lowest) ..., only two or three out of 100 people would try to get promoted. (...) If you were a supervisor, you could stay at the worksite. It is hard because other people had to leave after the contract was over. Isn't it in the nature of human emotions (*ninjo*) to avoid such hardship? (Notes are in original)

Tadao analyses how the word *ninjo*, which can be translated as human emotions or the way people ought to feel, embodies concrete qualities in the words of Takada. Without being promoted, even the most excellent workers must start from the lowest group whenever they begin to work at a new worksite. In spite of this fact, they chose to remain as contract workers rather than being promoted because that was the “*ninjo*” that they do not want to be “in the position to give orders to colleagues who had gone through hard times together” (ibid., p.77).

I would like to note that this unique sensibility of day labourers, or what Tadao (ibid., p. 28) calls an “anomalous act that disregards one's benefits and costs” was formed by way of a long history of Japanese modernisation. In feudal Japan, people (and households) were registered at local temples and thus could not move around without permission. Although this system was officially abolished in 1871 as part of Meiji reforms, there were already many illegal day labourers in the Edo period (1603-1868), when Japan created the most urbanised, large pre-modern society outside Europe (see Kashiwahara, 1988; Mori, 1988; Rozman, 2015).¹⁷ In 1700, the population of Edo (the old name of

¹⁶ Although Takata did not live in the Meiji period, Tadao uses Takata's episode to show the mentality of day labourers.

¹⁷ Twenty-five cities were founded between 1580 and 1610 (Leupp, 1992). In 1700, 15% of the Japanese population lived in cities (Gill, 1996).

Tokyo) was approximately 1 million, making it one of the biggest cities in the world (Gill, 1996). According to Gill (1996, p. 41), the number of drifting day labourers that supported the Edo economy (especially mining, construction, and transportation) was “big enough and rebellious enough to pose a potential threat to shogunal control”. The authorities tried to control day labourers by, for example, setting up a day labourer registry system. However, Edo and other big cities were hit by a series of riots of day labourers (see Gill, 1996; Leupp, 1992).

During the Meiji period, day labourers maintained their drifting lifestyle despite the various administrative attempts to control their mobility (Gordon, 1985). According to Tadao (1978), it was a moral responsibility for drifting day labourers in the Meiji period to share information about where construction sites were so that everyone could move around. When a person went to a worksite, he was offered “a meal and bed for a night whether he was hired or not”. Tadao (1978, p. 77) states that such concrete moral attitudes, or “human emotions (*ninjo*)” toward colleagues were “the foundation of ... the class consciousness” of the underclass.

To sum up, the feeling of camaraderie among day labourers has been created throughout history, as they were formed as an underclass outside of the civil society. On the one hand, a sharp class-consciousness is embedded in the feeling of camaraderie.¹⁸ According to Mukai (17 September 2018):

Whether a person has an experience of living as a day labourer or not makes a big difference. I believe that day labourers have a particular mentality. I would call it the mentality of the underclass, which is the refusal to belong to the system.

On the other hand, how day labourers saw each other as colleagues was marvelously cosmopolitan beyond any identity imposed by society. An old leftist who came to San’ya to join an annual winter struggle in 2018 told me how San’ya has been much more open than Japanese society. He said, “San’ya has all the minorities such as Korean, Okinawan, Ainu, and yes, also transgender (*okama*)”. Mukai also said (ibid.):

Yoseba includes people, such as schizophrenics and alcoholics, who are excluded from society. (...) For example, I am working with those who came out of jail, those who might not be able to work at an ordinary company. The sentiment those people seem to carry is like, ‘I cannot say things about others. I have issues myself.’

¹⁸ I understand class neither as a “structure” nor a “category” but as a “historical relationship” following Thompson (1963, p. 9), who states that “the notion of class entails the notion of historical relationship. ... And class happens when some men, as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs”.

4.1.3. Producing *yoseba* as tangible sites of movement

Continuing riots that occurred in San'ya during the 1960s made the district notorious nationwide (see Figure 4.5, 4.6). None of the revolts were planned or organised but spontaneous; every one of them triggered by bad treatment of a day labourer by police officers. Over twenty left-wing groups came to San'ya during the 1960s, but the efforts of channeling the riots into organised labour movements did not work (Bary, 1997; Funamoto, 1985; Imagawa, 1987). As often said in San'ya, “everyone hates organisation (*soshiki*)”.

Mainstream media claimed that San'ya's riots were thus considered “aimless, anarchic, meaningless”, “done by lumpens and vagrants”, and “spontaneous without any organisation” (Funamoto, 1985, p. 143). Gill (1996, p. 356) argues that day labourers in *yoseba* were “more unstructured, more individualistic and less governed by obligation than in the American skid row”. Bary (1997, p. 92) suggests that riots in San'ya were not organised “due both to the increasing severity of police repression and the lack of a viable ideology for the day-labourer struggle”. I would say that day labourers, unlike the proletariat, were not subjects whom a political ideology could organise. Yet, San'ya's riots were fundamentally political, at least in three senses. First, rooted in each individual's feeling of anger, they turned into direct, collective actions attacking the police station, which was the symbol of suppressive power. Second, in doing so, day labourers had neither a representative nor any organised structure of command. Third, San'ya's riots revealed the contradictions of Japanese society by forcing the whole society to see the existence of day labourers and *yosebas*.



昭和35年8月1日：交番前に集まった群衆

Figure 4.5. Day labourers in front of the police substation on August 1, 1960 (Source: The Jōhoku Labour and Welfare Centre)



Figure 4.6. A scene of the documentary film, “Attack to Attack” (1985)

In this context, the group *Genba Tōsōinkai* (Gentōi) (1972-1974) stands out in the history of San'ya's movement. Gentōi was organised in 1972, in association with Kamagasaki Kyōtō Kaigi (Kamagasaki Solidarity Congress, Kamakyōtō). Although Gentōi lasted only two years, they elicited significant support from day labourers (Bary, 1997; Tomotsune, 2019). Moreover, "Gentōi opened a new horizon for San'ya's movement which has been connected to the current movement", according to Mukai. San'ya Sōgidan was founded in 1981 by some former Gentōi members. Abe (15 December 2019), who has engaged in Sōgidan since 1980, says:

Yamaoka (a former Gentōi member) believed that a union did not fit for day labourers to fight based on their way of being. What was behind the thoughts was the idea of Funamoto, who had called day labourers the fluid underclass. (...) Thus, when we see the history of Sōgidan, Gentōi is a part of it. It was a new form of movement that emerged in the 1970s, igniting direct actions of day labourers. This was a very different phenomenon or a trend in the entire labour movement scene in Japan. It was a completely different one.

However, what was it that made Gentōi different from previous leftist groups? In what sense is Gentōi connected to the current movement of San'ya? In this section, I discuss how Gentōi created a site of movement which echoed day labourers' unique mentality.

Machida (29 October 2018), who was a member of Gentōi in his early twenties, explained to me what Gentōi did as follows:

We all worked as day labourers. And we fought. We fought against the vice recruiters (*tebaishi*) and violations of terms. Let's say a recruiter told you your job today would be cleaning. But, arriving at the worksite, you find your job is much tougher, like digging holes (*anabori*). Then, you call Gentōi. The next morning, we go to beat the drum. We go all together to make loud noises. *Yakuza* (Japanese gangsters) come. Police also come. Police are on the side of *yakuza*. It was scary. Definitely scary, you know. They were fucking *yakuza*!

Gentōi lasted only two years because "all members were arrested if they were not at the bar", Machida said. Between 1972 and 1974, 160 members of Gentōi were arrested (Bary, 1997). Despite the short period of active time, Gentōi effectively engaged day labourers. Two of the most famous slogans of Gentōi perspicuously capture the essence of the affection which mobilised the day labourers of San'ya.¹⁹ The first states, "If they get us, we get them back (*Yararetara yarikaese*)". The second says, "Don't die in silence by the roadside (*Damatte notare shinuna*)". These simple slogans demonstrate the strong feeling of camaraderie as well as hostility to those who oppress colleagues. Also, the slogans are not demanding anything from the system. In accordance with the form in which

¹⁹ Both slogans became titles of famous books as well as a documentary film about San'ya.

day labourers promise and encourage each other, these slogans display a sense of autonomy and independence, interconnected to their refusal to belong to the system.

I believe that it was Gentōi's anarchist tendency and its prefigurative characteristics that echoed day labourers' anti-authoritarianism and the feeling of camaraderie. As discussed in Chapter 2, what defines prefigurative politics is "the actualisation of a future ideal in the here and now" (Van de Sande, 2013). Prefigurative politics is the idea that "the struggle for a different society must create that society through its forms of struggle" (Holloway & Sergi, 2010). In this regard, Funamoto's explanation of how day labourers practically exerted sovereignty over work through acts of sabotage lucidly captures the prefigurative characteristics of day labourers' everyday practices. Day labourers were at the bottom of the hierarchy of the field of construction as well as the capitalist mode of production. Yet, they ignored the hierarchy and despised supervisors at worksites. Day labourers were "acting as if one is already free", to use Graeber's (2009, p. 527) words.

Gentōi's activism produced a great resonance with day labourers' unique present-oriented mentality. Unlike previous leftist activists in San'ya, Gentōi neither aimed to submit demands to the government/companies nor intended to organise day labourers under a specific political aim. Instead, they directly confronted concrete hierarchies and oppression embedded in their worksites on the one hand, while, on the other hand, forming an autonomous network of caring to survive collectively. In doing so, their practices were based on the "principles of direct action, of directly implementing the changes one seeks, rather than asking others to make the changes on one's behalf" (Leach, 2016, p.1). Organising direct actions, Gentōi did not form any representative unit or a structure of command, but depended on a spontaneous performativity that created egalitarian relations and affections. Funamoto's writing shows the anarchist orientation of Gentōi. He states (1985, p. 150):

Gentōi is not an executive system based on the majority rule but a gang-like association for those who have a mind to fight based on anger and resentment towards concrete enemies. (...) Unlike unions that depend on people's sense of order in their ordinary life, Gentōi, which is not a clear organisation but a noisy gang for struggles, depends on people's violence to destroy the current status quo and rebellious feelings to break the order of ordinariness. By doing so, it creates the realm of struggle, which is located in between legal and illegal realms.

The prefigurative characteristics of Gentōi are most vividly captured in the fact that they strived to create tangible sites of movement in which they (re)created work and home for day labourers. First, Gentōi created collective struggles in which labourers directly repelled hierarchies and suppression, such as vice recruiters, dangerous working conditions, excessive labour, and unpaid wages at their

worksites. Labourers confronted the vice recruiter, who usually worked with *yakuza*, with their bodies. During the fall and winter of 1972, San'ya became a battlefield between Gentōi and contracting companies (Bary, 1997; Tomotsune, 2019). Day labourers' robust struggles at their worksites had effectively paid off by repelling the most notorious companies from San'ya. Moreover, their vigorous disputes forced police, recruiters, and the government to work together closely to suppress labourers; even special riot squads were sent to San'ya to suppress riots. In other words, these struggles exposed the complicity between the government, companies, and organised crime while letting the whole society see their collusion.

Alongside the militant struggles at worksites, Gentōi strived to create a site of caring in which day labourers were empowered by their own ability to survive autonomously at *yosebas*, the home of day labourers. Gentōi launched programs such as health consultations, people's patrol, and, most importantly, the Winter Struggle to survive the national New Year's holiday.²⁰ For day labourers, the national New Year's holiday was the most dangerous time of the year. As there was no job during the holiday, day labourers had to sleep on the street in the bitter cold. The winter of 1973-1974 was particularly harsh due to the oil shock hitting Japan. To collectively get through the most challenging time, Gentōi built a massive tent at the Tamahime Park in San'ya, providing labourers with food and medical care. Bary (1997, p. 94) states that "the Winter Struggle developed into a complex political struggle to demand greater attention from the city welfare structure to the acute problems of day-labourers' existence". However, the gist of the action was creating space to survive on their own through an autonomous network of self-help.

For example, the first soup kitchen was organised during the national New Year's holiday in 1964 (San'ya Liberation Committee, 1971). A group of leftists, led by Kaji Taisuke, organised the event.²¹ They had struggled to require the government to provide labourers with "funds for six days' accommodations and foods" during the national holiday. As the struggle did not succeed, they held what they called "the soup kitchen for self-defence". The event was evaluated as the result of the "terrible defeat" of the struggle (ibid.). While previous leftists considered soup kitchens a form of aid, Gentōi regarded it as "the unlosable struggle" for "all colleagues to survive together" (Funamoto, 1985, pp. 175-9). Funamoto (1985, p. 179) writes:

²⁰ People's patrol was a practice in which groups of workers patrolled streets to rescue men who had fallen due to illness, hunger, or alcohol.

²¹ Kaji Daisuke (1923-93), an activist and day labourer, came to San'ya in 1946 and developed "the San'ya Liberation Movement".

The Winter Struggle was not only for the young labourers' sake. The Winter Struggle was also for sick people, older people, and alcoholics, who were broken in the course of capital accumulation and discarded by capital due to their lack of value as labour commodities. More than that, the Winter Struggle was an attempt to create a form of resistance open to the sick, the old, and the alcoholics. The Winter Struggle was also an attempt to deal with the necessities of labourers' lives, such as food, clothing, and shelter, to keep fighting.

To sum up, Gentōi's practices were distinct from previous leftist groups in San'ya. They did not demand that the government or companies provide labourers with welfare or better working conditions. They also did not intend to organise day labourers to achieve an ideal future. Instead, they produced concrete, prefigurative sites of struggle. Struggles arose within labourers' worksites and *yosebas*, a home for day labourers. At worksites, day labourers showed their defiance directly and physically against structural oppression, which marked both the means and the end of the struggle. At *yosebas*, they built a ground of self-aid to keep living, as the slogan, "Not a single one left to die", put it simply. This prefigurative characteristic of Gentōi had a significant resonance with day labourers' mentality, which can be characterised by anti-authoritarianism, independence, and the cosmopolitan feeling of camaraderie, all of which were based on their refusal to belong to the system.²²

²² In the 1980s, San'ya was described as the war between Sōgidan and a powerful *yakuza* gang, called Kanamachi family, which dominated the district. Two members of Sōgidan, including Yamaoka, were killed by *yakuza*. While the battle died down as the Kanamachi family withdrew from the district, people decided to build a space to support Sōgidan and honour the killed members. Thanks to funds from across the country and day labourers' voluntary work, the San'ya Labourers Welfare Hall was built in 1990. Soon, however, the economic recession hit *yosebas*. Thousands of day labourers permanently lost their jobs and turned into rough sleepers. In such circumstances, Sōgidan began to support rough sleepers. "It was like, the stage was largely revolved turned. The *yoseba* was completely changed. Activists needed to find a way to respond to the new circumstance", according to Mukai (11 November 2018). In Chapter 6, I discuss how Sōgidan has strived to produce a site of movement in their own context.

4.2. Shacktowns, the contested space of the urban poor in Seoul



Figure 4.7. A shacktown (Source: Encyclopedia of Korean Folk Culture)

The rapid industrialisation of Korea in the 1960s coincided with explosive population growth in Seoul. A vast number of people migrated to the city from the countryside. They settled down, forming shacktowns at vacant lots near riversides or in hilly areas above traditional residential areas. These slums were commonly called “bankside neighbourhoods (*ttukbang-dongne*)”, “moon neighbourhoods (*dal-dongne*)”, or “box neighbourhoods (*kekobang-dongne*)”. While the term box neighbourhoods signifies the vulnerable condition of the urban poor’s housing, other terms signify the geographical characteristics of the slums. As the government began to clean these slums from the centre of the city, what lasted longer were moon neighbourhoods in the outskirts of Seoul.

In the 1980s, when the brutal evictions of shacktowns continued, the TV drama *Dal-dongne* (“Moon Neighbourhoods”) ironically became a big hit. The word “*dal-dongne*” became the symbol of the slums in the collective and somewhat melancholic imaginary of Korea: The residents of *dal-dongne*—often typified by the figure of the day-labourer barely eking out a living—at least had somewhat

warm and humane neighbourhood relationships as well as the consolation of a closer view of the moon when they went back to their humble home on the steep hill slope.

This section explores how a massive population of “the urban poor (*dosibinmin*)” had been produced through Seoul’s rapid industrialisation, creating shacktowns as their home. It then discusses how the housewives of the urban poor class emerged as the primary agent of the urban poor movement in the 1970s, creating a network of care beyond the social norms of home and community.

4.2.1. Domestic migrations, the urban poor, and shacktowns

Korea was one of the poorest agricultural countries in the world in the 1950s (Ihm, 1988, p. 165). In 1950, the city’s population was just 18.4% of the national population, while 80% of the working population was in the agricultural sector (Park, 2003ab).²³ During the 1960s and 1970s, the military government pushed forward export-oriented labour-intensive industrialisation, focusing on the metropolitan area (Park, 2015). Rapid industrialisation took place during the 1960s and 1970s, with an extensive process of urbanisation.²⁴ This seemingly remarkable economic development was literally made possible on the back of cheap labour that migrated from the countryside (see Choi, 1989; Jeong, 1985; Park, 2003ab; Yoon & Kim, 1984).

A vast population came to the city to survive, escaping from the dismantling of the agricultural sector (Park, 2003ab). On average, between 1953 and 1970, 400,000 people came each year to the city from the countryside. Most of them were poor peasants who came to Seoul with no specific physical destination. In many cases, they came to Seoul with a whole family, because it was impossible to earn a living by farming (see Choi, 1989; Yoon & Kim, 1984). They settled down in shacktowns formed beside streams, at the foot of hills, or in any vacant lots in the city. Large shacktowns, which often did not contain a water supply or drainage facilities, sprang up everywhere in the city. In 1966, the housing shortage rate in Seoul hit 50%. In 1967, the number of unauthorised dwellings was up to around 200,000 (Park, 2015). Most of the migrants who did not have any skills worked as precarious, irregular labourers. Most male migrants worked as day labourers (*nalpumpani*), especially in the construction sector, while females engaged in hawking (*baengsang*). They formed the so-called “urban poor” (see Choe, 1989; Jeong, 1985).

²³ As of 2019, 50.1% of the national population resides in Metropolitan Seoul (Statistics Korea, 2019).

²⁴ Between 1962 and 1979, the GNP of Korea grew at an average annual rate of 9.3% (Kim, 1991), while 23.7% of the GNP was produced in Seoul as of 1966 (see Park, 2015).

The living conditions of the urban poor families were highly vulnerable on top of the fact that there was barely a social welfare system.²⁵ The military government introduced social welfare during the 1960s and 1970s, but only by way of a token gesture (see Choi & Jeong, 2012; D. Kim, 2018).²⁶ In such a situation, for the urban poor, catching a disease or getting injured directly meant losing hand-to-mouth subsistence, and they were more likely to get sick. Medical expenses were the most crucial factor in causing urban poor families to fall into debt (Jeong, 1985).

The urban poor were also precarious in terms of housing.²⁷ Many shacktowns did not have electricity, sewage facilities, or toilets, and were exposed to the dangers of fire and flooding (see Choi, 2013). The biggest threat for the residents of shacktowns was the military government who classified the unauthorised facilities as that which “undermines the development of Seoul and the order of civil society” (Seoul Special City, 1961, cited in Choi, 2013, p. 34). During the 1960s, the military government continued launching massive construction projects in the city, leading to skyrocketing land prices (See Pak & Jo, 2002; Yi, 1991). Eviction of the informal settlements was, in this context, one of the most urgent tasks for the Seoul city government (Choi, 2013). Forceful evictions of shacktowns took place but did not change the situation because evictees kept building shacks.

The evictions of shacktowns proceeded together with ideological propaganda to portray shacktowns as a “social evil”, “a hotbed of crimes”, or “enclaves of the anti-socials” (see Byeon, 1967; Chae, 1967; Yoon, 1964). The military government declared that unauthorised housing consisted of “unforgivable illegal acts” (Seoul Special City Government, 1961, cited in Choi, 2013, p. 34). According to Choi (2013), significant volumes of novels, media presentations, and government research reflect how such perceptions prevailed in society in the 1960s.

In 1967, the Seoul City Government established two measures for the evictees, but both plans resulted in disastrous failures (Choi, 2013; Wang, 2016; Yeom, 2014). The first of these was the construction of the so-called “citizen’s (*simin*) apartments”. While the citizen’s apartments were

²⁵ According to Park (2015), in 1962, the average income of an urban poor household was 1,574 won. It was even smaller than the average salary of a manufacturing worker, which was considered very low.

²⁶ The Livelihood Protection System was introduced in 1961. However, it provided income support to the elderly, the disabled, pregnant women, and children only if they did not have any able-bodied family members (Choi and Jeong, 2012). Although the National Health Insurance (NHI) Act was introduced in 1963 as an experimental program, it was effectively available only to public officers and workers at conglomerates (M. Kang, 2006).

²⁷ According to Kim (2006, p. 200), in the 1970s, approximately 20-30% of the population of Seoul lived in shacktowns, and most of them were migrants. Jeong (1985), 35% of the urban population fell into the category of the urban poor in the early 1980s.

designed for poor households, they became subject to real estate speculations. Between 1969 and 1972, 425 citizens' apartment buildings (for 17,204 households) were built, but 70% of the evictees sold their right of residency because they simply could not afford the required payments (Wang, 2016, p. 166). In the meantime, slapdash constructions constantly caused severe safety problems, symbolised by a total collapse of one of the citizens' apartment buildings in 1970.²⁸

The second measure comprised massive deportations by parceling out small portions of state-owned land to each household at the outskirts of Seoul to evictees.²⁹ In 1968, for example, the government issued a plan to develop a large-scale residential area at Gwangju to accommodate 350,000 people.³⁰ Once the government bought the land for the plan, it carried out massive evictions of shacktowns in the city and deported evictees to Gwangju under the slogan of "move first, develop later". Between 1969 and 1971, 120,000 evictees were taken by military trucks and garbage trucks to Gwangju, where there was literally nothing but tents (Choi, 2013, pp. 94-6; Park, 2014). Deteriorating living conditions caused various epidemics, while evictees lost their means of livelihood due to the isolated location. During the summer of 1970, three to four dead bodies were carried out each day (Choi, 2013). People could not even return to the city because the government began to control their residency through the resident registration system (Park, 2014). On top of that, the government required evictees to pay for the allotted lands, which was much more expensive than the original proposal, leading to a massive riot in 1971 (see Yim, 2020; see Figure 4.8).³¹

The riot became a watershed moment, pushing the government to change the redevelopment policy. To start, a temporary law was enacted in 1973, enabling residents of illegal houses to turn their houses into legal ones by upbuilding. However, in 1983, the government launched the Joint

²⁸ The construction budget per square meter was less than half the cost of the ordinary apartment (Yeom, 2014).

²⁹ Between 1955 and 1972, the Seoul City Government deported around 62,000 households to the 20 areas in public lands on the outskirts of Seoul (Yoon, 1996). The deported people were abandoned at wastelands, typically hillside areas on the outskirts of Seoul and formed shacktowns from scratch. The new measurement was creating satellite cities outside of Seoul to deport 1,270,000 evictees while evicting 230,000 unauthorised housings (Kim, 2011)

³⁰ This Gwangju is on the outskirts of Seoul, not the Gwangju located in South Jeolla province which is known for the popular uprising against the military dictatorship in 1980.

³¹ On August 10, 1971, angry rioters occupied a police station for three days, burning police cars and property. The government sent a riot squad, but failed to suppress the riot. The riot ended when the Seoul City Mayor promised an unconditional acceptance of the people's demands through broadcasting. Around 100,000 people participated in the riot. One hundred people, including policemen, were injured, and twenty-two people were arrested (Choe, 2012).

Redevelopment Programme (JRP) to enable private developers to be the primary agent of the redevelopment process, opening a new phase of real estate speculation (see Shin, 2008; 2009).³²



Figure 4.8. The Gwangju district riot (Source: The Seongnam City)

Against this backdrop, I investigate how shacktowns in the 1970s became the contested space of the urban precariat movement in which urban poor housewives appeared to be the main agents, as well as how housewives accepted, negotiated, and contested the social norm around work and home in their endeavours of living a better life in the city.

³² In the history of Seoul, the 1980s were characterised by violent evictions and vigorous anti-eviction struggles against them. Speculative redevelopment, which menaced tenants' right to live, became a significant social issue. The critical controversy concerned the lack of measures to protect tenants, the poorest residents of shacktowns. From 1983 to 1985, there were around 100 struggles against these evictions and demolitions, forming an anti-eviction movement as a more organised form, symbolised by the formation of the Committee of Seoul City Evictees in 1987, as well as the establishment of a permanent rental apartments policy for tenants in 1989, albeit with a condition (Kim, 1999). This history shows how shacktowns were created as the most precarious space in the city, pushed by the uneven development process.

4.2.2. Forming a subjectivity between the excitement of speculation and the joy of communism

Activists who engaged in the urban poor movement in the 1970s and 1980s commonly say that housewives were not only the main agents who maintained the sites of struggles, but also the most reliable ones. Indeed, it was housewives who made the first and one of the most successful cases of the urban poor struggle in the city in the 1960s. When the Seoul City Government announced the plan to bulldoze shacktowns in the city and send 200,000 people to Gwangju in 1968, one of my interviewees, Sara, lived in a shacktown called Changsin-dong as a Christian activist trainee. Sara talked to the housewives in Changsin-dong about the issue. They wanted to remain in the city, where they could find work. Thus, they began the struggle. Sara says (12 July 2018):

You know what? Moms (*eommadent*) were so smart!³³ They decided to bring babies to the protest. If a resident did not have a baby, she borrowed a baby from the neighbourhood. Imagine 700 moms, each one of them with a baby on her back, going to the city hall. (...) The moms became even more brilliant as the struggle went on. At first, we made guys go to negotiate with public officers. Then we got to know that public officers treated them to dinner. We could not trust guys anymore. We decided to do it by ourselves.

The struggle of Changsin-dong housewives achieved a remarkable success. They not only won the right to live in a new citizen's apartment but also concessions, such as phased eviction and temporary dwellings, which became one of the most important demands the anti-eviction movement made during the 1980s. 98% of the residents moved to the newly built apartment together. The housewives even intervened in the layout of the building, asking for a communal space in the structure.

We ran a night school for kids who sold papers without finishing elementary school. Moms realised that women could change the local society. Moms made the dust fly! We got together to do odd jobs and organise, for example, a cooking class and so on. I mean, we ran something like a community centre at the time. (...) We discovered the concept of *we* (*uri*), which was not individual. We cannot do anything as individuals. We had a fun life. If a household had any trouble, we all took care of it. You know, the Changsin-dong housewives were known to be tough. Nobody ignored us. (Sara, *ibid.*)

The Changsin-dong housewives' struggle is significant, especially for two reasons. First, the main agents of the struggle were housewives in a patriarchal society. Second, in the struggle, the urban

³³ *Eomma(deul)* (mom(s)) is the most common way to refer to housewife(s) in Korea. In fact, this is reflective of kinship-centred sociality in Korea. It is common for mothers (and also fathers) to be named and called by others, usually by kin but also by neighbours and schoolteachers, by a child's name. For example, "So-and-so's mother (*eomma*)" or "So-and-so's father (*appa*)" is commonly used to call someone who is a parent.

poor housewives created what Sara calls “we” and this is significantly different from the traditional community, as I discuss in the following sections. Before delving into the housewives’ movement, let me discuss how shacktowns became a contested space where urban poor housewives, the most precarious population in the city, formed sensibilities and desires which became conflictual among them.

The urban poor marked the bottom of the hierarchical divisions of labour in Seoul. However, there was another layer of the hierarchy within these divisions based on gender. With marriage, most Korean women moved away from wage employment primarily due to the social norm that required “married women’s domestic responsibilities as mothers and wives” (Cho & Koo, 1983, p. 11). This situation put the urban poor housewives in an even more precarious working condition. They were typically involved in flexible and intermittent jobs on irregular bases, earning the cheapest wage to survive. They often worked at home or took part in domestic work at someone else’s house. These features blurred the separation between domestic and non-domestic work, systemically making the urban poor females’ labour invisible. Their work was “not recognised as a job either by society or by the individual herself” (Cho & Koo, 1983, p. 8). Even when they had relatively specialised jobs, they took for granted the fact that they received a much lower wage than what male counterparts received for the same work. That is to say that it was not only males but also females who internalised the patriarchal ideology, an ideology that was combined with and which accelerated the hierarchical division of labour. However, it was not male family heads (*gajang*), but housewives who actually earned a living for their families in many urban poor households.³⁴

In this section, I discuss how the urban poor housewives, one of the most vulnerable populations in the city, began to form new sensibilities and desires, which were in conflict with one another around the dominant notions of work and home.³⁵ I analysed interviews of twelve urban poor housewives

³⁴ Studies show that although the patriarchal ideology of male breadwinner was promoted and deeply inscribed in the process of industrialisation of Korea, the ideology never reflected the social reality on the ground (see Yi, 2002).

³⁵ My analysis in this section has drawn on multiple sources. On the one hand, I interviewed four activists and two housewives involved in the urban poor movement between the 1960s and the 1980s. On the other hand, I am informed by field notes and records of interviews with the urban poor housewives generated by other activists and researchers as a form of primary source data. First, in order to understand urban poor housewives’ perceptions and practices around home and work, I analyse the life histories of twelve urban poor housewives. I interviewed two of them by myself. Kim Ha-kyeong, who was a student activist in the 1980s, offered me audio recordings of interviews with four urban poor housewives (transcribing was done by myself). According to Ha-kyeong, the interviews were conducted by Haepari, who did missionary activities in shacktowns. Sara also gave me a book containing six urban poor housewife interviews conducted by J Han (2018). Second, besides the interviews, I was informed by three sets of fieldnotes generated in 1969 by Choi Hyeop

who engaged in the movements in the 1970s and 1980s. All of them were from the countryside. They were married young (between 18 and 23), “by being tricked into”, “without knowing anything”, or even “by being kidnapped and raped”. While there were variations, such as whether one lived with her in-laws or whether her husband was physically abusive, most of them recollect the event of marriage as a significant turning point in a negative light. They say, “I have lived as a dead person since that day”. “All the pains and hardships began with the marriage”, or “My life turned into a big misery after that”. All of them had at least three children, and half of them mentioned an experience of miscarriage due to arduous physical work. All of them were de facto breadwinners in their households. They described how they had engaged in multiple jobs such as hawking, housekeeping, working at small-scale factories, and day labouring for odd jobs at construction sites to earn a living. Eight of them insisted that their husbands never brought money home. Some of their husbands worked but “spent all they earned on gambling and drinking”. Some were “conned into investing in a business” and loafed around. Some were sick.

There could be some exaggerations, but their stories clearly showed how fictitious the idea of a male breadwinner was. The urban poor males, who held a robust patriarchal ideology, did not consider day labouring as a decent job for a family head (Brandt, 2012, p. 166; see also H. Choi, 2012; Jo, 2012). Having neither educational backgrounds nor skills, however, they could not find jobs in the official economic sector. Establishing one’s own small business (*jangsa*) appeared to be the dream of the urban poor males.³⁶ Without enough capital or experience, their attempts often ended up in the loss of all the scraped-up money, if not falling into debt. The wish to establish a business, in such a situation, ironically functioned as an excuse for the males who fiddled around while pushing housewives to engage in excessive labour to earn a living.

At the same time, however, the field notes generated by ethnographers show the urban poor housewives’ fondness for urban life (see footnote 35). They said that it was “much freer” and “there are lots of things women can do” in the city (Soongin in H. Choi, 2012, p. 87).

Analysing multiple data sources, I would argue that two different sensibilities characterise the urban poor housewives’ fondness of urban life. The first was the excitement of speculation. The second

and two other research assistants. These fieldnotes were published as a book entitled “*Shacktown Diary*” (H. Choi, 2012). “Soongindong diary”, the 71 pages of field notes, provided me with particularly valuable sources for this section. The name of the chronicler is unknown, but I name her Soongin for convenience’s sake.

³⁶ According to Jeong (1985, p. 88), many urban poor expressed their desire to invest in human capital by educating their children (the oldest son). However, in most cases, they failed to do so due to the lack of resources.

was the joy of communism. These two sensibilities dovetail nicely with the notions of “exchange” and “communism”, respectively, the moral economic principles David Graeber describes (2012).³⁷ However, housewives often mixed up the two sensibilities in their narratives, demonstrating complex tensions and dynamics between different sensibilities forming around work and home at the same time.

First, the urban poor housewives expressed their excitement with urban life for economic reasons. They commonly said that the city was better to live in because there was “work for women” and they could “lend money or buy stuff on credit” in the city. It is important to note that the word “work” in this context signifies waged work, albeit in the most precarious form. When the urban poor women described how they had worked in the city to earn a living in general, their emotions were not that positive. Even before they came to the city, they had always engaged in an excessive amount of work at farms and homes. Doing physical work was nothing new to the urban poor women. What excited them was the fact that they could get paid. Before I delve into this aspect, I discuss how the urban poor housewives perceived their work in general. In doing so, I focus on the life stories of the twelve housewives mentioned above.

When the housewives recollected how they had lived, they did not make a clear distinction between money-making activities and domestic work. Instead, they tended to treat all their work as hardships of reproducing daily life, especially to “feed and educate kids”:

After the marriage, I have worked in everything like hawking, being a street vendor, and housekeeping at people’s houses. I mean, I can’t tell you how hard my life has been. Nevertheless, I am well pleased that I make my kids take up studies. (...) Their father has been sick. Therefore, I have to work. If I sleep two hours a day, it is a lucky day. I leave home around 11 in the morning and come back the next day in the morning. Then, I cook and other stuff before leaving (Jong-rye, interviewed by Haepari in the 1980s)

I make a bit of money by selling *gimbap* (a Korean dish made from cooked rice and seaweed), but it counts just for earning daily bread. I thus take care of a couple of kids as a nanny at home and other stuff to make ends meet. (...) Of course, it is tough. I have to leave home early and do house chores at night. However, I am prepared for this kind of hardship. I am earning a penny (*pundon*) to educate kids and make a living. (Jeong-sook, interviewed by Haepari in the 1980s)

The informants often used words such as “fate (*unmyeong*)” or “karma (*palja*)” in describing how they had worked to earn a living. These factors imply that the housewives did not treat their work as so-

³⁷ See Chapter 3.

called “productive labour” (Marx, 1976). Rather, they perceived their work as an obligatory part of living in which a family was a pre-given form as a unit of making a living. One urban poor woman in her 70s simply put it, “My life was tough. But, that (toughness) is nothing special. I have barely survived. I just did my best to feed and educate *saekidenul*, (is a term refer to kids but its literal meaning is babies of animals and birds) because I had to live. That’s it” (Geoin-imo, 11 July 2018).³⁸

The urban poor housewives worked to make ends meet. To them, working was an unavoidable part of life. Then, what was their excitement with “work” in the city? As I mentioned, it was about the fact that a part of their work began to be calculated and paid for in the city. This caused two significant changes. First, by being paid, the urban poor housewives realised that it was not the nominal male family heads but themselves who earned a living. This recognition not only challenged the authority of family heads but also empowered housewives, giving them a sense of autonomy and pride, as Jang in her 70s recollected (cited in J. Han, 2018, p. 102).³⁹

I worked. It seemed to be impossible to send kids to school if I just relied on my husband. (...) Guys in the town were all in a drunken frenzy. I thus worked furiously. (...) The painting was not a job for a woman. But I did it. I am proud of myself for that. Many people said that they were impressed. I mean, I was recognised for my ability in that world. But there was no life as a woman.

Second, money appeared to be the tangible form of the idea of “accumulation” and inspired the urban poor housewives. They described their economic activities for saving money in a way that was significantly different from how they mentioned their work to earn a living.

I put work ahead of everything else. I realised that my work makes money, which enabled me to forget all the physical pains. I worked as a housekeeper for three different families. (...) Since my husband also worked at the time, I was able to save money every month. I realised that this was the way of saving money. It was so fun. I did not even feel tired at all. (Yoojin’s mom, interviewed by Haepari in the 1980s)

None of the informants used the word “fun/joy (*jaemi*)” to describe their work to earn a living, while the word was often used to describe the act of saving money. Most of the urban poor did not have

³⁸ This attitude is partly related to the fact that housewives themselves disregarded female labour. At the same time, however, how they interpreted their work incubates a possibility of re-organising our understanding of work to produce commons beyond the dichotomy of waged labour and other activities (Federici, 2015; Wainwright, 2013) as I discuss in Chapter 7.

³⁹ In the same vein, studies show that factory work signified liberation or independence from the patriarchal order for young women who migrated to the city to find jobs (see Kim, 2006; Lee, 2009).

any room for saving money in reality, but they still expressed their excitement with the mere possibility of doing so. For example, in Soongin's field note, a woman whose husband had been sick and who thus had a tough time explaining why she liked the urban life did so as follows (H. Choi, 2012, p. 97):

Life is very tough. But I am trying hard to put money every month in a *gye* (a rotating credit association) to make a lump sum of money and thus have a bigger seed capital (*micheon*). This is something I couldn't even imagine in my hometown.

The quotes demonstrate that what excited them was the possibility of saving money to make "seed capital".

The field notes about shacktowns generated in 1969 entail surprisingly abundant episodes about the urban poor housewives' engagements in various informal financial practices (see also Jo, 2012). For the urban poor, who did not have a regular income, borrowing money from neighbours or buying daily necessities on credit at local shops were quite ordinary. If the housewives had any extra money, they "played" the money by lending it to neighbours at interest. *Gye* and *ilsu-nori* (literally 'daily money instalment play' which means the informal micro-credit business that lends money and gets daily interest) were the most important means of making money for the urban poor housewives.⁴⁰

According to Sara, how "somebody's mom managed money and bought a house in the lower area was a popular topic of gossip amongst neighbours". The successful stories typically entailed how the housewives gained money by "playing money (*don-nori*)". In other words, the urban poor housewives recognised the difference between an act of earning money by working and an act of playing money, i.e., speculation. Money was not just an equivalence of their work but capital, "a mysterious and self-creating source of interest, of its own" as defined by Marx (1981, p. 516). A house, in this context, functioned as the most crucial strategy to minimise household expenses, increase income, and speculate with any available resources.⁴¹ Speculation (*tugi*) on housing was not an extraordinary practice in shacktowns at all, while the urban poor housewives were excited to become a part of the speculative money game.

⁴⁰ Regarding *gye* (a rotating credit association), see Chapter 2, footnote 12.

⁴¹ The real estate market had flourished in shacktowns since the 1960s with "active transactions of houses and rent even if the land was owned by the state" (H. Choi, 2012, p. 160). Regarding the ways in which informal financial activities, as well as practices of speculation, were not extraordinary in the country, see also Cho and Koo (1983), Kim (1995), and Song (2014). The urban poor bought a shack in order to live there, rent out all possible space, and sell it at a higher price.

On the other hand, another sensibility, associated with the word fun/joy in the urban poor housewives' narrative, is what I call it the joy of communism. The joy of communism and excitement in speculation expressed by the urban poor housewives link to fundamentally different moral bases (Graeber, 2010). The housewives, however, often mixed up these sensibilities in their narrative for two reasons. First, financial activities in shacktowns were often perceived and practised in the same vein as mutual aid in farming communities. They often mentioned how people helped each other in shacktowns just like they did in their home village. They held that they could lend money to each other daily or monthly as the most convincing example of mutual aid in shacktowns.

Brandt's (2012, p. 170) analysis on how different logics operated in Korean rural farming communities and communities in shacktowns is noteworthy in this regard.⁴² According to him, two logics operate "in deciding what an appropriate behaviour pattern was in every specific situation" in farming communities. The first was "the logic of an egalitarian community". This logic, associated with joyful emotions and an open attitude, was shown in farmers' hospitality and generosity and various mutual aid practices. At the same time, there was "the formal morality of the community" based on a patriarchal hierarchy. This second logic, linked to emotions like solemnity and dignity, emphasised the Confucian order of "Elders First (*jangyuyuseo*)", especially in kinship relations. The balance and tension between two logics collapsed when families came to the city and found that they were not in "the extended family system [that] belongs to the sophisticated fabrics of farming communities" anymore (ibid., p. 172). The egalitarian sensibilities and practices worked better in the city. At the same time, however, the families found that their lives became more precarious in the city in terms of work and housing. In such a situation, what substituted the stability provided by the kinship system of the farming communities was the idea of "becoming a successful, self-made (*jasuseong'ga*) businessman" (ibid. p. 174).

Indeed, the informal financial practices in shacktowns must be related to mutual aid practices on some level as shacktown residents were accustomed to the hospitality of farming communities. For example, when a person in trouble asks his neighbour to lend money, the neighbour may act according to the rule of generosity instead of checking the other party's credit. Before long, however, the creditor cannot help but begin to sense the gap and adjust their principles. Therefore, stories in which the urban poor compared mutual aid in farming communities to informal financing practices in shacktowns often appeared contradictory.

⁴² Brandt's analysis significantly resonates with how Graeber (2010) explains three moral principles co-existing at the basis of human economies: communism, hierarchy, and exchange.

Also, the urban poor housewives mixed the joy of communism and the excitement in speculation in their narratives because they engaged in various informal financial activities through associations of females. The associations not only functioned for financial purposes but also became a way of socialising. When the urban poor housewives praised urban life, they usually started their talk by giving economic reasons. They offered lending money at interest or joining rotating credit associations (*gye*) as an example. But, once they mentioned their practice of *gye*, the subject tended to change. They began to say things like, “It is so fun when we get together for a *gye* as we share how everybody has been doing. We sometimes watch movies”; “I am going out with other housewives to see the outside world. These groups enabled the scope of women’s activities”; “When we get together for *gye*, we can hear how other families are doing. We share ideas and thoughts. We consult whatever issues we have. By doing so, we realise that we are living together in society”. Here, the theme is how they shared conversations, thoughts, and activities with other females and how much they enjoy the shared conviviality. They were those who had been the most suppressed in the patriarchal hierarchy of farming communities. It is not surprising that one of the biggest attractions of urban life for the urban poor housewives was that they could be an active part of egalitarian relations in which they shared the joy of communism.

These two sensibilities grew to be at odds with each other, however. First of all, the urban poor housewives’ sheer pleasure of shared conviviality was held in check by the internalised patriarchal ideology and the discourse created around the virtue of financial management. The fact that “dance fever (*chumbaram*)”, symbolising housewives’ group activity, appeared as a serious social problem in the 1970s would be one clear example. Dance fever also spread into shacktowns. “No housewife is bad at social dancing amongst those who join many *gyes*”, according to Soongin (Choi, 2012, p. 131). Sara also said that she built a rapport with the urban poor females by joining a group of housewives who went dancing every night (12 July 2018). Both Soongin and Sara were engaged in the urban poor movement as females in their 20s, implying that they were highly open-minded. However, in her fieldnotes, Soongin revealed a sense of criticism toward the dance fever, reflecting the social atmosphere in which the dance fever was presented by combining stories of how housewives were out of control (*munran*) and extravagant (*sachi*) (see also Gho, 2012 July 17).

Moreover, the criticism of the housewives’ dance fever was based not only on traditional morality but also on modern housewives’ new responsibilities. The following quote was from Sara when she explained her engagement in a shacktown called Nangok in the 1970s (12 July 2018):

There was a vast Middle East boom starting from the middle of the 70s, you know, for the construction work. Most of the adult males in the town went to Kuwait. If they worked in

the Middle East and sent money home, it amounted to quite a lot. Housewives who lived on the top of the hill could move into the lower neighbourhoods. I mean, they saved money to buy even a shack. But not all the housewives saved money frugally. Some housewives just wasted money, you know, they danced around, if they didn't have love affairs. I mean those fickle young ones.

The above quote shows the discourse built around housewives' abilities of managing/financing money; Some housewives managed to buy a house despite the absolute incompetence of their husbands. Others made it by diligently managing money while their husbands worked overseas. The worst case was those who squandered money sent home from their husbands working at construction sites in the Middle East. In other words, the discourse was imbued with the sense of moral judgement on what was a respectable life in the deeply tradition-bound yet rapidly transforming city.

4.2.3. Weaving a network of care beyond a home at the edge of society

Waves of redevelopment threatened the urban poor's right to live by violently evicting them. It not only razed shacktowns to the ground but also raised the housing prices of the surrounding area. The residents, whose livelihoods were extremely precarious, could not help but navigate through hardship to find the best way to survive. For the urban poor, their involvement in the movement itself was initially an act of investment to get compensation. Before long, in addition to brutal violence and severe economic difficulty, they found themselves in a place of extreme uncertainty. Engaging in the anti-eviction struggle became a constant process of making decisions amongst different choices: how to earn a living during the struggle and who should do it? Should compensation or secret offers be accepted at some point or resisted till the end? How to resist, and with whom and for what purpose?

For one thing, what was clear was that the joy of communism and the excitement of speculation could not help but have a head-on collision when the urban poor housewives became involved in the social movement. To borrow the expression of In-gi (11 July 2018), who devoted himself to the urban poor movement for 30 years, "the movement demanded one to start investing for something else than monetary profit, even temporarily". That is to say, the engagement in the movement invited housewives to a process of subjectivation to overcome their precarity differently from how they had done before. In this section, I discuss how the site of the anti-eviction movement turned into a battlefield over different attitudes in relation to dealing with precariousness. I then explore how the urban poor housewives created a unique network of care beyond the norms of family and community.

(1) Building community-ness in the movement

I interviewed five activists who engaged in the urban poor movement in the 1970s and 1980s.⁴³ The activists commonly state that the fundamental difficulty of the urban poor movement was the fact that the agents as well as the place of the movement, i.e., shacktowns, have disappeared. “Evictees, who had fought with every ounce of strength, just left the movement after getting compensations”, according to an activist, In-gi (11 July 2018). The activists thus tend to evaluate each case of struggle based on whether “a community (*gongdongche*) to live a better life together” was formed through the struggle.⁴⁴ However, what did a community mean for the urban poor females who had been seriously suppressed by the strong patriarchal ideology embedded in the Korean agricultural communities, including in their own families? What did the sentence “live a better life” mean for them? As Dongwon, another activist who engaged in the anti-eviction movement in the 1980s points out, “we don’t even have a clear idea what the word, community, actually means. Moreover, any community will be disbanded in the end” (15 July 2018).

In this regard, In-gi offers valuable insight (11 July 2018):

These days, there are many ways for people to be informed about redevelopment, policies, and rights. But, no matter how informed people were, through the internet, for example, it does not mean people are forming any community-ness (*gongdongche-seong*) in the movement. What’s crucial is that one’s being transforms itself in the movement. I mean, whether one is going to desire to live in the movement without worrying about income or whatever is the point.

In-gi does not use the word community, which often refers to a clearly bounded unit. Instead, he uses the word “community-ness”. Two things are notable. First, with the word community-ness, he implies relations, or communal experience, through which a related/engaged person changes her

⁴³ One engaged in the movement in 1969 as a religious activist. Two encountered the movement as students in the 1970s and 1980s, respectively. One engaged in the movement as a factory worker and another as an urban poor housewife in the 1970s and 1980s, and have since led their lives as activists.

⁴⁴ Activists’ emphasis on community is related to how the urban poor movement sprang up in Seoul. It was religious activists who activated the urban poor movement in Korea in the 1960s. The Cooperative Education Institute was founded in 1962 by Mary Gabriella Mulhein, a Canadian nun, to facilitate credit associations for the urban poor. The Institute of Urban Studies and Development (*Dosimunje Yeonguso*) was founded in 1968 by the United Presbyterian Church in the USA. It began the Action Training Program to foster activists to organise the urban poor based on Alinsky’s Community Organization Method (CO method) (CPUH, 2017). The trained activists went to shacktowns and began to live there and organise “resident movements (*jumin undong*)” as one of the “residents”. Their purpose was “creating self-help communities in which the urban poor empower themselves to live a better life”, according to Sara (12 July 2018), who was one of the first trainees of the Action Training Program.

own being. Second, the process of “transformation” engages the issue of how to deal with economic insecurity/precarity, even temporarily.

Interviews of the urban poor housewives conducted by the activist Haepari in the 1980s, vividly show what In-gi means in the above quote. Jongrye and Yoojin’s mom were urban poor housewives involved in the anti-eviction struggles of the 1980s. Both expressed their feelings of insecurity/precariousness (*buran*) in a society where they had nowhere to turn and thus had to sell their labour to feed their kids and sleep under the roof. For example, Yoojin’s mom, in her recollection, expressed how she had worked ardently due to her strong feeling of precariousness. In order to feel secure, she tried her best to work hard and save money:

I could not rest. I felt so insecure, seeing how society worked. It was like I could be dead at any moment. It was like I would let my children starve to death. (...) I moved into this town in the year of 1984. Then, in 1986, there was the first eviction. I thought, “Wow, it really happened. I have no savings. Where should we go if we were evicted?” Another house was evicted right by our place. I began to feel even more desperate. That is why I worked so hard. I saved money. It was fun to save money. (Yoojin’s mom)

Both Jongrye and Yoojin’s mom, who were supposed to be evicted with very little compensation, joined the movement with the hope of getting a better compensation. The following quotes clearly show that their involvement in the movement was an act of investment:

I heard that if I move out, I could get relocation expenses. (...) But, then I heard that if I choose to stay, I could get a small apartment for those with low income by paying back for years. I thus decided to stay. (Jongrye)

At the time, a woman living next door ... roughly explained to me what the tenant action committee was. I remembered that I had heard a rumour that residents of the 3rd district had received 1,000,000 won (KRW), although I did not take it seriously.⁴⁵ Anyways, my ears got tempted by what she said. (...) I thus tried to engage other housewives, saying, “Let’s get together. They got 1,000,000 won in the 3rd district. Trying wouldn’t hurt. What do you have to lose?” (Yoojin’s mom)

Thereafter, however, their narratives headed in very different directions. Jongrye believed that her engagement in the movement made her situation even worse. She could not work and used up her savings. She also hated being with other families. For Jongrye, her engagement was a completely failed investment.

⁴⁵ 10,000 won is approximately 9 USD as of May, 2021.

Now, I don't want to live here even one more day. But I cannot leave because I have wasted all the saved money for the last two years. I could not work at all but just spent money because I had to go wherever evictions took place, every day. (...) I have so many regrets. I am feeling so *buran* (insecure/precarious). But, as I wasted all my money, I cannot even leave. I am so regretful for joining in (the tenants' action committee). If I have not joined, I would not have wasted the money and thus could have lived with my kids without this pathetic feeling. (...) It is too hard to be with other households. I even hate myself for being here. (Jongrye)

Yoojin's mom demonstrated a totally different attitude. Economically, the situation of Yoojin's mom was no better than Jongrye's case. Her husband had been unemployed. Her family had spent all her savings and owed debt. She explained the situation in stride only when the interviewer asked about it. The sense of stability she demonstrated is considerably different from the part in which she expressed her feeling of insecurity. She ceased to consider herself as an isolated individual, who could "starve to death" at any moment. Instead, she began to see herself in solidarity with other poor people. In doing so, her statement is not just an abstract recognition. It was accompanied by a concrete transformation of how she built relationships with her neighbours, as the following excerpt demonstrates:

Before I joined the movement, I thought that I was the only one who lived like this. But I have realised that there are so many people just like me or even poorer than me. Since there are people whose situations are even worse than me, I have joined the struggle and put myself on the frontline. (...) Yes, I have changed a lot. I was a very reserved person before, but not anymore. I could not talk in front of people, but now I can. Simply put, I came to have guts. I could talk with anybody. I mean, I came to feel so close to my neighbours as if they were my brothers and sisters. I used to worry about how people would think about me. But I don't think about such things anymore. The neighbours were like my family. I come up to anybody in the town, even to elders, and asked, "Wow, I am so hungry. Can you get me some food please?" without hesitation. (Yoojin's mom)

Once she felt the neighbours were like her family, the way she calculated interest/profits changed inevitably. She began to think that speculative practices, about which she had once been excited, were problematic:

Before I joined the movement, I thought that they (people who made money through speculation on housing) made money reasonably. But now, I think about how absurd it is.

This whole country is just for the rich. I think we should not have people like *bokbuin* (literally meaning “lucky wife”) in society.⁴⁶ (Yoojin’s mom)

The interview of Yoojin’s mom demonstrates how she had transformed herself by engaging the movement. Indeed, all my interviewees who had engaged in the urban poor movement (both students-turned-activists and urban poor-turned-activists), said how the movement had completely changed their lives. In most cases, what made them remain at the site of the movement was not an ideology or a rationale but their experiences of “encountering so many interesting people”, “sharing all the hardships and joy with other participants”, or “having such intense moments of time at the site of struggles”. In other words, the participants were affected by their collective experiences, and by being so, became a part of the movement.

However, when a struggle became prolonged, “evictees could not help but feel extremely weary”, as In-gi (11 July 2018) points out. For example, Dong-won, who participated in the five-years long Sang’gye-dong anti-eviction struggle in Sang’gye-dong in the 1980s, recalls how people’s desires changed drastically throughout time (July 15, 2018):

We had a great struggle. The atmosphere was great, really. People talked about things like “what a community should be like”, “let us build community housings”, “let us make co-operatives”. We had such hopes. (...) Everything changes drastically depending on moods. If it goes well, a community is built. But, once a bad atmosphere is created, it spreads so quickly. (...) Finally they got compensation in the form of land, and the situation got even worse. Some people sold their share and left while others wanted to keep struggling. Even when a community was built, we don’t know how long it will last. People say that Sang’gye-dong ended up as a “half success”. People got compensation, but the community failed.

A community-ness can be created by going through hardships together. But no one can endure constant hardships. The joy of communism must be felt to renew community-ness. I believe that this is why the most unique and cheerful achievement of the urban poor movement was found in the 1970s instead of the 1980s, when people had to put all their effort into resisting brutal evictions.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ *Bokbuin* refers to middle and high-class housewives who turned into the main agents of real estate speculation using family assets.

⁴⁷ As the JPR allowed the private sector to be the main agent of the redevelopment project, professional demolition companies, which hired gangsters, appeared in the 1980s. Regarding demolition companies’ brutal violence, see *The Report about Dawson Construction’s Tear Down Crime* (1998), collectively written by twelve civil society organisations.

(2) Creating the urban poor housewives' movement through the joy of communism

The first medical cooperative in Korea was established in the 1970s by the urban poor housewives living in Nangok, one of the poorest shacktowns in Seoul. This shows what the urban poor housewives could do in the movement when they had more room for doing what they wanted to do instead of being captured by the feeling of insecurity and confronting brutal evictions. I heard the story from Sara, who constantly said, “It was so fun” or “We had a lot of fun” throughout the interview (12 July 2018).

Nangok was established as a relocation site for evictees from central Seoul in 1967 (see Shin, 2018). Sara, who organised the Changsin-dong housewives' struggle in 1969, went to Nangok in 1973. Most residents had just one meal a day. In October of that year, she organised the Noodle Club with 15 housewives who lived on the top of the hill, which meant that they were the poorest in the town. “Rich people did *gye* for making big money. We did *gye* for eating noodles once a month,” says Sara. They ate noodles while sharing the news of how each one was doing. Topics were about kids, husbands, and work. One day, one of their husbands got robbed on his way home after day labouring. The housewives gathered opinions and thoughts regarding the need for a streetlight on the sidewalk. They requested that the Ward office put a streetlight at the site of the incident and their request was granted. “The members of the Noodle Club were excited. We could work together to solve a problem. We began to talk about other issues and tried to resolve them one by one”.

Meanwhile, they confronted two instances of hardship. First, a town resident got paralysed in one leg while her colleagues had the same symptoms, and the factory just fired her for that. Angered, she appealed to the Regional Employment and Labour Administration (*Seoul Jibang Goyong Nodong-cheong*), but failed to receive any help from them. Sara (Ibid.) says:

Nobody knew the word like an “occupational disease” at the time. People just died. Anyway, the members of the Noodle Club wanted to do something and conceived of a plan. We went to the Dong'a Broadcasting station. And, it was reported! The company was disconcerted. So was the Labour Administration. They sent people who had symptoms to a big hospital. People were diagnosed with an occupational disease due to chemicals and got six months' treatment in the hospital. That was what the Noodle Club did! It was not the whole story. The sick woman had three kids. Her husband worked as a wallpaperer. The Noodle Club housewives did laundry and prepared lunch boxes in rotation for her kids during the whole six months!

Before long, a member of the club just barely escaped a miscarriage. Other members brought her to a hospital and found out they could not afford it. They went to the borough office to see if there was any welfare for the poor while also collecting contributions:

The housewives collected around 40,000 won (KRW) in the town. I collected 50,000 won from Fathers and Sisters of the Catholic church. So we managed to hospitalise the woman. She gave birth to a girl. We were so happy that we could save her by pulling together. On the other hand, it was the first time for them to see the big hospital. The housewives were shocked by how much money was required. They said, “There is no way but dying if we lose our health!”

These episodes show how the urban poor housewives effectively expanded the unit of care beyond family and home. To put it differently, the precarious people in Nangok made a wholly different notion of expanding family/home in the neighbourhood. Their practice stood out not only from the traditional Korean extended family based on the Confucian notion of descent or on the modern norm of the nuclear family.⁴⁸ As Engels and Morgan (1978) have already pointed out, the family is a historically created institution. While members of the family tend to share resources and income within the unit even in a society where the logic of capitalist reciprocity is dominant, the family changes its boundaries and structure to adjust to and deal with pressures existing in the economy (Graeber, 2011; Wallerstein, 1990). By changing the practice of care beyond family/home, the urban poor housewives in the above episode expanded what Graeber (2011) calls communism beyond the unit of the family to overcome the sense and reality of precarity imposed by the society.

These sensibilities became the foundation of the Nangok Medical Cooperative. In 1974, Sara heard that the student union of the Catholic University was looking for an area to conduct free medical treatment for the urban poor every weekend. After a year and a half, the housewives thought that something should be done because the most impoverished people did not come for free treatment:

It was a mountain neighbourhood (San-dongne) consisting of 35 *tong*.⁴⁹ We visited every single *tong* without missing one, every day. For a month, we had meetings almost every night. The decision was simple: “We should let the poor get treatments”. But how come? I suggested establishing a cooperative. (Sara, interviewed by J Han, 2018, p. 34)

⁴⁸ Kim’s (1995, p. 69) research analyses how lower-class families in the 1990s were “more individualistic and ‘modern’ than upper-middle-class families” in Korean urban areas. According to the study, lower-class families tended to place their survival/life strategy within the nuclear family unit and cut off their social bonds to survive on limited resources.

⁴⁹ Tong is an administrative unit. Usually, 20-50 households are designated as a *ban*, while 4-6 *ban* becomes a *tong*.

In 1976, they established the “Nangok Heemang (*Hope*) Medical Cooperative”, with 118 households with its members.⁵⁰ The cooperative was run for ten years until the National Health Insurance system began to be effective in 1989.

Three things are essential to note. First, the housewives tried to run the cooperative autonomously as much as possible. While the project was supported by Catholic and medical school students, from the beginning, the residents decided to pay a certain amount of money instead of accepting the service as a charity. They collected the paid money in case there would be a patient who needed special treatment. The 1980s were the heyday of the Nangok medical cooperative, with around 10,000 people as its members. Meanwhile, a German NGO proposed financial support for establishing a medical centre, but they refused the proposal. Sara says (12 July 2018):

Moms discussed the proposal and decided to reject it. Having a centre would be great, but we didn’t have such a capacity yet. If we could not autonomously run the centre, it would be run by specialists or those who have the ability. The residents thought that they could become a subject rather than an agent. That was why they rejected it. I think that they made a significant decision. They were able to make such a judgement collectively and refused a tempting proposal. The fact is historically significant, I think.

Second, housewives gladly offered their time and work without compensation. They did so because they felt proud of and enjoyed the activities. “The residents were proud of taking care of their health care themselves,” says Sara. The urban poor housewives said, “We did volunteer work every Saturday. I guess that we all had the same feeling like I cannot miss it, you know, like it is my responsibility”; “Working as a volunteer, I felt energised even though my body was tired. I feel great that I am doing something good for somebody” (cited in Han, 2018, p. 39). For example, the annual general assembly and the autumn picnic for all the members were the two most significant events of the year. The housewives in the committee prepared for the event for several days. Since they had to work for a living in the daytime, they had to gather to work at night. The housewives said, “We got together at Sara’s place to prepare food. It was so fun, although very tough. I mean, I was excited despite the physical toughness”. “We marinated seaweed to bring. We made pickled garlic stalks and seasoned them. It was so delicious. Yes, we had so much fun. I could forget all the hardships because of the fun we had.” (cited in Han, 2018, p. 45). These feelings of joy and empowerment enabled the housewives to work not to make money but to create a network of care. They ran a summer school for caring for kids collectively. They created a fund to support poor students who passed the

⁵⁰ At the time of the establishment, the membership was given to the household with more than five family members and less monthly income than 30,000 won. All members should get 10 hours’ education about a “cooperative”.

entrance exam but gave up attending high school. They went to other shacktowns to build solidarity and inspire housewives there. In other words, they voluntarily worked to (re)produce lives beyond the unit of the family.



Figure 4.9. The residents of Nangok at the cooperative. (Source: Media Health)

Last but not least, the case of the Nangok housewives' movement demonstrates quite different sensibilities around "community" from other examples of the urban poor movement at the time. In many cases, the urban poor communities appeared as a more closed form of self-help communities (see CPUH, 2016).⁵¹ Also, despite their alternative characteristics, these communities still entailed gendered oppressions. For example, the book entitled "Searching for the Origin of the Village Community Movement" describes how the community movement developed in the 1970s. While famous figures were, in many cases, males, "preparing meals and drinks for visitors was the work of women", even in the space where activists lived together, according to the book (CPUH, 2016, pp. 102-5). The "sacrifices and patience" of women who "worked the longest hours with the most intensity" were "the very power that sustained the community" (CPUH, 2016, p. 104). On the other hand, what the housewives in Nangok created in the 1970s was a free association rather than a

⁵¹ CPUH is an abbreviation of the Committee for Publishing the Urban Poor Movement History.

community. The housewives joined in it as much as they wanted. They contributed their work to weave a network of care beyond a community of intimacy. What facilitated their engagement was neither sacrifices nor patience, but a sense of pride and the joy of communism.

4.3. Conclusion

This chapter has emphasised how precarity was produced, governed, and contested in Tokyo and Seoul in the period of rapid industrialisation as well as how the most precarious population in the cities formed the urban movements that challenged the dominant norms of work and home. Two main conclusions emerge from the findings.

First, precarity was produced and governed (or planned as such) in a dualistic manner, geographically and ideologically, in Tokyo as well as in Seoul. The uneven development process produced precarity because the construction of city space necessitated flexible labour-power. In both cities, the authorities tried to regulate precarity by depositing the precarious population in a specific place. They also stigmatised the most precarious population as deviating from the dominant values of the society. In post-war Tokyo, a strongly gendered lifetime employment system controlled precarity for most of the population. However, precarity dominated the life of day labourers, whose work was essential to the construction of the city. Considered as the “underclass,” they were “geographically pooled, economically reproduced and politically contained” in *josebas*, as Hayashi (2013, p. 1193) puts it. In Seoul, producing and governing the reserve pool of labour-power took place in a much more haphazard manner. A huge number of domestic migrants ended up as the “urban poor” in Seoul, building unauthorised housing on a massive scale. The authorities attempted to abolish precarity from the capital city by evicting the surplus population and destroying their homes. While the urban poor constantly rebuilt their homes in the city, the authorities justified the forced removal of the “urban poor” by stigmatising the urban poor and their space as “social evil”.

Second, in both cities, precarity was never entirely governed. The allocated space of precarity turned into the space of movements, and the most precarious population in the city appeared to be the most rebellious subjectivity contesting the norms of the dominant society. In Tokyo, where urbanisation had begun much earlier than in Seoul, day labourers had created a unique culture or mentality of the underclass by actively distinguishing themselves from the civil society since the late 18th century. As I have discussed, the day labourers across different times shared the experience of day labouring in which they worked together with colleagues at the bottom of society. Based on this experience, they had developed a unique sense of sovereignty over their work (which meant living on one’s own) while building a sense of camaraderie that did not depend on one-on-one personal relationships, but

the recognition of their common plight. The intermittently repeated riots during the 1960s and 1970s show the strong anti-authoritarianism of day labourers. While most activist groups failed to organise day labourers, the activist group Gentōi successfully mobilised San'ya's day labourers because of the group's anarchistic and prefigurative characteristics. Gentōi made San'ya a concrete site of prefigurative movement in which day labourers collectively confronted authorities in worksites and built the *yoseba* as a home for mutual care.

In Seoul, the urban poor housewives consisted of the most precarious form of labour-power in the city. The urban poor migrated to the city with their families, experiencing precarity in housing and work. Holding strong patriarchal sensibilities, the male heads of households tended to be reluctant to accept their plight. On the other hand, the urban poor housewives took a much more flexible attitude, changing their bodies and sensibilities by actively absorbing ideas and practices in the city. In doing so, they developed two colliding sensibilities, which I term the “excitement of speculation” and the “joy of communism”. The urban poor housewives’ movement in Nangok demonstrates how the most oppressed people in the highly patriarchal capitalist society could become agents of an urban movement. The urban housewives built a free, associated network of care beyond the home and traditional community by voluntarily sharing their time and affection.

Chapter 5. Prefigurative Movement of the Voluntary Poor in Neoliberalising Capitalist Cities

Well, creating a life different from the perspective injected by capitalism would be the maximum amount of resistance to capitalism, wouldn't it? (Narita, the owner of IRA in Tokyo Nantoka, 19 September 2018)

In capitalism, one needs to have an ability to earn money or an attractive persona to make human connections, both of which I don't have. How can I live? Should those who cannot pass the cut-off just die? I came across Bin-Zib when I agonised over such things. (Odi, a former resident of Bin-Zib, 7 July 2018)

The purpose of the cracks is not to create a community of saints but to establish a different form of relations between people. (Holloway, 2010, part 9, section 3)

This chapter comparatively explores a specific kind of urban movement that appeared in Tokyo and Seoul when Japan and Korea began to enter a period of neoliberal restructuring after economic crises (the bubble collapse in Japan and the Asian financial crisis in Korea). These were movements in which urban youth voluntarily chose to live what they called “the paupers’ lifestyle”, breaking away from the middle-class lifestyle.

Dameren (The league of Good-for-nothings) (1992-present) in Tokyo and Bin-Zib (Empty/Guests House) (2008-2018) in Seoul have been the most notable cases.¹ Both experiments were initiated by the educated youth who could indeed enter the class of the proletariat if they wanted. They, however, chose not to enter into capitalist wage-labour relations as much as possible, living as voluntary poor. In both projects, the initiators did not want to organise political activism to confront the system in the manner in which the earlier generation of leftist organisations did. Instead, they simply started to do what they wanted to do while inviting others to join them by inverting the value mainstream society attaches to words such as “*dame* (good-for-nothing)” and “*ingyeo* (surplus/residue)”.²

Since the mid-2000s, the youth in Korea have begun to call themselves, self-mockingly, as “*ingyeo*”. While the Korean term *ingyeo* originally means “surplus” or “residue”, in the vocabulary of youth subculture, the word refers to those who do not have regular jobs and thus fail to become decent members of society. The slang has a clear connection with what Marx (1976) calls “surplus population”, “lumpenproletariat”, or “reserve army”. Indeed, Namu Wiki, a Korean-based Wiki site specialising in youth subculture, points out that “*ingyeo*” is a synonym for “lumpen”. The site also points out that “the closest translation for *ingyeo* in Japanese is *dame* (good-for-nothing), which has become popularly used since 2000” (Namu Wiki, 2020).³ On the one hand, the emergence of these popular slang words in Japan and Korea demonstrated the reality in which a considerable number of the youth failed to enter the regular job market. On the other hand, these terms have reflected the strong capitalist work ethic captivating the youth in both societies: if you are not working, and thus

¹ I follow Cassegård’s (2013) translation for the English name of Dameren. For Bin-Zib, the translation was done by me.

² I use the term “revaluation” or “revalue” in the way Massumi (2018) uses in his manifesto for the value struggle. Above all things, “the revaluation of value” means “to *uncouple value from quantification*” (Massumi, 2018, p. 4; see also Chapter 2).

³ While Namu Wiki might not be considered a reliable source in academia because the youth create it to discuss their subculture, for that very reason it could be considered a great source for tracing the developments of youth culture.

not contributing to the economic process of making surplus value, i.e., profit, you fall into the surplus population (*dame/ingyeo*) of the society.

We should note that the term *ingyeo* had a positive nuance, at least partly, in the mid-2000s in Korea.⁴ Kim (2005) also points out how “the jobless person (*baeksu*)” was also often described as a “free and easy-going subject who pursued a self-concerning lifestyle pattern” in the youth culture of the early 2000s. However, by the late 2000s, this positive connotation had diminished considerably. This change corresponds with how the meaning of “freeter” also changed entirely in Japan.⁵ When the term freeter was coined in the late 1980s, it referred to one who wanted to “free oneself from the ‘lifestyle regime’ of the middle class and especially of the salaried employed (*saranīman*), to craft one’s own life plans” (Richter, 2017, p. 126). However, it soon began to signify unskilled irregular workers with a significantly negative nuance (see Driscoll, 2007; Obinger, 2009).

Dameren and Bin-Zib were experiments in which urban youth voluntarily chose to be *surplus* (*dame/ingyoe*) in its most positive connotation. These experiments had been launched before the neoliberal ideology of self-reliance became pervasive in both societies.

Born in the 1960s, the founders of Dameren graduated from universities when the bubble economy was about to come to an end. While they could be hired in big companies, they decided to live as freeters to enjoy their life fully. Promoting what they called “unemployed life”, many of those who engaged in Dameren lived without working as much as possible. They demonstrated their lives as concrete examples of the unemployed lifestyle and shared various “skills to survive” to encourage others to join. In doing so, the main activities of Dameren were “mingling” and having “talks” about various aspects of living as *dame* (good-for-nothings) in the Japanese society where salarymen symbolised the normative lifestyle.

Bin-Zib (Empty/Guests House) was founded in 2008 in Haebangchon in Seoul. The founders belonged to the so-called “IMF generation” who were born in the 1970s and who experienced the financial crisis in the late 1990s while they were in their 20s. The name, *Bin* (guest, empty, poverty) – *jib* (house) announced founding residents’ hope for communal experiments grounded in

⁴ For example, “*ingyeo-roun*” is a pun that sounds similar to the word “*yeoyu-roun*”, meaning “leisurely due to spare time, money, and other resources”. Combining the words “*ingyeo*” and “*yeoyu-roun*”, the youth expressed the fondness of *ingyeo-roun* (leisurely by being surplus) time, a relaxing moment outside of the competitive capitalist life.

⁵ Regarding freeters, see Chapter 1, footnote 6.

unconditional openness and egalitarianism.⁶ Although the founders launched Bin-Zib as a living experiment to reduce working time, having been inspired by Andre Gorz's (1989) critique of work,⁷ residents came together to organise a cohousing movement in their endeavour to make more space for newcomers. Since their foundation, over 20 Bin-Zibs, two cooperative cafes, and an alternative bank were organised in Haebangchon and beyond until the last Bin-Zib was disbanded in 2018.

Studies about Dameren (Cassegård, 2013; Fukui, 2012; Kohso, 2006, Mōri, 2005) and Bin-Zib (Han, 2018; 2019; Kang et al., 2012; Yoon, 2013) show surprising similarities between them. First, both cases demonstrated prefigurative characteristics.⁸ The urban precariat youth who initiated these experiments actively chose to live as the poor, rather than being forced to do so. Instead of demanding better work conditions or social welfare from the system to be secure, people engaged in Dameren and Bin-Zib chose to depart from the wage relation and lived the way they wanted to. Second, in their endeavour to create a paupers' lifestyle, they each developed a unique DIY culture, sharing economy, and alternative spaces. Third, both cases clearly differentiated themselves from the traditional leftist movement. People involved in these experiments embraced a more anarchistic ethos based on their awareness of and aversion to mainstream society's repressed and hierarchical atmosphere. They pursued a loose network or association rather than an organised form of activism under a unified ideology. In other words, Dameren and Bin-Zib demonstrated significantly similar characteristics in terms of the engaged people's intentions and the styles of the experiments. The atmosphere expressed in both cases was significantly different from that of older leftist groups of both Japan and Korea. They looked cheerful and fun.

However, what interested me was that Dameren began their project by producing alternative discourses and practices around *work* while Bin-Zib began by opening a house to make a *home* for others and tried to change the ideas and practices around the home/family and housing. The idea of

⁶ While a house is *jib* in Korean, Bin-Zib members put their English name as Bin-Zib on their website. Bin-Zib in the Korean language expresses the three values the participants pursued: (1) the house of *bin* (a guest) where there is neither ownership of the house nor hierarchy between *juin* (an owner/a host) and guest; (2) the house for *bin* (the poor) who enjoy their paupers' lifestyle rather than working hard to spend more; (3) the *bin* (empty/vacant) house where there is always a room for newcomers.

⁷ Gorz (1989) distinguishes work-for-oneself and autonomous activities from work for economic ends interrelated with commodity exchange. Work-for-oneself is work for reproducing life, such as preparing food, cleaning the home, giving birth to children, bringing them up, etc. Autonomous activities are activities one performs freely and not from necessity as the activities themselves are ends.

⁸ Prefiguration refers to "the attempted construction of alternative or utopian social relations in the present, either in parallel with or in the course of, adversarial social movement protest" (Yates, 2015, p. 1; see also Chapter 2).

work in the capitalist system is fundamentally intertwined with the notion of the free individual and the family as a personalised reproductive unit, based on the dichotomy of work and home (Federici, 2020). Any collective endeavour to depart from the capitalist wage relationship could not help but involve the question of how to contest such notions and practices. If so, under what circumstances did Dameren and Bin-Zib come to choose a different terrain as a strategic point of their value struggle? Furthermore, how did their value struggles over surplus (*dame/ingyeo*) unfold differently in each context?

This chapter explores how Dameren and Bin-Zib's praxis in breaking away from the value system that puts work as the utmost moral imperative reflects specific political, economic, and regulatory realities. The creation of alternative discourses and practices around work and home was central for both Dameren and Bin-Zib in contesting the global capitalist order right in the heart of the neighbourhoods of Tokyo and Seoul.

In Section 5.1, I review the socio-economic and cultural contexts in which the movements of urban youth who wanted to escape from both the capitalist wage-labour relation and the hierarchy deeply embedded in society appeared in Tokyo and Seoul. I also trace how precarisation had proceeded in each city, promoting the neoliberal ideology of self-reliance. In doing so, I examine how work and home became specific terrains of value struggle for the precariat of Tokyo and Seoul. In Section 5.2, I explore how Dameren and Bin-Zib struggled over the capitalist value system, creating a different time-space in each context. I also discuss how both Dameren and Bin-Zib came to pay attention to the issue of care and reproductive work in their value struggles, demonstrating the fact that it was the irreducible *surplus* of collective work that had created the communities and relations within them.

I focus on specific periods in which each of them was the most active. For Dameren, this was in between 1992 and 2002. On the other hand, Bin-Zib had its most active term between 2008 and 2016, until the experiment had to leave the area of Haebangchon due to increasing rents.

5.1. Contextualising the emergence of the prefigurative youth movement

5.1.1. Freeters against work-centred society: The case of Tokyo and Dameren

(1) The end of Japanese-style welfare society and the appearance of freeters

The bubble economy of Japan suddenly began to collapse in 1989.⁹ The whole country started to experience a severe economic crisis characterised by deficient real growth in GDP and increasing numbers of bad loans, which affected major corporations (Hirayama, 2003). Soon, the so-called Japanese-style welfare society began to crumble. The unemployment rate increased from 2% in 1990 to 5.40% in 2002 (Macrotrend, 2020). Instead of restoring the damaged social security, however, the Japanese government explicitly shifted towards neoliberal policies (Fujita, 2011; Kadi & Ronald, 2014). In 1995, Japan Business Federation published a report entitled, “Japanese style management for a new era”, which suggested a new strategy for corporations that involved a full-scale introduction of temporary, contract, and dispatched workers. Corporations cut costs through the casualisation of the workforce. After the Asian Financial Crisis, the erosion of the Japanese employment regime continued even further (Mour & Kawanishi, 2005; Rebick, 2005). The dissolution of Japan’s “lifetime employment system” was officially finalised when the Koizumi government enacted the Labour Dispatch Law in 2004. The rate of irregular workers, which had been around 2% of the labour force in 1990, hit 50% in 2010 (Driscoll, 2015).

“The mature homeowner society” also collapsed with the burst of the land bubble, with Tokyo as its epicentre (Forrest & Hirayama, 2015). Homeownership had been promoted as an essential part of the personalised welfare provision in post-war Japan (see Chapter 4). However, the security of owner-occupied housing as an asset was severely damaged because the price of land and housing dropped sharply. Those who had purchased houses faced heavier burdens in making mortgage payments while properties continued to fall in value. Meanwhile, housing and urban development policies were transformed along with the neoliberal move, accelerating the financialisation of urban space and the marketisation of the housing provision system (Jacobs, 2005; Oizumi, 1994; Ronald & Kyung, 2013; Shibata, 2008).¹⁰ This transformation involved “a further retreat from public housing

⁹ Regarding how the land bubble developed through the financialisation of the economy, combined with urban development, see Arikawa & Miyajima (2007), Kerr (2002), and Oizumi (1994).

¹⁰ The deregulation of the urban redevelopment project made it easy for urban developers to replace low-income residents with higher-income professionals in urban areas (Estévez-Abe, 2008). The financialisation of the rental housing sector also became evident in government policies. Not only has the security of tenure been reduced and eviction made easier, but the government has sought to

provision, the formation of the housing loan security market and the deregulation of institutional mechanisms for the protection of renters” (Ronald & Hirayama, 2009, p. 1005).¹¹

Meanwhile, the Japanese welfare state model revealed serious problems. The economic downturn made it significantly difficult for the family to function as a unit responsible for care. Changing gender roles (women’s social and political mobilisations) and the decline in the birth rate also pushed the government to restructure its welfare scheme. During the 1990s, family support programmes, such as public childcare, maternity and parental leave, child allowance, and extended social care for the elderly, were introduced to support the elderly, families with small children, and married female labourers. While such shifts were carried out by enhancing the roles of the market through deregulation and marketisation of care services, the youth and non-regular employees were excluded from these protections (Hirashima, 2004; Miyamoto, 2003; Peng, 2002).

The young generation (currently in their late 30s or early 40s) appeared to be the victim of these changes during the 1990s. As terms like “lost generation (*rosujene*)” or “the generation of the employment ice age” imply, many of them failed to enter the labour market and were forced to live as irregular workers (Driscoll, 2015; Genda, 2007; Ohtake, 2008; Tsutsui & Mazzotta, 2014). Japanese society also experienced “a radical transformation in the form and meaning of ... home”, one that significantly impacted younger generations (Ronald & Hirayama, 2009, p. 2847). Engaged in insecure labour, such as a temporary or part-time jobs for bad wages, they confronted not only the uncertainty of income but also the impossibility of (re)producing family amidst the ruin of the Japanese welfare society, which was based on the idea of “my home” and a life-time job, as promoted by the growth-oriented capitalist society. According to Ronald and Hirayama (2009), around 60% of freeters live with their parents for an economic reason while pursuing an individualistic lifestyle by atomising space within a home as “parasite singles”. “*Hikikomori* (shut-ins)”, the youth who refuse to leave their bedrooms, are the most extreme case of individualised parasite singles. These names demonstrate how the new generation appeared to be precarious both in terms of work and home.

establish a rental-property-security market. That is, rental dwellings financed by more professional investors are expected to replace those provided by non-professional landlords. Between 1983 and 2008, among households with heads aged 30-34, the percentage of owner-occupiers decreased from 46% to 30%, while private renters rose from 33% to 56% (Forrest & Hirayama, 2015).

¹¹ The Government Housing Loan Corporation, which had been the core of housing provision in Japan, was abolished in 2007 with the drastic expansion of the private mortgage market and equity-release-type loans (Hirayama, 2014; Ronald & Hirayama, 2009). Tokyo went through gentrification, which raised rents for low-income housing and removed some affordable options from the housing market (Hasegawa, 2005).

(2) Reclaiming self against oppression and hierarchy

- **Emergence of the new movement on the street**

With the collapse of the Japanese welfare system, Japanese society witnessed an increasing number of suicides amongst the youth population. While the phenomenon was often seen as a result of the economic depression (Chen et al., 2012), the discourse of “self-responsibility (*jikosekinin*)”, the Japanese version of self-reliance, blamed the youths on their lack of effort or willingness to work, if not the lack of a will to live (see Yasukazu, 2004).¹² Allison (2012, p. 348-349) analyses the phenomenon from the perspective of “social precarity: a condition of being and feeling insecure in life that extends to one’s (dis)connectedness from a sense of social community”. There was a pervasive sense of isolation amongst the youth in the “relationless society (*muenshakai*)” or the “country of loneliness (*kodoku no kuni*)” where one-third of the population lived alone and 32,000 died at home alone. According to Allison (2019, p. 346), “[b]eing alone –literally, psychically, socially –is the new human condition for Japan/ese in the 21st century”. In such a situation, the Japanese youth found themselves in an extremely precarious position, with neither material with which to live nor social relations that allowed them to have a sense of belonging.

Allison’s analysis shows how the highly individualised lifestyle in Japan, combined with the collapse of the welfare system, has produced what she calls “the social precarity”. However, there is another factor that draws a more complicated picture from which Dameren emerged. It was not always the case that the precariat youths were passively de-socialised. Some of them actively broke away from the society ordered by what Nakane (1972) calls “the vertical principle”.¹³

In this section, I discuss how Dameren appeared on the scene of Japanese activism, reclaiming the autonomous self. In doing so, they entered into conflict not only with the dominant middle-class lifestyle imposed by society, but also leftist activism, which had suppressed individuals in favour of ideology. In order to understand this aspect, the self-destructive failure of the New Left movement of the 1960s and the 1970s in Japan as well as the legacy of the non-sectarian student movement must be taken into account.

¹² According to Takeyama (2010), it was the Koizumi government (2001-2006) who strongly emphasised the ideology of self-responsibility (*jikosekinin*) in its attempt at revitalising the national economy by neoliberal reforms and promoting an entrepreneurial spirit.

¹³ Concerning the hierarchical and closed nature of Japanese society, see also Nishikawa (2020), Rohlen (1989), and Takayoshi and Doi (2008).

The New Left movement in Japan, which confronted the orthodoxy of the Japanese Communist Party, had its heyday during the 1960s (see Ando, 2013; Andrews, 2016; Kuriyama, 1973; Igarashi, 2007; McCormack, 1971; Schieder, 2014; Walker, 2020). However, it is said that the New Left movement ended with a self-destructive, internal struggle known as violent sectarian infighting (*uchigeba*) amongst sectarian factions (*toba*).¹⁴ The internal struggles involved extremely violent and sometimes torturous acts, resulting in “the death of over a hundred people” over the years (Cassegård, 2013, p. 35; see also Ando, 2013; Murata, 1980). By doing so, the sectarian movement lost public support and severely traumatised the radical movement itself. Since then, nihilistic individualism has overflowed in society, opening the so-called “age of apathy” while economic growth legitimised the conservative and bureaucratic system. Cynical individualism intensified even more with the arrival of a glamorous consumer society during the bubble period.¹⁵

What scholars call the “post New Left movement” (Kohso, 2006), “freeter activism” (Cassegård, 2013), or the “new cultural movement” (Mōri, 2013) began to appear in the late 1980s, albeit on a small scale, against this backdrop.¹⁶ Akino-Arashi and Dameren were the two most significant cases in Tokyo.¹⁷ Two historical factors simultaneously took place that are worth mentioning because they were influential in relation to the emergence of the new movement and its sensibilities.

¹⁴ As a combination of the Japanese word *uchi* (internal) and the German word *Gewalt* (force), *uchigeba* refers to the violent fighting between radical sects. According to Murata (1980), the total number of *uchigeba*-related deaths ran up to eighty by 1980.

¹⁵ In this context, many Japanese critical thinkers expressed a sense of relief when the bubble economy burst and thus, the so-called Japanese model collapsed. For them, the glamorous period of the bubble in the 1980s was the “void of critical thought and oppositional politics” (Kohso, 2006), in which they “felt almost suffocated” (Karatani, 1997).

¹⁶ Cassegård (2013) and Mōri (2013) also analyse the new form of movement. Calling it “freeter activism”, Cassegård sees it as an attempt to overcome the traumatic experience of the New Left, yet still within the radical legacy. Mōri (2012) calls it a “new cultural movement” and emphasises a discontinuity.

¹⁷ Akino-Arashi (The Storm of Autumn) (1987-1991) was a group that formed to protest against the emperor system, in which there were no citizens but “subjects (*shinmin*)” to be ruled (see Titus, 1980). Declaring themselves the “National Joint Struggle of Individuals”, members of Akino-Arashi chose the pedestrian mall (*bokosha tengoku*, often abbreviated as *bokoten*) of Harajuku and the Yoyogi Park as the space of struggle and did punk gigs and performances against the emperor system. They also held what was termed “the Speakers’ Corner”, letting anybody speak about anything. What they did was, obviously, “having a different groove (*nori*) from the leftists at the time” as Higuchi points out (2009, p. 125). It attracted not only freeters but also “delinquents, hooligans, scum, runaway girls, extremists, or in other words all lawless fellows”, who became a part of the movement (Mitsu, 1995, p. 84). “The majority of members were freeters rather than students”, according to Kashima (29 December 2019).

The first is the existence of non-sectarian student activism. More specifically, the open and egalitarian movement existed even during the age of apathy under the vague umbrella of the “non-sectarian radical” movement as the sociologist Sakai Takashi (2020) states. Abe, who engaged in the non-sectarian student movement in the 1970s, states that Zenkyōtō (Zengaku Kyōtō Kaigi, meaning “All Universities Joint Struggle”) (1968-1969) was the beginning of the non-sectarian student movement, which is an “anarchist movement” (December 15, 2019).¹⁸ Yamamoto Yoshitaka (2017), who was the representative of the Tokyo University of Zenkyōtō, explains the organisational principle of the Tokyo University Zenkyōtō as follows:

There is neither control nor coercion by an organisation. There is neither guidance nor representatives. Each individual struggles through their own responsibility while building solidarity with other individuals, horizontally. (...) Let even those who have complaint or doubts in; Let them in and make discussions inside; do thorough discussions. This was the policy. (Yoshitaka, 2017, pp. 91 -133)

As Zenkyōtō lost its momentum, the sectarian organisations began to dominate Japan’s suffocated social movement scene. However, the non-sectarian movement remained on campus. Sakai (2020) explains, for example, how the non-sectarian students created alternative space on campus in the 1980s.¹⁹ Based on his own experience of the non-sectarian radical movement, Sakai (2021) defines “non-sectarian radical” as an organisational principle “to avoid bringing hierarchy into the movement”. The non-sectarian movement was confined within the issue of student self-rule (*gakusei jichi*) of the campus because of violent interventions of sectarian organisations.²⁰

The second factor is a social change. As I discussed above, the Japanese welfare state began to crumble in the late 1980s. The so-called “wild children” appeared on the streets, demonstrating and dismantling families and classes, as the first symptom of it (Arai, 2006; see also Driscoll, 2007; Kawanishi, 2004). At the same time, neoliberal restructuring of the university began, (see Karatani, 2021; Sakai, 2020). As Kashima (29 December 2019), a former member of Akino-Arashi, notes, some non-sectarian student activists began to leave the university:

¹⁸ Zenkyōtō was organised as a mass student movement during the 1968–69 Japanese university protests. In disputes, students were particularly concerned with tuition fees, university management corruption, and their use of violent guards; see Muto (2009), Tsuzuki (1970), and Yasko (1997).

¹⁹ I will discuss how the non-sectarian student movement produced alternative space on campus in Chapter 6.

²⁰ According to Mukai (16 December 2019), who engaged in the student union in the early 1990s, non-sectarian students could not organise any political actions for an issue that sectarian factions were involved with. “They will come to attack you physically regardless of what the issue was, because they believe you were not supposed to do as you please in their territory”.

Around the time, the state started to intervene and control universities rigorously, while sectarian factions had violently suppressed non-sectarian activists. Most students were indifferent to the social movement. The student movement lost its presence in universities. (...) In such a situation, many non-sectarian student activists could not find any place to engage in activism in the university. They could not consider the university as space they belong to. Symbolically speaking, we can say that they came out to the streets to make a “square”, newly, when the square of student self-rule was disappearing in the universities. I was one of them.

Against this backdrop, Dameren was formed by the non-sectarian students who decided to live as freeters upon leaving universities. They reclaimed the autonomous self against an oppressive society, especially by way of conflict with what Dasgupta (2003) calls the “world of the salaryman”, as I detail below.

- **Forming Dameren against the world of salarymen**

Pepe and Kami, founders of Dameren, attended university at the zenith of the bubble economy. Most of the students were apolitical, including Kami, while the shrunken student movements generally suffered from an oppressive hegemony established by sectarian groups. After graduation, Kami was hired by a major corporation. “In those days, everybody became salaried workers quite effortlessly”, Kami (12 December 2018) said. However, he quit the job after 10 months because he felt like he was “living for the company”. Then Kami began to visit the university to hang around with Pepe “because everybody was working except for Pepe, who still attended the university”.

Pepe and Kami founded Dameren because they wanted to keep engaging in activism outside of the school. They wanted to form a movement different from either an old-style student movement or the civil movement, which focused on specific issues to reform. Kami (ibid.) said:

I wanted to keep doing the non-sectarian student movement type stuff. Well, a movement with a free groove (*nori*) or done in jest (*huzake*)? (...) I did not want to work. I decided to live as a freeter. I thus imagined activism that was freeter-like or a movement with the groove to live freely. Well, those who joined serious activism often said that Dameren was not a social movement, though. (laugh)

What Dameren did was mainly gathering and talking under the slogan “Let’s mingle (*kōryūshiyō*)!”. The topics of conversation were about how they were terrible for everything: having no decent job, no money, no talent, no sex appeal, etc. In doing so, Dameren did not attempt to overcome the problematic situation. Instead, they just talked about it and questioned what was wrong with living as a *dame* (a good-for-nothing).

From the perspective of the traditional leftist movement, Dameren was seen as apolitical, if not nonsensical. However, as scholars point out, Dameren revitalised the suffocating Japanese activist scene in unique ways (Cassergård, 2013; Kohso, 2006; Mōri, 2013). First, Dameren distinguished themselves from the dogmatism of the sectarian movement by exerting an aspect of culture, nonsense, humour, or “jest” – to use Kami’s word – in the activist scene in Tokyo. Second, they invented languages and cultural forms for freeters to express themselves to oppose capitalist work ethics. Finally, they actively chose to be good-for-nothings and experimented with how good-for-nothings could live. In doing so, they naturally strengthened what Graeber (2011) calls “communism” in their daily lives by sharing space and resources as well as restoring the sense of community in which precarious beings cared for each other beyond the boundary of the family unit, about which I will discuss later in this chapter.

Yet the most significant motivation – sensibility – which informed Dameren was not initially the desire for the reconstruction of a community. On the contrary, what the founders of Dameren wanted to do was reclaim the autonomy of self against the oppressive society. The following excerpt demonstrates this aspect:

Let’s say you are going to get a job. But you would rather get a job on your own, choosing between life with a job and life without a job. That is a more exciting life than getting a job just because you were set to do so regardless. (To be clear, I am not arguing that you should not get a job.) We can say that not only about employment but also for anything in our life. Aren’t we losing our power of imagination and the experimental spirit, as our lives are in reality greatly limited by concerns such as falling into the category of a good-for-nothing without having a good distinction (*baku*) or an accomplishment (*udatsu*)? How empty is our life if we try to “live just like others” or “make ourselves superior to others”. We have only one life to live, so neither the “motherland” nor an accomplishment worth sacrificing our dear life. Let us throw away our pursuit of distinction. And let’s question whatever we take for granted. Any unknown event will take place only when we choose such a way of life. (Dameren, 1999, pp. 4-5)

Post-war Japan has been constructed as what Kimoto (1995) calls a “family corporate system” based on a highly institutionalised and gendered division (see Chapter 4). Salarymen have represented ordinary working-aged men while the media and state have promoted full-time housewives (*sengyōshufu*) as an ideal and the most fruitful job for women. Wage workers symbolised the model of a normative lifestyle, if not an implicit responsibility as a full member of Japanese society. Without any doubt, “people earnestly study to get a job, work to earn money to get married, buy a house, and pay back loans throughout one’s life because everybody is supposed to do so”, as Kami (12 December 2018) expresses it. In this context, Dameren problematised the standardised lifestyle and the reasons why many people took it for granted. The reason, they argued, was conformity. People

had a real fear and anxiety of being different from others, being left behind, and thus being excluded from society.



Figure.5.1. The book cover of Dameren Presents How to Live Without Working? (Kaminaga & Hasegawa, 2000)



Figure.5.2. The book cover of Dameren Manifest (Dameren, 1999)

The issue of “the guys hanging around during daytime on weekdays”, which Dameren had tackled, vividly reflects such an atmosphere. “The guys hanging around during daytime on weekdays” is a frequently used phrase in Japan. As Tanaka (2016), a researcher of studies of masculinity, points out, this expression not only dismissively remarks on unemployed males but also implies a sense of distrust. “A guy, who is supposed to be in between university graduation and retirement, is considered suspicious only due to the reason that he is wandering around in the town during the daytime on weekdays” (Tanaka, *ibid.*). Simply put, “the guys hanging around during daytime on weekdays” is the clearest example of *dame* defined by the Japanese society that has created severely gendered pressure around work and home. In this context, Dameren called for people to liberate their own life from the suppressing social atmosphere. In their attempt to reclaim their own life by

questioning the predetermined mode of life, they could not help but focus on the issue of work.²¹ In other words, work was the central strategic terrain of Dameren's value struggle to contest what was considered "normal (*butsu*)" in the society of salarymen:

Everyone is drawn into the vortex of employment. Everyone wants to belong to and feels anxious about being unattached. That is why everyone is employed. We thought that it would be good to create something like "Dameren". (Kami, in Ukai et al., 1997, p. 304)

5.1.2. The voluntary poor against the privatised house/home: The case of Seoul and Bin-Zib

(1) The formation of the urban precariat in the real estate class society

Unlike Dameren, who started their movement by directly confronting work ethics embedded in Japanese society, Bin-Zib residents put significant time and effort into contesting the meaning of a home, family, and housing in capitalist society. It was mainly because the communal experiment had begun by opening the founders' living space, i.e., home. The fact that they began their experiment with their rented apartment home reflects the socio-economic context in which "[r]ental housing is at the crux of financial class divisions ... between those who have money capital and those who do not" (Song, 2014, p. 3). In order to understand the significance of their movement, I will first briefly clarify Korea's socio-economic context.

While Korea was one of the poorest countries in the world in the 1950s, by the year 2007, per capita gross national income (GNI) in Korea hit 22,000 USD, ranking it eleventh in the world (Statistics Korea, 2020). This seemingly miraculous economic development was not only based on the extensive exploitation of labourers but also real estate speculation (Pak & Jo, 2002; Yu et al., 2011). During the 1960s and 1970s, the military government provided various incentives, including information on land development, for conglomerates (*chaebol*). Backed by the government, conglomerates raised funds with their land reserves as collateral while the government manipulated the Korean real estate market through building infrastructures (Yu et al., 2011). From 1974 to 1987, businesses that invested in the land gained, on average, 1,004% profits, while businesses that invested in production gained 331% profits (Bae, 1992 cited in J. Kang, 2006). As a result, conglomerates tended to invest in land rather than facilities. Real estate has and continues to constitute a crucial part of their assets.

²¹ The first formal event of Dameren in 1993 was "a symposium about the employment problem; *Dame* is the possibility!".

While the military government controlled the interest rates to the advantage of the industrial sector, housing became regarded as “a superior investment compared to financial savings” (J. Kim, 2013, p. 339). The rental housing system, called the key-money (*jeonse*) system, played a crucial role in encouraging not only the middle class and the working class but also the urban poor to conduct financial practices to increase household assets. The key-money system is a yearly or biannual housing lease contract, which is unique in Korea, where there was no established system of financing (or mortgages) in the housing sector (J. Kim, 2013; Shin, 2008; Sohn, 2008). In need of a lump-sum of money to access housing, people “transform[ed] the housing rental system into a credit system” (Song, 2014, p. 49). A tenant deposits a lump sum of cash, typically from 50% to 80% of the property value, at the beginning of the contract. The deposited key-money is refunded when the tenant moves out but without interest. In other words, the interest generated from the key-money during the contract is taken in place of monthly rent. By the end of the 2000s, the key-money was calculated at 12% interest per year.²²

As housing prices constantly soared, the key-money worked as a significant source of funds for landlords to invest, guaranteeing a high rate of profit (Shin, 2008). Tenants also favoured the key-money systems, which gave them an opportunity to save. The key-money system, however, not only facilitated real estate speculation but also imposed great pain on those who did not have access to a large sum of money. Living conditions of housing outside of the key-money system had historically been degraded, such as illegal cheap boarding houses, in many cases without adequate water supply, ventilation, or garbage disposal (Ha, 2002). Moreover, as Song (2014) points out, the key-money system and the informal financial practices around housing had formed “sedimented financialisation” even before the official arrival of the globalised process of financialisation. Korean people had taken financial practices, which was symbolised as an attitude of seeking profits from interest making, for granted (see also Chapter 4).

The civil uprisings continued in the 1980s, contesting the military dictatorship and demanding better working conditions for labourers (J. Kim, 2016). The government advanced various financial methods to mollify the dissatisfaction of the masses. Consumer loans were expanded by issuing

²² A contract called “*joenmwolse*” is a mixed form of contract with key-money and monthly rent. A tenant does not pay the full key-money deposit but deposits a part of key-money while paying monthly rent to fill the gap (J. Kim, 2013, p. 338). For example, a 200,000 USD key-money deposit can be transferred into a 100,000 USD key-money deposit and 1,000 USD monthly rent. The Housing Lease Protection Act limits the conversion rate for key-money to monthly rent, but the actual rate is decided between a tenant and a landlord.

credit cards, increasing the limit for cash advances, and promoting housing mortgages (Hong, 2017; Ronald & Kyung, 2013). Although financial deregulation ignited the currency crisis, the strategy effectively worked on the masses who wanted to enter the middle class by purchasing their own homes. Then, the currency crisis of 1997 hit the country. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) took steps to reshape the national economy, imposing further financial deregulation and corporate restructuring.²³

Confronting the severe economic crisis, the Kim Dae-jung government (1998-2003) installed “Productive Welfarism”, improving the public welfare system by including medical insurance, a national pension system, industrial accident compensation insurance, and unemployment benefits, especially under the circumstance in which a large number of unemployed and temporary workers were created (Lee, 2004; Song, 2003). However, the effects of this expansion of welfare in Korea and its form in the society was quite distinct from those of the welfare in “advanced” countries during the Fordist era (see Jessop, 1991; Marshall, 1965). As noted by various studies, this so-called productive welfare operated as a new neoliberal governmental technology that sought to improve productivity and minimise welfare costs (Kwon, 2005; Peng, 2012; Song, 2003). By distinguishing the citizens deserving welfare from the others, by reproducing dualistic gender/sex paradigms, and by qualifying youth as human capital and providing only temporary, irregular employment, the government made the realm of social security a site for implementing neoliberal policies as Song (2003) discusses.

While the ideology of neoliberalism took root in Korea, the metropolis of Seoul was submitted to its own restructuring, deepening the gap between the rich and the poor in what Sohn (2009) calls “the real estate class society”. The so-called Project-Financing (PF) policy was adopted in 2000 to enable financial institutions to join more directly in the process of redevelopment by issuing various derivative securities.²⁴ The triad of government, construction companies, and speculative investors/financial institutions attempted to build luxury mansions and business centres after forcing them out (Hong, 2009). The view of real estate has changed from a tangible asset to a financial asset, according to Lee (2011). Various financial activities became core skills for individuals. Books about financial and real estate investments became bestsellers while the dominant discourse of the era

²³ If the decades of the military dictatorship (1961-1987) had constructed an ideal infrastructure for the growth of domestic capital, the IMF prepared the ground for a second round of exploitation by global capital, further driving the flexibilisation of the Korean labour force. The unemployment rate was 2.05% in 1996 but rose to 6.96% in 1998 (The World Bank, 2008).

²⁴ The contribution made by real estate development to Korea’s GNP was 19.2% between 1999 and 2009, which was the highest of any OECD country (Hong, 2009, p. 15).

urged the struggling population to pursue “self-development (*jagigaebal*)” and by acquiring literacy of “financial-technology (*jae-tekni*)” (see Kim, 2020).

Under such circumstances, the young generation appeared to be the most precarious group, confronting a highly unsustainable work status as well as a vulnerable residential situation. The residential space for those who did not have sufficient key-money deposits was extremely vulnerable. Before the 1990s, lower-income groups in Seoul could count on fairly durable local communities and social relationships in shacktowns of old neighbourhoods, albeit with deteriorating living conditions. However, the residential space for the urban poor became isolated and fragmented, as the coinage “*jiokgo* (the pain of hell)” demonstrates.²⁵ The poor living in such conditions were not only deprived of their basic economic needs but also of a sense of community, whether familial, societal, cultural, or political (Lee, 2006).

Against this backdrop, the founders of Bin-Zib communised their key-money deposits to rent a decent house to start their experiment and invited others to join them. While the word *jiokgo* (the pain of hell) appeared relatively recently, these vulnerable residencies had always been where the urban poor youth, including the founders of Bin-Zib themselves, lived. In other words, housing was the most urgent issue for the poor youth to deal with and the only possible space for them to use for any alternative purpose. Choosing a home as a place of movement, participants of Bin-Zib could not help but interrogate the meaning of a home, family, and housing in capitalist society. The issue of a community pushed their contemplation even further, as I address below.

(2) Making an alternative home without forming a closed community

Bin-Zib founders opened their home to strangers to form a kind of lifestyle movement in which they could “reduce working time as much as possible” (Salgu, 8 June 2018). At the same time, however,

²⁵ “*jiokgo* (the pain of hell)” refers to the vulnerable residence where precarious Korean youth live. This word is a pun, literally meaning ‘the pain of hell’, while its pronunciation combines the first syllable of *jibabang* (a room that is half underground), *oktapbang* (a room at the rooftop of a building), and *gosimwon*. A *gosimwon* was initially a residential complex for people going through an intensive preparation period for state examinations. In the 70s and 80s, many university students from low-income families dedicated as much as 3 to 4 years to prepare for the exam to achieve upward social mobility. *Gosimwon* offered them the cheapest residency isolated from the outside world. Since the 1990s, *gosimwon* has been turned into a low-cost residential choice for low-income urban populations such as precarious workers, including migrant workers, the disabled, welfare recipients, and others. As a result, the number of *gosimwon* complexes in Seoul jumped from 811 in 2001 to 2814 in 2006 (Lee, 2006). All three symbolised the most precarious forms of residency for those who do not have enough lump-sum money.

the founders and early residents of Bin-Zib rejected the idea of forming a community (*gongdongche*), as the following excerpt shows:

Oddly enough, when people gather together around a certain common denominator, all of a sudden, differences become a problem. A border, a boundary between inside and outside the community, appears, and qualifications are required to enter the community. To unite many different people and act under an identical value, the community requires something that is almost religious. Consequently, everyone becomes similar to each other. I thought that was a fundamental problem of communities. Inversely, I thought, why don't we form an extremely open community that is open to all in its fundamental operations? Anyone can come and leave anytime she wants. And, that fact itself becomes a resource and strength of the community. That's what I imagined. (Ji'eum, interview by O. Kim, 2009)

Considering other alternative movements that had emerged in the society, Bin-Zib's apparent repulsion against the concept of community was unique, as I have discussed elsewhere (Han, 2015), and which is worth briefly explaining here. The student movement with political organisations as its centre played a pivotal role in democratising Korean society (Kim, 1996; Choi, 2003; Choi, 2009; Seo, 1997). With the end of the military regime in 1987, the civil movement expanded. We must note that various community movements were led by the age group later known as the "386-generation".²⁶ The 386-generation, the icon of Korean democratisation, had provided a counterforce during the military regime. Culturally, however, they had been tied to older sensibilities based on traditional values of community and patriarchy (H. Kim, 2009; Sim, 2010).

It was in the 1990s when Korean society witnessed the emergence of a new generation who claimed to act according to individuals' desires (Lee, 2010; Cho, 2015; Yi, 2010). The so-called New Generation or Generation X was often characterised as the flag-bearer of a consumerist culture (see Yi, 2010). However, Generation X showed the potential to be a new resistant subjectivity, particularly because of their sensitivities to questions of gender and an egalitarian tendency influenced by the cultural liberalisation of the society and the newly-appeared digital culture (Cho, 2015; Sim, 2010). The student movement shrunk significantly during the 1990s, but those who engaged in it at that time were attentive to various lifestyle-based issues and more interactive and egalitarian forms of communication (Choi, 2009).

Another crucial fact is that Generation X experienced university as an autonomous space. The neoliberal restructuring of the university began in the mid-1990s, enhancing the entrepreneurial

²⁶ 386 signifies those in their 30s (in the 1990s), fighting against the Korean military regime while they were students in the 1980s, and who were born in the 1960s.

characteristics of the universities.²⁷ Many private universities began to enact campus development projects both inside and outside their campus to make profits, collaborating with government-linked companies and conglomerate groups (see Oh, 2021). This process obviously transformed the spatial arrangement of the university. While various spaces autonomously used by students were eliminated, campus space turned into shopping malls, with various franchise shops. Those of Generation X attended university before the spatial transformation was complete. Many activists, who belonged to Generation X, including Bin-Zib's initiators, mentioned their experiences with space, such as how much they enjoyed the life around student society rooms where drinking parties were held almost every day. Some of them even lived in school for years.

Since the early 2000s, a new kind of activist scene emerged in Seoul, with those who belonged to Generation X as the main agents, and which demonstrated different sensibilities from the traditional leftist movement. Cultural Action (*Munmhayeondae*), Anaclan (Korean Anarchist Network), and Bin-Zib would be significant examples of this trend.²⁸ The collective transformation of cultural sensibilities symbolised by Generation X was interconnected with the innovative methods and technologies of networked communication (see Kim & Jo, 2017; Sim, 2010). Many activists engaged in this new trend of the movement, including the earlier residents of Bin-Zib, got to know each other in the early 2000s. It was through an internet server/networking platform that supported a blogosphere named Jinbo (progressive) Blog, which was part of an independent Internet service developed by activists. Most Jinbo bloggers were interested in social movements and activism, yet how they engaged in the movement was quite different from older leftists in Korea (Min, 2002). Using the Jinbo blog as a hub, Jinbo bloggers organised many spontaneous direct actions, created autonomous spaces, and acted in solidarity with various struggles based on networked individuals rather than organisations.

²⁷ Although the concept of entrepreneurial universities emerged in Korea in the late 1990s, Oh's study shows how the entrepreneurial university has a long history in East Asia, especially in Korea where the private sector dominates higher education.

²⁸ Cultural Action (1999-present) pursues "politics of everyday life to create a society that embraces various cultural values", according to Seon-yeong, a member of the group (6 July 2018). The group carried out various direct actions during the 2000s at various sites of struggles. It was also the activists of Cultural Action who launched *Gongyuji*, as I discuss in Chapter 6. Anaclan (Korea Anarchist Network) was founded in 2000 by those who belonged to Generation X. According to Moona, one of the earliest members of Anaclan, they were "a bunch of punk kids and activists who were interested in the anti-globalisation movement and the anti-war movement, as well as anarchism" (7 July 2018). Starting with the Anti-Iraq War Movement in 2003, they actively participated in various scenes, such as the migrant workers' movement, the peace movement, and the anti-military movement while trying to revitalise the anarchist movement scene, which had been annihilated in the country after the Korean War.



Figure 5.3. Haebangchon in Seoul (Source: Wikipedia; marked by the author)

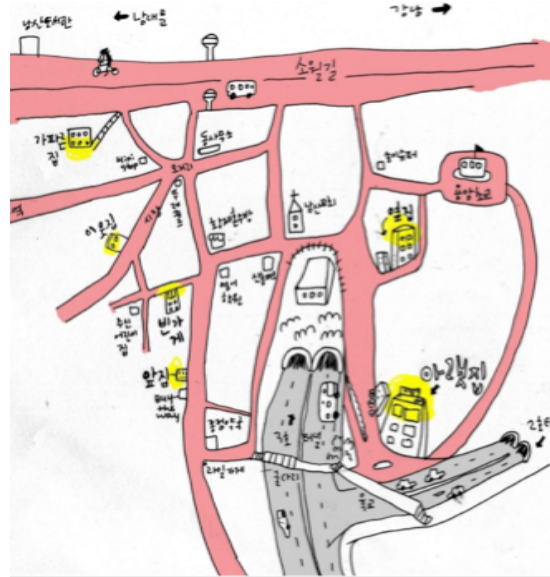


Figure 5.4. The map of Bin-Zibs in Haebangchon illustrated by a Bin-Zib resident in 2010 (Source: Bin-Zib)

To sum up, the formation of Bin-Zib reflects the collective transformation of cultural sensibilities at the time. The founding residents of Bin-Zib were repulsed by the hierarchical atmosphere tied to traditional community values. Based on this repulsion, they attempted to form a movement that differed not only from the traditional leftist movement built around a political ideology, but also from the community-based lifestyle movement. When the initiators of Bin-Zib began to think about doing a communal experiment, one of them posted a proposal on the Jinbo blog. Many bloggers expressed interest, adding ideas, while some of them joined. The name Bin-Zib (Empty/Guests House), which was chosen by a vote, declares two things. First, anyone could freely come and go because Bin-Zib is just an empty house for guests. Second, nobody could claim ownership or privilege in Bin-Zib because everyone, no matter how long the person has lived there, is just a guest. In doing so, the name clearly expresses the founding members' wish to secure a radical openness and an egalitarian attitude in their experiment.

What should be pointed out is that the way people lived in Bin-Zib did not resemble life in normal shared houses where individuals shared common areas while having private space based on the rent each person paid. Bin-Zib residents not only shared private space with strangers, but also invited them to partake in a culture in which people loosely shared various resources with others without precise calculation, just as one would with their family members. *Jib* (a house/home) and family could not help but be something Bin-Zib residents had to constantly struggle with.

5.2. Value struggle of Dameren and Bin-Zib in the heart of the capitalist city

5.2.1. Dameren's value struggle against the Japanese model of capitalism

(1) Producing the heterogeneous urban by living free/idle time

According to *Dameren Manifest* (Dameren, 1999), “*dame* = the general term to refer to those who would be called ‘a *dame* (useless/pathetic) bum’ by family, school, company, and the state” (p. 7). Dameren made it clear that it is the dominant society that frames certain conditions as *dame* while promoting the so-called “sound” (*matonmona*) or “normal” (*butsūna*) lifestyle, which has three strongly typified components: “work” (*shigoto*), “romantic relationships” (*renai*), and “family” (*keazoku*). Dameren had an odd but acute anti-authoritarian sensibility. They recognised that the normative Japanese lifestyle was just based on a particular type of worker and his family that served the Japanese capitalist system and stigmatised those who broke away from the track as *dame* (good-for-nothings). If you lack particular skills, attitudes, or abilities to be a part of the system, you are called *dame*. It goes without saying that unemployment would be the utmost *dame*.

Dameren contested the capitalist value system by calling themselves *dame*. In doing so, Dameren's value struggle mainly targeted capitalist time. Scholars have discussed how modern capitalism was launched together with the invention of a specific perception of time and practices around it (see Konings, 2018; Lotz, 2014; Thompson, 1967). As I discussed in Chapter 2, the capitalist value system operates based on the premise that value is quantifiable, exchangeable, and accumulable. In this value system, value is the incarnation of labour, i.e., the activities employed in the profit-making process, while time appears as the standard to measure value.²⁹ Simply put, value, labour, money, and time appear to be identical.

More importantly, time is not just money as the simple expression of value but “the substance of money as capital” (Lazzarato, 2012). When Franklin (1748) preached, “time is money”, he already made it clear that time is money which “can beget money, and its offspring can beget more, and so on”. If you idle a day without working, it does not just mean the loss of wages for the day. It means that you fall behind in this competition of generating money (see also Kuriyama, 2002). Here, the conception of time is a secular and linear one “in which humanity saw itself as making its own temporality, increasingly understanding present practices as having emerged out of a past and as

²⁹ Marx (1976) analyses how value is measured by so-called “socially necessary labour time” and represented by units of money through capitalist production and exchange.

shaping a contingent future” (Konings, 2018, chapter 6, para 4). Time shows up not only as capital itself but also as strong moral pressure, producing subjectivities who invest their present time for a better future (Lotz, 2014).

In this context, Dameren contested this capitalist time, above all, by refusing employment and reclaiming idle time. Concurrently, Dameren produced a language and discourse to attack the capitalist notion of time in which one should invest his own present in order to gain a better future. The following excerpt is noteworthy in this regard:³⁰

Q1. I am a 23-year-old freeter. However, this is just life in disguise for me. I have a plan to be famous in 5 years with my band! Give me some comments on it!

Pepe: Remember (speaking to Kami)? When you were working at a department store, you told me, “Working at a department store is a disguise for me. My real job is a poet”. This person reminded me of you.

Kami: What? Did I say such a lame thing? How shameful (laugh). **Well, I would say** (to the questioner), **first, please accept the fact that the plan is impossible** (laugh).

Pepe: There is a possibility that this person has talent. However..., well... I don’t think it is always harmful to “have a dream”, but he would be one of the hundred amongst those who say this. I guess this person would not be the one.

(...)

Kami: When it comes to ‘the ambitious type,’³¹ they tend to have a prospect of success. They hope to turn things around with a final home run because they don’t want to accept their current *dame* situation (smile). Of course, it is impossible. Therefore, they develop a complication faced by the gap between the desired state and reality (smile). **How come such a prospect is the only thing that occurs to one’s mind? This is what is really tough, just a movement-like perspective.** (Kaminaga and Hasegawa, 2000, pp.151-154, emphasis in original)

In the above excerpt, the correspondent and Pepe/Kami perceive time in a totally different manner. The correspondent says that his present life is “a life in disguise (*kari*)”. The Japanese word, *kari*, means “temporary”, “interim”, “fictitious”, or “in disguise”. In other words, he believes that his ideal

³⁰ The excerpt is from *Dameren Presents How to Live Without Working?* (Kaminaga & Hasegawa, 2000). The book is composed of various sets of Q&As. Pepe and Kami formulated the questions based on the frequent topics appearing in their daily lives and activities.

³¹ “The ambitious type (*yabō kei*)” refers to those pursuing or having a dream to be successful. Dameren invented an array of vocabulary to describe different subjectivities and attitudes within Dameren. See footnote 36.

life will be realised in the future. The questioner waits for a possibility coming in the future while denying his own present. In his time, his present becomes fictitious. Kami calls this kind of attitude “a prospect” and affirms that it is “impossible”. It is not that Pepe and Kami disregard the correspondent’s talent or ability. They try to problematise “a prospect”, which belongs to the time of *possibility* in a Deleuzian sense. A possibility is “an alternative form of present reality that has not yet been ‘realised’” (Linstead & Thanem, 2007). From Dameren’s perspective, the fact that everyone clings to the time of “a prospect” is the real problem that makes life tough. The same goes for a movement that suppresses the present for a better future in its linear history of progress.

On the other hand, Dameren celebrates the joy of the life of free/idle time (*hima*) without working. The Japanese term *hima* means “free time”, “spare time”, or “leave of absence” as a noun. In a society where a person is supposed to work, idle time appears to be harmful unless it is a “leisure time” for those who work hard (see Thomson, 1967). In this context, Dameren reevaluate idle time. First, for Dameren, having idle time is an act of suspending the rule of society.

Well, even in the Dameren neighbourhood, some people got hired soon. They say it was because they felt bored with the idle time of daytime on weekdays. They also say that, in the idle time, they began to contemplate stuff such as what they should do with life or how to deal with practical issues, which made them feel bitter. However, I believe that having such contemplations are great. Although my mother always says, “Hey, you need to stop contemplating such things” (laugh), **isn’t it the authentic taste of life to mull this and that over?** (laugh) I would say that those who are employed are inclined to think of nothing. They never ponder whether something is good or bad or ‘boring’ only because they are employed. (Kami, in Kaminaga and Hasegawa, 2000, p. 118, **emphasis in original**)

In the above excerpt, Kami criticises those who do not think of their own life, those who just accept the rule of society without any doubt. Pepe states that they founded Dameren because they “hope[d] to have a life in which we can savour what we want to do and what we don’t want to do” (Pepe, in Ukai et al., 1997, p. 313). In this context, idle time refers to the time to ponder over things considered natural according to the grammar of society.

Second, idle time is the time of creating values, here and now, freely, outside of the capitalist value system. Pepe describes idle time as time for “reading, watching movies, listening to music or losing oneself in thought, looking at grass moving in the wind or listening to raindrops falling” (cited in Cassegård, 2014, p. 50). According to Kami’s advice on how to enjoy idle time, “you can make some humble events based on your own interest, publish an independent zine, or create/engage in a movement using idle time. It would be fun” (Kaminaga & Hasegawa, 2000, pp. 118-119). In other words, idle time refers to the time for various autonomous activities, or what Gorz (1989) calls

“work-for-oneself”, from listening to raindrops falling to creating a movement. Idle time produces various incommensurable use values with incredibly different intensities and densities. Yet, these are considered inactive or idle time because they are not valorised in the money form.

The important thing is that Dameren’s value struggle over idle time was not for valorising the idle time in money form. On the contrary, Dameren criticised the discourse of work as the means of “self-fulfilment” as well as what they called “a strategy of making jobs by oneself” (Kaninaga & Hasegawa, 2000). For example, in 1998, Dameren had a chance to meet members of the National Unemployed Regiment (*Jeon’guk Baeksu Yeondae*, NUR) coming from Korea.³² NUR is an NPO (founded in 1998) to solve the issue of unemployed youth in Korea. NUR reported about the encounter with Dameren in a Korean newspaper, stating, “The NUR expedition and Dameren, the Japanese counterpart of the unemployed (*baeksu*) association, assured our will to overcome unemployment, shouting <the world without the unemployed!>” (NUR, 2004). Dameren also provided a commentary about this encounter in their book as follows (Kaminaga & Hasegawa, 2000, p. 144):

Pepe: When it comes to creating jobs, the unemployed people from Korea considered it quite positively.

Kami: I think such a perspective is not that good.

Pepe: You are not company-oriented (laugh). But, you know, we are making a book like this. This also can be an act of producing profits, I guess.

Kami: That is true.

The above quote clearly shows how Dameren and NUR differed in their perspective. NUR tried to solve the issue of unemployment by creating jobs.³³ On the contrary, for Dameren, the problem was not the lack of jobs but the reality that constantly captured their activities in the profit-making process.

Dameren’s refusal of work clearly aimed at the capitalist value system, which operates in endless profit-making processes. For Dameren, idle time was great not only because it presented autonomous time for oneself but also autonomous time that helped people break away from the

³² *Baeksu* (a white hand) is a slang meaning the unemployed.

³³ NUR belongs to the time of the “prospect” as it is explained above. In an interview, the representative of NUR says, “Hey, all the *baeksu* (unemployed) in the country! Please be a *baeksu* who has a dream, a *baeksu* who does one’s best! There are lots of jobs you can do. You don’t need to lower your sights to find them but widen your vision” (Ju, interviewed by Noh, 2012, Sep).

capitalist value system. In the book, Kami mentions that idle time can be a time for creating a movement. Here, the movement Kami mentions is obviously different from the movement that suppresses the present for a better future.³⁴ For Dameren, movement was all about thoroughly enjoying their present, and idle time was the very moment of joy through which they could create radically different values outside of the capitalist value system. As a time that does not belong to the linear time of telos, idle time breaks the time of capitalism through becoming by way of numerous virtualities in the present.

Wrapping up this section, I would like to briefly point out how Dameren's value struggle over idle time had actualised in a spatial form, producing a unique heterogeneous space in the city. Three factors created a synergy effect. First, Dameren organised what they called a "gathering" by utilising handmade posters and independent zines. Even the so-called "Dameren hotline" was set up at the end of 1997. "Kami used his telephone number for this purpose, now everybody would think it's crazy (laugh)", according to Pepe (14 December 2019). This is to say, for Dameren, "mingling" specifically meant gathering with different people. With the slogan "unlimited mingling", Dameren has widened the network without any screening or exclusion. "There is no use to gather only with the same kind of people", said Pepe (*ibid.*).

Second, the activities of Dameren were performed in a highly laid-back atmosphere. There was a Dameren gathering in mid-October 2020. When I asked a friend how it was, she answered as follows:

Well, it was planned to gather at 1 pm on a riverside. However, you know, everybody came very late. There was no particular activity like talking about some topic or anything. Everybody was just doing nothing (*daradara*), killing time, making a bonfire, or something like that. I left when it got dark because it was so cold. It was said that people stayed there until midnight, and those who missed the last train slept at Kakekomitei.³⁵ The next day, they drank again in front of the station from mid-day. You know, as always (Ha-pi, 2 November 2020).

³⁴ Shin, Zhao, and Koh's (2020) discussion on the notions of futurity and temporality embedded in Asian speculative urbanisation shows how the same idea around time has captured both the social movement and capitalistic development.

³⁵ Kakekomitei is the name of a pub-like alternative space in Kunitachi, a suburban city on Japan Railways' Chuo line in the western part of Tokyo. It is a part of the "Nantoka Neighbourhood", which I discuss in Chapter 6.



Figure 5.5. The year-end party of Dameren in 2017 where I accidentally joined. It was held in an event space run by Shirōtono-ran. (Source: Dameren Radio)

Her description captures the gist of the atmosphere of gatherings organised by Dameren. Even when they held a speaking event with a specific topic, the atmosphere was easy going and people digressed all the time, just like chatting over drinks. Mingling and talking, the two main activities of Dameren, in this context, are clearly “an antithesis of the society which promotes productive communication”, as Kami (Kaminaga & Hasegawa, 2000, p. 73) stated. A leftist critic, Ukai Satoshi (1997, p. 305), states that Dameren’s talk was “unique” as “it does not have any telos, different either from a therapy or a discussion which aims to find a consensus”.

Finally, as the urban poor, Dameren preferred to get together outside as long as the weather permitted. Parks, riversides, and streets were where they got together. In doing so, Dameren created a unique heterogeneous space in Tokyo. For example, Kosho (2006) reflects on the stifling atmosphere of Tokyo in the 1980s as follows:

I recall the air of the 1980s vividly, just because it feels so alien now: young people on the street looked extremely neat, wearing mostly black designer clothing with bobbed hair that was reminiscent of well-groomed Japanese children. They ardently enjoyed gourmet food, designer clothing, and high culture, while unhesitantly pursuing their careers. In big cities,

there were endless renovations of fancy stores, houses, hip clubs, and the like that offered stages for the urban elite.

Kohso's writing vividly demonstrates how open space, or space as commons, had shrunk in Tokyo, which had turned into a global city through a drastic spatial restructuring during the bubble era (see also Sand, 2013; Huang, 2004). In this context, the new form of movement reclaimed the streets in the 1990s, as discussed. The uniqueness of Dameren is that, in doing so, they did not organise political actions on the streets. Instead, they gathered and idled on the streets and, by doing so, demonstrated different existences and desires in society. The following quotes vividly show the foreignness that Dameren inserted in the homogeneous urban space in Tokyo:

I wanted to meet Dameren people one more time, but there was a bigger question, “why at this parking lot in Nakano?” Anyway, I joined with the question in my heart and encountered a group of incredibly weird people totaling around thirty... **It was a bizarre scene. What the fucking hell is this! I thought. Then, I got explanations like, “How about these kinds of people?” or “well, we are these kinds of folks” (laugh).** (Tamago in Dameren, 1999b, p. 28, **emphasis in original**)

(By gathering at parking lots or parks,) people feel free to join, and actually, incredible variety of people come, widening the gathering. It is not only about gathering but also the act of putting posters to announce gatherings on utility poles or walls that makes me excited with the feeling of touching and changing streets, you know. Like the feeling of doing something. (...) It is fun when I socialise with people who are way beyond my imagination. **When I run into a *hentai* (pervert, abnormal) who is really incomprehensible, I think, oops, how tiny am I!** (Hirai in Dameren, 1999b, pp. 40-1, **emphasis in original**).

(2) Caring heart/mind in the sinking society

While Dameren rejected what they called “the working and consuming culture” and encouraged people to be voluntary *dame*, in reality, many of those who engaged in Dameren tended to oscillate between the feeling of anxiety about the future and the joy of living the present as *dame* on various levels as a matter of course.³⁶ In this context, Dameren deployed two different self-definitions: Dameren as “a network of people who seek alternative ways of life --the association of alternatives” as well as Dameren as a gathering not to “develop a complication sickness of *dame* (*dame wo*

³⁶ Dameren jokingly categorised the engaged people as “the ecstasy faction (*kōkotsu ha*)” and “the anxiety faction (*juan ha*)”, based on how they felt about their lives of “mid-day on weekdays”. There were also terms like “the self-driven type (*shutai kei*)” referring to those who actively pursued a Dameren-like lifestyle, while the “mind/mental type (*kokoro kei*)” referred to those who had mental issues.

kojiraseru)”. The expression refers to the situation in which one’s mental state collapses due to social pressure and anxieties. For example, in a speaking event, Pepe said:

I was boggled at first. Wasn’t there some other way? At the same time, I wanted to avoid a mental collapse, at least. This was the very meaning of “not developing a complication sickness of *dame*”. I wish to express this aspect as much as possible. (Pepe, in Ukai et al., 1997, p.313)

These two definitions demonstrate how Dameren was in the middle of a value struggle both against the dominant society and within the group itself.

For Dameren, *dame* is the negation of what is counted as a score according to the grammar of the capitalist value system. This usage of the word *dame* felicitously corresponds to the origin of *dame*. As a terminology of the game of Go, *dame* in Japanese signifies a spot which neither plays a strategic role nor counts as a score in the game. The founders of Dameren attempted to radically appropriate the fact that *dame* was the name for social misfits in order to actively depart from society. If you do not care about the rule in the first place, living as an unemployed single over forty, for example, does not necessarily signify a negative value. Taking a step forward, *dame* can be the location from which you jump towards an “unaccountable way of life”, to use Pepe’s expression (13 October 2018), from a lifestyle that is forced by society. It may change the whole grammar of the game if more people take the leap. However, when people internalise the rule of the game, *dame* appears as the very reason for them to work hard not to drop out. “People don’t want to become a *dame* bum. Due to the fear of being left behind, most people cannot help but accept work as the default form of life” (Kami, 12 December 2018). To make it worse, those who judge themselves as *dame* from the perspective of the dominant ideology tend to undergo a collapse their mental state. *Dame* becomes a real issue.

Indeed, since around 1997, “those who had some serious mental issues had increased in Dameren to the level that they became the majority”, according to Kami (12 December 2018). Dameren’s demographic change reflected the social change of Japan during the 1990s.³⁷ Fukui (2012) points out that many newcomers had difficulties in mainstream society and thus considered Dameren as “a place to be” (*ibasho*). He continues to argue that this situation affected “the collective identity of Dameren”, leading to the decline of Dameren as “a social movement”. However, Fukui’s

³⁷ With the collapse of the Japanese model of the welfare state, many youths were forced to become freeters while the term completely lost its positive nuance. The sarin gas attack in the Tokyo subway and the great Hanshin earthquake in 1995 smashed the lingering aftertaste of the bubble. In such a situation, Japanese society faced with issues around the youth with keywords such as *hikikomori* (shut-in), NEET, the collapse of families, the collapse of classrooms, bullying (*ijime*), and paid dates (*enko*), on the top of the drastically increasing suicide rate (see Arai, 2000; Driscoll, 2007; Kawanishi, 2004).

interpretation overlooks the fact that Dameren was an attempt to form an open experiment to challenge not only the grammar of the dominant society but also the traditional leftist movement formed under an identical set of ideologies. In addition, active members tried to preserve the radical aspects of *dame* by preventing Dameren from becoming a shelter for social misfits.

Opening Dameren to those who had already complicated their conditions of *dame*, Dameren could not help but put more effort into issues of mental health and try to find a way in which they could deal with anxieties about the future. Dameren's talks about anxieties almost always led to the theme of social care, demonstrating the inseparable relationship between care and anxiety. For example, in *Dameren Manifest* (1999), Kikuike points out how anxieties come from a lack of care, which is fundamentally about relationships in which people depend on one another:³⁸

People tell me, "You may be alright now, but how about in the future?" These words make me feel desperate. Social security systems such as insurances and pensions, on top of work, marriage, and a family, are reducing the anxieties pointing to the future. Because no human being can live alone, we need to make relationships with others. People support each other and their livelihoods in order to live with an easy mind. Nobody can reject the social security system in this sense. But there is a weird reversal happening between the idea and the reality. The social security system should be the result of mutual aid between individuals. (...) But in reality, the social security system appears to be monthly bills or "dispensation" granted by the state. People, especially those who find their deducted salary, cannot see any concrete relations through which one feels mutual aid. (Kikuike in Dameren, 1999a, p. 56)

In their endeavour to prevent a complication of *dame*, Dameren created alternative discourse and practices around care. On the level of discourse, Dameren tried to transform the atmosphere in which dependency, with examples from parasite singles to recipients of life protection, was scorned. At the same time, they looked squarely at the problems the family and the state entailed as the dominant units of care in Japanese society and produced a critical discourse. In the above excerpt, Kikuike points out that the social security system provided by the state erases concrete relationships of mutual aid, turning its participants into taxpayers who feel robbed by the state and beneficiaries who should be grateful to the state. Meanwhile, they knew that care and love within a closed home could easily turn into severe violence due to its closed intimacy and the fundamentally hierarchical relation between a breadwinner/caregiver and a dependent:³⁹

³⁸ Regarding theories of care as interdependence, see Bubeck (1995), Gilligan (1982), and Tronto (1993).

³⁹ Here, pressure has two meanings. First, a family suppresses individuals as the idea they need to accomplish to make "the perfect form of life" (Dameren, 1999a, p. 126). Then, family members appear to be pressure, in their everyday life, by imposing a specific role on each other. For example,

One of the slogans in the disabled movement is “Mother! Do not kill!”. For the disabled, family members are not only the closest able-bodied but also the existences that strongly impose the perspective of the able-bodied to them. From this perspective, disability is perceived only negatively, and thus disabled becomes a negative existence. This slogan was originally directed at a mother who killed her disabled child. But it also clearly shows how a family relationship is irreconcilable especially for the disabled, in general. (Kyukyoku Qtaro in Dameren, 1999a, pp. 201-202)

In reality, Dameren pursued concrete relations in which they collectively tried to avoid developing complications related to mental well-being. In doing so, they were keenly aware of the danger of close intimacy and tried to “protect each individual” from emotional burdens coming from “heavy dependence” (Dameren, 1999a, p. 308). For example, when Dameren began to get the tough phone calls, they made “a call network”. Pepe (12 December 2018) said, “it was to share the burden, you know, as it was too much for a person to take. Kami wanted to make a network through which those people could connect”. This is to say, Dameren strived to create a loose network of care, or what Ogura (in Ukai et al., 1997) calls “a loose commonality” beyond both the “isolated single person” and “a modern family with which all commonalities have been replaced”.

The “Sinking Family” (*Chinbotsu Kazoku*) project would be one of the most notable examples of how those who engaged in Dameren weaved a concrete yet loose network of care. The project began in April 1995 by Kano Hoko, a 22-year-old single mother of a one-year-old, Tsuchi. Having a child, she wanted neither to get married nor to dedicate herself to raising her child completely. Instead, Hoko distributed flyers of invitation: “Why don’t we bring up a kid together?” (see Figure 5.6)

While Hoko did not get a response from people, a friend introduced her to Dameren. Many members of Dameren began to come to care for the child. Two more single mothers and their children joined. Participants took shifts, as much as they wanted in their available time, to take care of the children so that single mothers could work, attend school, and have their own time. The experiment continued for eight years in a small three-story rented house, which they named the Sinking House. The project entails various significant aspects that deserve further discussions, but here I focus on how care was given/received in the Sinking House in a fairly different manner from that of society.

Nisiike (in Dameren, 1999a, p. 177) describes how her ex-husband “tried hard for the family, based on the resolution of a man works outside, a woman takes care of home”, but failed caring for family members’ feelings.

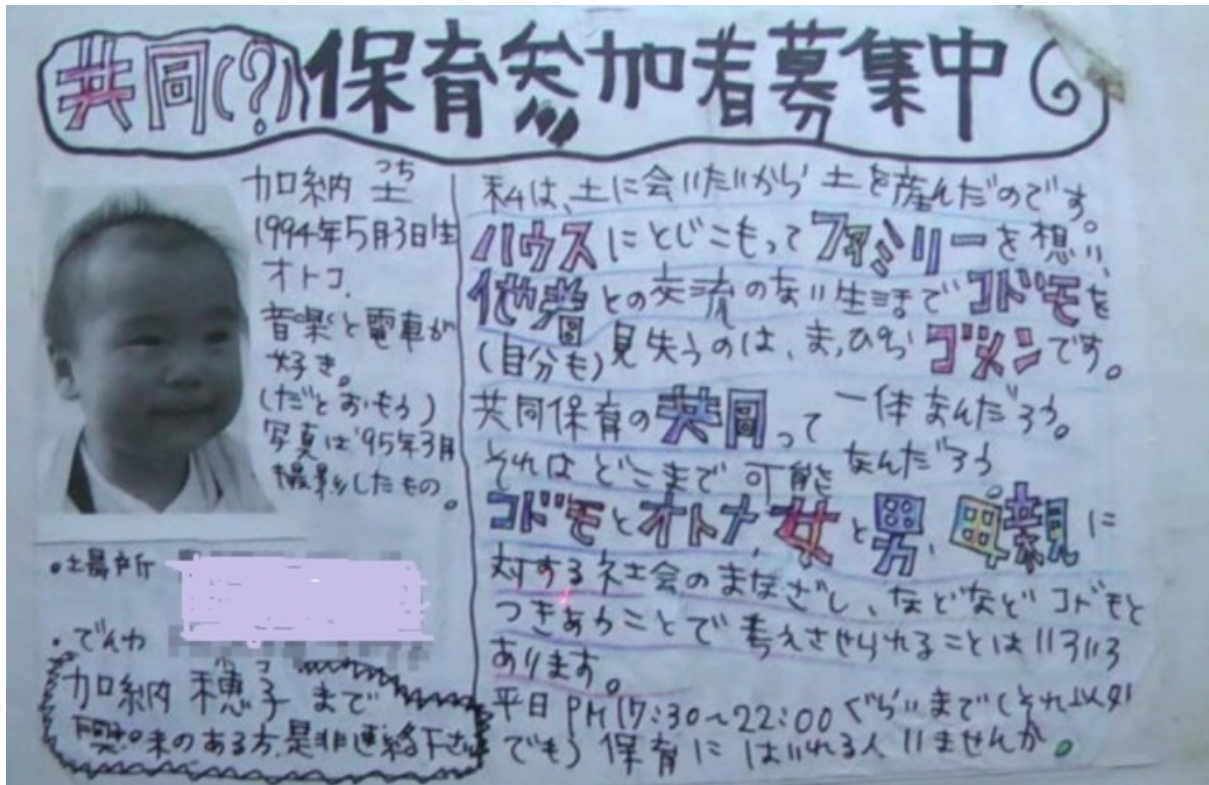


Figure. 5.6. The Flyer of the Sinking Family. Hoko put this flyer on telephone poles in her village. The title is: "Recruitment for a joint childcare". (Source: The Sinking Family)

The child of Hoko, Tsuchi (12 December 2019), who now is in his 20s, recalls his childhood in the Sinking House as follows:

It was chaotic. Many weirdos, including those who had mental issues, came to the house that was never locked. Some of them were not even interested in childcare. People drank every day (laugh). There was always somebody in the living room, like sleeping on my school bag... (laugh). Many of them drank or smoked. Well, in terms of smoking, there was a rule, such as smoking should be under the ventilator. But basically, you didn't have to be a respectful human to take care of a child in the Sinking House. (...) I would say that nobody cared about such things.

Some people might think that such an environment would harm a child. However, Tsuchi (ibid.) firmly told me that he would feel anger toward such a view.

I don't know if every child would be happy in the Sinking House. But, at least for me, my childhood in which I was around many adults is precious. I was actually angry at Hoko-san when she decided to move out.

A documentary film, the Sinking Family, directed by Tsuchi, shows how much he appreciated his childhood spent in the Sinking House. A huge volume of childcare notes vividly demonstrates how

participants, including single mothers, put their time and effort into childcare in the Sinking House. Tsuchi (Ibid.) says:

It seems like nobody knows what should be done in various situations. But, anyways, they were talking about things, like what to do when Tsuchi cried if it was good or bad to leave him alone for a while without having a conclusion. It was impressive.

In other words, the Sinking Family was produced, like many other families, by care, which was essentially an interactive act of giving/receiving one's time and affection to/from others.

However, the Sinking Family was not a family, even in an alternative way according to Tsuchi.⁴⁰ He asks, "A family would have an inside and outside, no?" The Sinking Family was open to all, even those who were not interested in childcare, while there was neither a precise aim of the project nor any rule for childcare. People came to the Sinking House when they had idle time and shared the time and activities as much as they wanted. In an article, Hoko (Kano, 1997), the mother of Tsuchi, states:

Once, we felt a bit nervous about if we did well; we could call what we did collective childcare. So, we set up a talk to "think about collective childcare!". But, in the end, we talked about what we wanted to do. We thought that we should do what we want to do. There would be something created from it, no matter if it is collective childcare or not. (...) Although we call it collective childcare, we are actually making relations based on each individual's needs rather than "doing childcare collectively".

This openness and flexibility made the Sinking Family unique, preventing participants from having feelings of obligation, hierarchies between the caregiver and dependents, or even a sense of boundary. Tsuchi (12 December 2019) says:

It was not such an atmosphere in which a caregiver should supply a proper model for a child. (...) There was this kind of perspective in the Sinking Family; whether it is a child or an adult, a person doesn't know about what she doesn't know. When you feel burdensome, you can avoid it.

At the same time, the participants of the Sinking Family built a collective rhythm and sensibility, loosely, through a constant process of trial and error. In doing so, they created a loose, egalitarian network of communal care in which not only each participant felt safe in her own way, but people

⁴⁰ The project's name was inspired by the words of a right-wing politician: "We are losing the perspective that a man is working outside, a woman is keeping a home. Many housewives get divorced as family ties become weaker. Japan is sinking in this situation." The name was adopted by Hoko and other participants who thought that, "Such a family must be sinking" (Kano, 2020, p. 6).

also supported each other in their idle time, according to their needs and abilities, in “friends-like” relationships, to borrow Hoko’s (Kano, 1997) words.

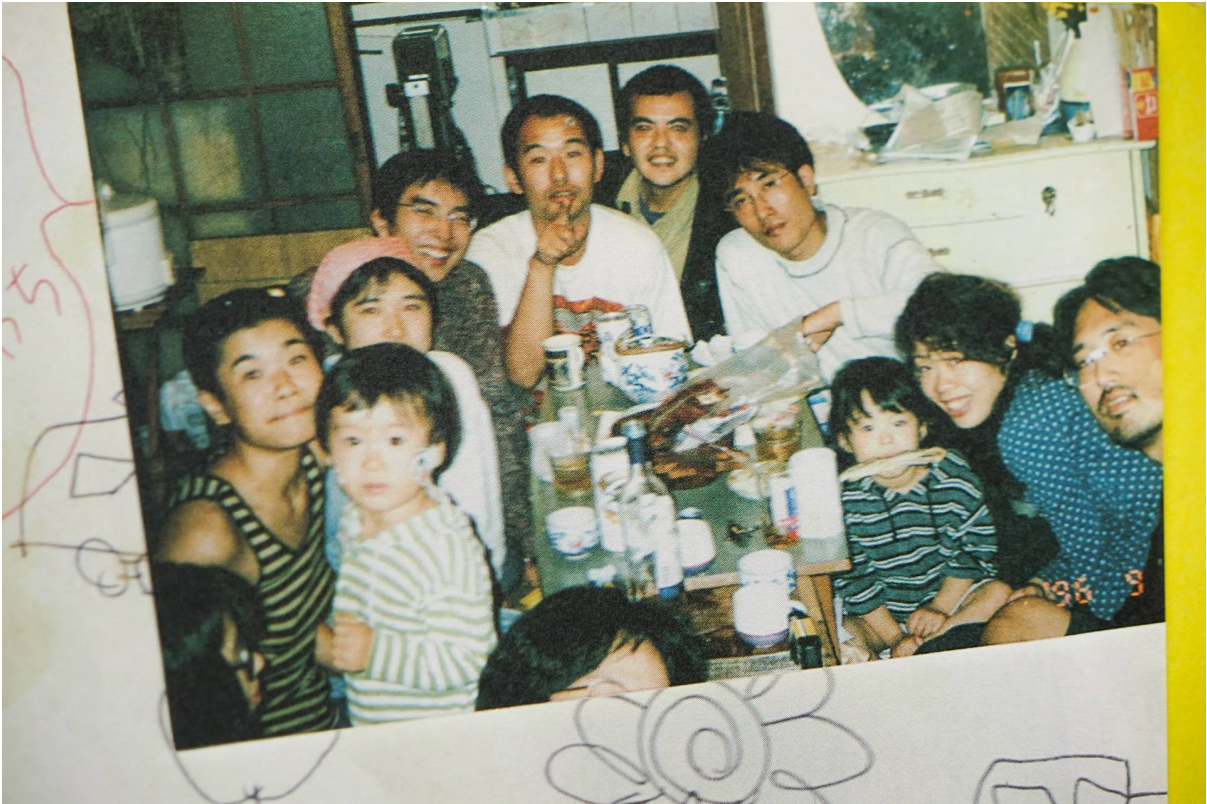


Figure. 5.7. A picture of the Sinking House. (Source: Enlight-fostercare.com)

For participants, the Sinking House was a place where those who had difficulty with communication “could have a fulfilling time without having a conversation with others” (Bataiyu in Dameren, 1999a, p. 218), or an experiment of “creating a concrete situation in which one does not feel lonely without having one’s own child” (Pepe in Dameren, 1999a, p. 217). For the single mothers, it was a space through which they could relieve emotional burdens and thus engage not only with their children but also many other people through an egalitarian relation of support:

Since there are many people around, nobody feels hurt, even when the child gets angry and yells at them. This is very different from when a mother is only with her child. Due to the existence of others, the conflict can be softened. People can talk about it with a light heart, saying like, “it was pretty tough last night, wasn’t it?”. (Laichi in Kano and Takahashi, May 2019).

For Tsuchi, it was a place where people were always around him. He said, “A child has grown well enough as long as there are people around him”. He further notes:

I don't have a concept of a family inside me. Hoko-san, Yama-kun (the biological father of Tsuchi, "kun" is a way of casually addressing a man between friends), and all the caretakers of the Sinking House were precious beings with whom I share delightful memories. But, maybe I don't have any single person whom I consider my family. So, I have lived without a family, but it has been great enough. Maybe it is one of the new forms of family, a concept of family that one does not know about family. (Tsuchi, interviewed by Sasaki, June 2018)

In conclusion, the Sinking Family not only deconstructed the normative image of a home as the safe space in which respectful parents protect and care for a child, but was also different from established parent-run childcare cooperatives (see Morgan, 2005; Vamstad, 2012) or the examples from societies where childcare is not confined to a family, but extended to an entire community (see Mtetwa & Muchacha, 2017; Mushunje & Mafico, 2010). It was "created by being completely away from any social norms", to borrow Tsuchi's (Kano, 2010, p. 35) words. In the Sinking Family, participants produced/shared activities and affections directly, showing that it is people's acts and the interaction of giving/receiving their time and affection which (re)produce space and relation. At the same time, they tried to open the space without having a fixed aim or rules and, by doing so, prevented themselves from having any obligation or hierarchy that could arise in a community of care. This aspect is discussed again with the case of Bin-Zib, where participants produced a more concrete discourse about care as an act of (re)producing Bin-Zib without closing the community.

5.2.2. Bin-Zib's value struggle in the real estate class society

(1) Contesting a house/home as private property

Since its beginning, the active members of Bin-Zib encouraged each of the project's residents to be "a full-time Binzibite" – which meant "the unemployed" – to join in what they called the "idle" (*ingyeo-roun*) lifestyle. Quite a handful of residents actually quit their jobs to fully enjoy the everyday life of Bin-Zib, where the average living expense was surprisingly low. Indeed, the early residents' collective efforts were directed toward the greatest possible reduction of working time and securing free time by cultivating a unique DIY, sharing culture. Yet, the most significant factor which enabled them to lower their living costs was "sharing the life space", as Ji'eum (2013) points out.

The founders wanted to form an open community to escape from capitalist relationships. As the number of residents increased, however, they needed more space to keep the idea of Bin-Zib as "an empty/vacant place" where they could accommodate any newcomers. Three more Bin-Zibs were set up by early 2009. People who could/wanted to co-fund the key-money deposit rented a house and invited others to live together. However, in this way, each Bin-Zib fiscally depended on a few people

while issues around the feeling of indebtedness rose. After over a year of extensive discussion, Bin-Zib residents established the Collective Bank Bin-Go in 2010.⁴¹

The Declaration of the Collective Bank (Bin-Go, 2010) vividly demonstrates Bin-Zib residents' collective awareness of what a house means in Korean society as well as how they tried to create different meanings and house practices. Bin-Zib residents demonstrated how housing had been at the centre of economic activities in Korean society and had produced a linear track of life as follows (Bin-Go, 2010):

A house is money. People earn money to buy a house and buy a house to earn money. ... Those who do not have any deposit live at a *jjokbang* (dosshouse) or a *gosimwon*.⁴² They desperately save money to get a room by a contract combining key-money and monthly rent. They try to save money again to increase their key-money deposit until they can rent a house only by key-money and thus be liberated from monthly rent. They keep saving money, make investments, and get loans to finally get "my home". Then, they accelerate the real estate investment to leave more property to their children. Going through this process is what consists of the standard path and progress of our lives. Which stage you have reached signifies the class to which you belong. Our lives are dotted with each act of earning money connected to the purchasing of a house.⁴³

One can see how the adage of Franklin is repeated in Korea with a house price as the shocking evidence. If you do not participate in real estate speculation, what you lose is not just the chance of making money. You are actually becoming poorer because housing prices are constantly going up. According to this logic, space appears to be not only a quantifiable commodity but also capital. People desperately wish to invest in a house through what Bin-Zib calls "the standard path" in the above excerpt.

Based on this recognition, Bin-Zib residents argued that what created this "suffocating reality" was people's perception of a house as "the most valuable private property". At the same time, they pointed out that a family is the only unit in which "people share the space of a house and the

⁴¹ Bin-Go will be discussed in Chapter 6.

⁴² A *jjokbang* (dosshouse) is a 9 square metre-sized room which can be rented without a deposit. There is no kitchen, and residents use a shared toilet (Nam, 2013). Regarding *gosimwon*, see footnote 25 in this chapter.

⁴³ While the first Bin-Zib was rented via a key-money contract, many Bin-Zibs were established based on *jeomwolse*, which is a mixed form of key-money monthly rent; A tenant does not pay the full key-money deposit, which is around 60 to 80% of the property value. Instead, she deposits a part of key-money while paying monthly rent to fill the gap (J Kim, 2013, p. 338). For example, a 200,000 USD key-money deposit can be transferred into a 100,000 USD key-money and 1,000 USD monthly rent.

resources in it” in capitalist society, although “even families break apart” in the world of private property where “individuals and activities are related with each other only through money” (Bin-Go, 2010). In other words, Bin-Zib residents problematised capitalist ownership and the fragile notion of family which has supported it. If this is so, however, what should be done to liberate a house from the law of property ownership? How does one stop calculating gain and loss and share things together beyond the unit of family? Bin-Zib residents neither tackled existing laws nor established internal rules. Instead, they just rented a house and declared that there was no owner of the house and that everyone could live together. In other words, Bin-Zib residents just began to act as if there had been no ownership of housing or the notion of home as family space. Indeed, Bin-Zib was proposed as a way of changing the negative reality by “act[ing] conversely”, to borrow Ji’eum’s (2010) words:

It looks like there is no answer in reality, but we can find the answer when we look at reality inversely. We have to earn money to get a house because everybody wants to earn money from a house. We have to compete to own things because nobody shares them. (...) Isn’t it possible for us to act conversely? If nobody wants to earn money from a house, the house price will not go up, and we don’t have to earn money for it. If we share things, we don’t have to compete to own them. Our lives will be enriched without accumulating things in the house ... Bin-Zib located in Haebangchon under the mountain Namsan is one of such acts to actualise these possibilities. We are having a house, which is shared with everybody; a home where everyone is a host, a guest, and a member of the family at the same time. (Ji’eum, 2010)

In their direct action of performing a different house/home, the Bin-Zib residents’ struggle focused on two aspects: a house as the means of investment, i.e., capital, as well as a home as private space for a family. In terms of the ways in which Bin-Zib has conflicted with a house as capital, the most essential practice of Bin-Zib would be their attempt to eliminate monetary profits, or what they call “surplus money”, in their collective living. The founders opened their home to others and began to live together in 2008. Three more Bin-Zibs were set up by early 2009 in the same manner. People who could/wanted to co-fund a key-money deposit rented a house while all residents paid the same amount of “shared expenses” each month no matter if and how much one contributed to the key money. In this way, they stopped calculating how much interest is generated from the deposit. If there was “surplus money” at the end of the month, residents saved it “to organise more Bin-Zibs” (Bin-Zib, 2009).

It is important to note that Bin-Zib residents’ attempt to eliminate “surplus money” went alongside their struggle to produce and share various *surplus* produced directly in their collective living. As mentioned above, Bin-Zib promoted more people to participate in the idle life of Bin-Zib. However,

the idle life, or wasted time from the viewpoint of capitalism, actually contained lots of activities that (re)produced the collective lives of Bin-Zib. The important thing is that these activities could never be calculated. There has been no way to make all residents contribute evenly. There have always been residents who put more time and effort unconditionally in Bin-Zib as “invisible hosts”, to use their own words:

That’s why, for example, we decided the amount of shared expenses as “more than 2,000 won (KRW)”. The important part, actually, is the “more than”. If everybody only paid 2,000 won, we wouldn’t be able to manage Bin-Zib properly. The way we deal with household chores is similar. There is always more work than just the combined amount of each individual’s chores. At Bin-Zib, therefore, people are supposed to do “more than” the minimum, voluntarily. There have always been people who pay more. There have always been people who work more, without saying so, voluntarily. (Ji’eum, interview by O. Kim, 2009)

These invisible activities and what Ji’eum calls “more than” was what actually supported and (re)produced the space and relations of Bin-Zib. Bin-Zib residents strived to make this invisible work visible so that more people could be a part of it while being careful not to make it something exchangeable/reciprocal. In other words, Bin-Zib residents tried to cultivate an atmosphere in which people produce/share things “from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs” (Marx & Engels, 1970b, p. 25). Some examples utilised in Bin-Zib demonstrate this culture: how the ancient Inca people worked together and put things together in their collective warehouse where any individuals could acquire things anytime they needed; how squirrels who collect acorns honestly and forget about them have created a rich wood for all.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Here, some might question the problem associated with qualifying the practices of urban commons with the practices of archaic societies or even animal life. We also should note that Bin-Zib residents’ referencing the archaic practice of the Incas may incur reductionist romanticization of others as “noble savages” (see Ellingson, 2001; Trouillot, 2003). As Trouillot (2003) discusses, the myth of the “noble savage” has been constructed and mobilised as an argument for utopia or as an argument against it. In other words, the idealised savages have been nothing other than “the alter ego the West constructed for itself” (ibid., p. 18). If so, how can we create “strategic points of “reentry” into the discourse on otherness” (p. 27) without falling into what Trouillot calls the “savage slot” located in the category of “the Rest” (p.23)? Can we view historically existing practices or institutions “in terms of their potentialities to force on oneself a kind of pragmatic optimism”, instead of othering, to borrow Graeber’s (2001, p. 227) words?

My thesis involves the issue around the “epistemological status of native discourse” on two different levels, which can be posed in terms of the following questions: Can natives refer to other marginalised subjects without objectifying them? And how do I (as a researcher) discuss “men and women who are subjects of history” (Trouillot, 2003, p. 27) without slipping into the savage slot?

First, Bin-Zib residents did not think twice about the issue of romanticising the other. Nevertheless, it is important to note that they referred to other social/communal forms of life (including even

The idea of Bin-Zib asked its residents to share space and resources with others just like people (tend to) do with their family members. In other words, they tried to change how they create/share both material and immaterial forms of *surplus* around a house/home by contesting not only a house as a means of investment but also the dominant practices and notions around home and family. Living at Bin-Zib, residents were asked to change their sensibilities around family and the home.⁴⁵ Bin-Zib's spatial arrangement, which was clearly different from the modern dwelling space, facilitated this process of subjectivations, as I explain below.

Most of the Bin-Zibs were set up by renting a small apartment-style structure, called a *billa*, where inner space was divided according to specific functions and accessibilities.⁴⁶ However, residents used this space in an unconventional manner. For example, all rooms were used in multiple ways in Bin-Zib. A huge number of writings on the Bin-Zib blog and its homepage demonstrate the residents' excitement about the cheerfulness of Bin-Zib. Numerous activities, for example, from a tofu making

animal life, as in the case of the ecology of squirrels and the forest) not to build a utopia but to develop and improvise a concrete, everyday practice of communistic pooling. Also, Bin-Zib residents were not unaware that any moral economy entails fundamental unevenness or even violence. Founding an alternative Bank, which required them to have over one year of intense discussions, was one example of how Bin-Zib residents tried to deal with this fundamental issue around "open-ended communistic relations" which easily slip into hierarchy and the "closed reciprocity of gift" similar to market exchange (see Graeber, 2001, pp. 220-1). In this regard, I would say that Bin-Zib residents hold what Graeber calls (ibid., p. 227) "pragmatic optimism", the ability to "place *some* practices or institutions within an imaginary totality in which they might *not* contribute to the reproduction of inequality, alienation, or injustice".

As for my effort to challenge the marginalised "epistemological status of native discourse", I have tried to engage Bin-Zib residents and all other participants of this research as "interlocutors" and "subjects" with their own historicity and specificity (Trouillot, p. 27). By tracing the genealogies of the urban precariat movement in Tokyo and Seoul and putting them in comparative perspective, I have also tried to inscribe the situatedness of each locality as "a site defined by its human content" (ibid., p. 123) rather than relegating them in the savage slot of global and local utopian narratives. Even if the size of their movements seem insignificant in relation to the mass proletarian movements of the past, their specificity cannot be erased by putting them under some vague sense of otherness via an Asiatic/national slot of one kind or another or a generational name representing the marginalised youths as the imagined other of "the boomers" (the so-called 386 generation (386 *sedae*) in Korea, or the *dankai* generation in Japan).

⁴⁵ A significant body of literature shows that the notion of privacy, the modern form of family, and the spatial organisation of modern dwelling spaces are deeply interrelated (Dibie, 1994; Friedman, 2007; Mumford, 1961). With the development of the bourgeois concept of family as the most intimate and exclusive relationship, home lost its sociability, turning into a closed space of privacy. (Ariès, 1962; Prost et al, 1991; Yi, 2000).

⁴⁶ Originally from the English word, villa, *billa* in Korea refers to a small-sized building that is less than four stories and that is filled with small flats to accommodate low-income families.

workshop to band practice, took place all over the house simultaneously, especially when the community had its active term.



Figure 5.8. Bin-Zib residents on the rooftop of a Bin-Zib. (Source: Bin-Zib Zine, Noneun Saram, 2014)

The most outstanding feature was the absence of a private room. While the founders of Bin-Zib decided to give up having a private room in order to maximise Bin-Zib's capacity for accommodation, Bin-Zib residents expressed mixed feelings and attitudes about the question of private space.⁴⁷ What is noteworthy is that a good number of Bin-Zib residents, including those who had experienced a strong feeling of uneasiness, expressed how they came to “find” or “discover” private space in Bin-Zib:

⁴⁷ For example, a good number of residents told me that they had enough space in Bin-Zib. One resident even told me that she felt her space became enlarged in Bin-Zib compared to the bachelor apartment she had lived in by herself. There were also many residents, although to varying degrees, who expressed their uneasiness about Bin-Zib's spatial setting. Even one of the founders confessed how she had felt uneasy in her early days of Bin-Zib, saying, “A stranger was sleeping just beside me in the middle of the night. I felt very weird, to be honest” (Salgu, 20 April 2018).

We came to think that private space is not a thing for which we should pay a lot of money. While people assume a private space is an absolute necessity, we discovered that the concept has been somewhat exaggerated. Private space is needed, but it is not a thing you should keep for 24 hours a day. (Moya, 2011)

Finding a private space in Bin-Zib was not possible unless a resident changes her own personal boundaries, or what Edward T. Hall (1966) calls “proxemics”. Dion’s (2010) writing clearly shows this aspect.⁴⁸ According to Dion, “how much a person shares personal items with others was often mentioned as an indicator of how much the person got adjusted to Bin-Zib”:

Usually, people mix things together as they get used to the lifestyle. Food is the first thing people start to share easily although there are a few who put nametags on food in the fridge. While some people just put on any socks they see in the house, some people try to keep their own socks separately. Some want to do laundry separately, but others don’t care and mix it all together. If you have something you don’t want to share with others, you might want to put it aside separately. (Dion, 2010)

By entering Bin-Zib, a newcomer encounters a totally different sensory world, where not only space but also resources are supposed to be shared with strangers as if they were family members. Without any doubt, however, this practice of Bin-Zib encountered considerable difficulties. In this context, Bin-Zib appears to be a space of subjectivation where residents are invited to change their bodies and sensibilities through collective life. Bin-Zib residents often used the metaphor of chemistry to describe how a resident gets adjusted to Bin-Zib through “fermentation”, “ripening”, and even “contamination in a good way”. Yunong’s (J. Kim, 2015) writing significantly demonstrates how the space of Bin-Zib appears to be not only an act of forming *jib* (a house/home) outside of the capitalist value system, but also the very present form of residents’ actions/interactions in which residents change their bodies and sensibilities.

If you mix some yoghurt with a bottle of milk and put it in a warm place, the can of milk becomes yoghurt. People who have the sensibility of being together are just like the lactic-acid bacteria. They are doing activities in the space, and their sensibilities are transferred to and embodied by newcomers just as milk becomes yoghurt. The newcomers are becoming lactic-acid bacteria that can share the culture of being together. It would be great if it could always be successful. But it is not always that way. The process needs specific conditions,

⁴⁸ The notion of proxemics suggests that the boundary of a person is not predetermined but constituted by interacting with one’s surroundings, which permeate into us while we are also being permeated by them. Personal space thus varies in size according to the cultural and social context (Hall, 1968, p. 95).

such as ratio and temperature. If there are not enough bacteria, milk turns sour, failing to become yoghurt. (J. Kim, 2015)

(2) Housekeeping to (re)vitalise daily life and relations of Bin-Zib

The earlier residents of Bin-Zib were activist-minded people with anarchistic tendencies against capitalism and against the patriarchal division of labour. They kept in mind that one should not appropriate others' domestic labour in order to live together. They thus put a significant, conscious effort into housekeeping (*salim*, literally meaning “vitalising” in Korean). For them, housekeeping was deeply interconnected with their intention of living differently from the capitalist way of life. Many of them were good at housekeeping, or became good at it through communal life in Bin-Zib. “A revolution starts in a kitchen” was the slogan often mentioned in Bin-Zib in its early stage.



Figure 5.9. Residents of Bin-Zib make a large amount of kimchi preparing for winter. (Source: Bin-Zib Blog)

As the number of residents increased, however, Bin-Zib became a highly complex space. Mass media reported on Bin-Zib, romanticising the communal life of Bin-Zib (see Kim, 2009; Kim, 2011).

People beyond the small activist scene began to come to Bin-Zib, and many of them had internalised

social norms. In such a situation, Bin-Zib became a significantly contentious space where patriarchal, gendered bodies clashed with feminists' sensibilities. Housekeeping became a sensitive issue.

While many of the newcomers were incapable of or indifferent to housekeeping, domestic work and operational work became concentrated in the activity of a few active members. The work of Bin-Zib, which had once consisted of joyful, collective activities, turned into a burden. Active members could not help but feel exploited. If such a situation went on for a long time, even the most active members became inactive, if they didn't leave the community due to extreme fatigue and frustrations. Under such a circumstance, Bin-Zib repeatedly fell into periods of inactivity, sometimes for months, until somebody began to work voluntarily to problematise the situation and encourage others to act to revitalise the community. In other words, what Bin-Zib residents called "the positive culture of Bin-Zib" was something that should be constantly cared for and (re)vitalised. Without the work of housekeeping voluntarily given by its residents, Bin-Zib stopped functioning and turned into a poorly-serviced, cheap accommodation. Engaging newcomers in the activities to maintain and (re)vitalise Bin-Zib was thus a crucial issue of the community. Doing collective studies, producing discourse, and devising various methods to make the invisible domestic work visible were examples of their endeavour to reproduce what they called the "common sense of Bin-Zib" (Han, 2015).

I would like to point out three things in this regard. First, the capitalist economy has systematically dismissed reproductive labour while confining it to the domestic realm of the individualised family (Dalla Costa, 1999; Federici, 2020). Based on the family-based household and its gendered division of labour, reproductive labour (including domestic labour and care/affective labour) often remains invisible without being paid for, while the whole system depends on and exploits the unpaid labour. Based on this recognition, the "wages for housework" movement proceeded to show that "these homes are the factories in which we work", according to Federici. Federici (interview by Small, 2018, p. 200) further states:

It was a question of denaturalising housework and showing the social, historical character of the work. For example, if you had wages, men could also do that work. We wanted to disconnect it from femininity because the naturalisation was a significant impediment to struggling against it.

Active residents of Bin-Zib shared this perspective. But, instead of requiring wages for housework, they tried to reevaluate reproductive work in Bin-Zib while trying to escape from all kinds of wage labour as much as possible.

Second, homes are factories not only because people produce value, exploited by capital at home, but also because homes (re)produce a specific mode of subjectivity that serves the system. The story of

Jiwoong clearly demonstrates this. When Jiwoong moved to Bin-Zib, he was extremely incapable of housekeeping as well as mingling with people. It turned out that he had graduated from the most elite university, which means he had achieved some success according to Korean social norms. Jiwoong (14 June 2018) says that, however, he had always felt severe pressure and anxiety at home, which was like a “Spartan-style Academy (for preparing for the university entrance exam)”:

My father was a typical Korean father, you know, who belonged to the generation that suffered from poverty in general. He could not tolerate that I idled around. I mean, it was why I always had an upset stomach at home. (...) In the third year of high school, my grades dropped. My health deteriorated a lot. And the relationship with my father became worse. My mother was just all of a dither over the situation, about which I also felt terrible. I managed to enter Seoul National University, albeit with a broken body and mind.

Jiwoong’s case is not extreme, but a rather typical one. In Korea, education has been considered the very means of upward social mobility for an entire family, and educational investment has focused on the elderly son of the family (see Yi, 1998; Park & Abelman, 2004). Many Bin-Zib residents, especially males, commonly shared about how much pressure they were under from their parents to get good grades to enter a good university, regardless of their family background. Jiwoong’s parents played their roles in the patriarchal home to send him to the elite university. Jiwoong had to put all his physical and mental strength into studying, becoming incapable of caring for himself and others. Jiwoong says that he failed in society due to his “particularly susceptible characteristics and severe depression”. Otherwise, he would be one of the successful Korean males or what Pak (2009) calls “the valorous men, who do not have the ability to care for others, but rather interact with others only through money”. A home, in this context, is one of the crucial spaces which produces a specific mode of body serving the dominant system.

Third, Bin-Zib residents’ endeavour to engage newcomers in housekeeping/(re)vitalising the community is fundamentally “affective labour”, which is “itself and directly the constitution of communities and collective subjectivities”, as defined by Hardt (1999, p. 89). A former Bin-Zib resident, Haru, told me about how Jiwoong had become “a whole new human being” after nine months of living with “four nagging housemates”. When I asked, “Isn’t it exactly what a mother does to her child?”, she laughed hard and answered, “Tell me about it! ‘Am I your mother?’ This was what we actually told him, every single day!” What is important here is, in this story, nagging was not only functioning to change a person’s behaviour. As a profoundly affectionate work, it involved changes in the relationships of engaged people. Jiwoong attained not only skills for housekeeping but also the ability to make intimate relationships, as he (14 June 2018) says:

Well, I got along well with people from school. ... I don't know. Maybe I just didn't realise that I was not that intimate with them ... because I didn't know what intimacy felt like. However, here in Bin-Zib, I feel like I am very intimate with my housemates. It is hard to explain what the differences are. Well, at school, even though I got along well with friends, there were still some feuds, unwittingly, and a sense of competition, which I don't feel here.

As I have discussed, Bin-Zib residents have put significant effort into housekeeping in their attempt to escape from wage labour. For them, housekeeping (*salim*) is not just domestic labour but an act of giving their time and work to constantly (re)vitalise the space and relations as the root of the word, *sallida* (vitalise) makes clear. Indeed, housekeeping is what produces a family as a meaningful unit of intimate relations in any home. As profoundly affectionate work to produce relations and intimacy, housekeeping should be voluntarily shared and communicated among family members. However, the affective work of reproduction becomes a duty of women/housewives under capitalism while words such as love, care, and motherhood are utilised to strengthen the ideology of the gendered division of labour rooted in the patriarchal family model. On the one hand, love, in this context, becomes deteriorated as a submissive act of sacrificing oneself to (re)produce the suppression system. On the other hand, an aggressive desire for control and domination is justified under the name of love and care. Jiwoong's case demonstrates that not only females, or the suppressed reproductive worker, but also everyone is broken in the system, losing the ability to care for themselves and others. Then, how to recover our ability of affective work to (re)vitalise daily life and relationships without being subordinated to what Gorz (1997) calls "the intangible obligation of love"?

Bin-Zib residents, on the one hand, decided to open love, care, and intimacy beyond the unit of the individualised family by living with strangers, declaring that "it is not that the practice of sharing is possible because we are a family. Conversely, the practice of sharing enables us to become-family" (Ji'eum, 2010). Bin-Zib residents call their housemates *sikgu* (literally meaning "those who eat together under the same roof"). *Sikgu* is different from a family bonded by a blood tie, as Haru explains (9 June 2018):

There is some bottomless longing for each other in a family, saying because we are a family, because I am a mother, or because you are a daughter. But we don't have such determined roles here. Yet we can still rely on each other, trying to have conversations. If it doesn't go well, we can break up. Nobody blames us for that, unlike how a broken family is accused in society.

On the other hand, Bin-Zib residents tried not to create reciprocal relations by promoting a culture in which people work "more than the minimum, voluntarily" without calculating how much each individual contributes. In doing so, Bin-Zib residents tried to keep their affective labour as pure

surplus, which cannot be calculated or mediated by money, in their collective endeavour to (re)produce Bin-Zib.

5.3. Conclusion

This chapter explored Dameren and Bin-Zib, the prefigurative and micropolitical urban movements that emerged when neoliberal restructuring began to sweep Japanese and Korean societies. While day labourers and the urban poor housewives discussed in Chapter 4 were never a part of the mainstream society from the beginning, the young people who established Dameren and Bin-Zib voluntarily chose to become “outside to the middle class” (De Angelis, 2010). They rejected being a part of wage-labour relations and began to live as they wanted while encouraging others to join instead of pursuing a project defined by a political ideology. I draw two conclusions from the findings.

The first is that Dameren and Bin-Zib demonstrate that the precariat’s prefigurative forms of life necessarily engage value struggles over *surplus*. Value appears as a universal form, i.e., money. Capitalism dictates the reduction of activities and things into money to indicate its value. Making monetary surplus, i.e., profit, has become the universally desired goal. Rejecting this regime of capitalist value, the members of Dameren and Bin-Zib created an alternative way of living in relation to work and home. As detailed above, people’s lives in the sphere of work and home were under much pressure in each city, providing the background for Dameren and Bin-Zib to take work and home as terrains of urban struggle.

While they confronted capitalist value on different terrains, the value struggle developed by Dameren and Bin-Zib shared much in common. First, they reclaimed incommensurable and irreducible *surplus* (*dame/ingyeo*), i.e., uncaptured/unvalorised life (time and activities) under capitalism. In doing so, they challenged the abstract measure of the capitalist conception of time and space. Second, they put their most outstanding effort toward valorising housework and affective work, creating an outside to modern practices around home and the family under capitalism. Lastly, they tried not to fix any political ideology or any universal vision in relation to their experiments. In other words, both cases reveal that value struggles essentially appear to be the “*salto mortale*” (fatal leap) of the precariat toward an unknown future.

The other conclusion is that the emergence of Dameren and Bin-Zib reflected a collective transformation of cultural sensibility, which is fundamentally connected to the notion of “the urban”. Their way of life was not only averse to capital, but also the closedness and hierarchy inherent in the notion of “family”, “community”, and “society”. Earlier members of Dameren and Bin-Zib pursued

openness to an extreme level, thoroughly enjoying the joy of spontaneity and heterogeneity. Not before long, however, both experiments experienced significant difficulties caused by demographic changes. Confronting the fundamental issue of precariousness caused by being with Others, the precariat of Dameren and Bin-Zib tried to develop ways to apprehend and share the risk and burden instead of closing the community to secure safety.

This chapter does not discuss how people in Dameren and Bin-Zib financed their living. In Dameren, individuals worked as part-time workers, i.e., freeters, while trying to reduce their working time as much as possible. Also, many people in Dameren earned their living by working as personal care-workers for the disabled. In the case of Bin-Zib, many Bin-Zib residents lived on a small income, working part-time jobs. Those who were regular workers were mostly involved in non-profit organisations or government programs (see Chapter 6, footnote 62). Active members tried to create a space to valorise their activities by opening cafés but failed. This aspect will be discussed more in Chapter 6.

Chapter 6. Precariat Movement and the Production of Urban Commons in Precariousness

I think there are a few pathways of movement for breaking away from the rules of middle-class society. Dameren or Shirōtono-ran would be one pathway of doing so, I guess. In my case, I would like to contemplate the pathway from the inside of the underclass. (Mukai, an activist of Sōgidan, 11 November 2018)

In capitalism, there is already a fixed answer for how to live. We should earn money and increase assets our whole life to deal with various difficulties and a sense of insecurity on our own. (...) Thus, I hope to make a different plan for anti-capitalists, I mean, at least, an example that positively affirms a different form of life. (Ji'eum, an activist of Bin-Go, 7 June 2018)

The so-called precariat movement, as a response to the intensive neoliberalisation of society, came into bloom in the early 2000s in Japan and the early 2010s in Korea.¹ The precariat movement in Tokyo in the 2000s and Seoul in the 2010s shared commonalities with the youth movement in Tokyo in the 1990s and Seoul in the 2000s, as exemplified by the experiments of Dameren (1991-present) and Bin-Zib (2008-2018) (see Chapter 5). Commonalities were especially shared in terms of their anarchistic qualities, egalitarian manner of organisation, and their cultural inspirations (see Cassegård, 2014; S Kim, 2013b; Lee, 2017; Mōri, 2005). Such new movements were undoubtedly part of the emergent global trend of leftist movements that took a cultural turn (see Buechler, 1995; Nash, 2001).

However, there is a lacuna in the current research when the precariat movement in Seoul and Tokyo are examined comparatively. The urban precariat movements in these two cities had distinct orientations regarding both political expression and spatial practice. In other words, they built different forms of commons with different traits, reflecting the historical legacies of urban movements in both Seoul and Tokyo, respectively. In Seoul, the urban youth movement developed by problematising not only precarious labour but also the issues around precarious space affected by ongoing gentrification (see also Lee, 2017). Activists in Seoul have contemplated such terms as “community” (*gongdongche*), “common land” (*gongnyuji*), “common resources” (*gongnyujae*) and “commons” (*keomeonjeu*) and utilised these concepts in their struggles. On the other hand, in Tokyo, these concepts have barely been used in the precariat activists’ scene, except for the term “community-ness (*kyoudosei*)”, referring to communal sensibilities produced amongst participants of an event or a site of movement.

This chapter maps the contentious terrain of contemporary precariat movements in Tokyo and Seoul based on 17 months of ethnographic fieldwork in the precariat movement scenes in both cities. There are two conditions I have adhered to in this research. First, in mapping a cartography of contemporary precariat movements in these cities, I have not followed the prevalent perception in both Korea and Japan that these involve the young generation victimised in the era of global capitalism. Instead, I examine the movement as a terrain in which different groups and generations of the precariat encounter, contest, negotiate, and work together to challenge and overcome the neoliberal ideology of self-reliance. I trace discourses and practices that have developed in the

¹ Here, as Ito (2006) defines it, the precariat refers to “those who, in globalising market-centrism, find themselves in precarity both in terms of their working lives as well as concerning their daily lives, especially the young generation”.

precariat's value struggles by locating them in the genealogy of social movements in each city. In doing so, I intend to demonstrate how the urban precariat in these cities has created different spaces and relations in their struggle against neoliberalism and its ideology of self-reliance.

Second, there was a series of catastrophic events that not only pushed members of society to bear witness to the crumbling system but also exemplified the reality of precariousness more intensively than ever in each context.² New activist trends emerged in both Tokyo and Seoul. Subjects of these movements were primarily those who held a strong identity as the precarious minority of a patriarchal, capitalist society. Although these trends have merged into the precariat movement, especially during the 2010s, I chose not to include them in my map of the precariat movement, which is not bound by a particular identity or based on a sense of victimhood. I believe that this new trend of the movements provides a solid prospect for future research.

Unlike Chapters 4 and 5, in which I compared specific cases through a homologous structure of writing, in this chapter, the precariat movement in Tokyo and Seoul will be discussed as distinct structures as I have tried to apprehend the specificities of each site by following the historical traits of movements in each city. While limited by socio-economic situations, urban precariat subjects have drawn on the legacy of the vernacular commons in the urban movements of each city. In sections 6.1 and 6.2, I discuss how the precariat movements in Tokyo and Seoul developed orientations toward autonomy (*jiritsu*) and community (*gongdongche*), respectively. I look at these critical notions as essential cornerstones in the value struggle against neoliberalism. I also look at how these distinct forms of value struggles emerged in the urban precariat movement in each city.

² In the case of Japan, it was the devastation caused by the Great East Japan earthquake of 2011, which caused the nuclear meltdowns at Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. In Seoul, the sinking of the MV Sewol in 2014 and the Gangnam Station Murder Case in 2016 both showed how a patriarchal and bureaucratic society murdered teenagers and young females.



Figure 6.1. The Precariat General Strike in Seoul in 2012. (Photo taken by the author)

6.1. Reclaiming autonomy to break away from the system: The case of Tokyo

With the foundation of “The General Freeter Union” in 2003 as its signal flare, the precariat movement in Tokyo was in full swing during the 2000s. Several small unions and non-profit organisations (NPOs) were set up to problematise precarious labour and insecure life in Japanese society (Cassegård, 2014; Watanabe, 2015). The mass media began to pay attention to the issue of the “working poor”. The book “*Let Us Live! The Displaced Youth*” was published in 2007; it has sold steadily since then and made its author, Amamiya Karin, an icon of the precariat movement. Together with the anti-poverty movement, the precariat movement offered a vision of poverty in Japanese society and demanded better working conditions and social protections from the government and corporations (Shibata, 2020). “*Haken Mura* (the Village for Dispatched Workers) to Survive the Winter”, a struggle organised in 2008, marked a boiling point that drew attention to the issue of poverty in Japanese society (see Shinoda, 2009).³ “Survive” became an essential keyword in this context, catching the imagination of many who felt threatened by the cruel realities of neoliberal society. On the other hand, however, there were more prefigurative forms of experiments, in which the precariat tried to create “autonomous life” here and now.

Indeed, what marked the specificities of the Japanese precariat movement is the value of “autonomy” (*jiritsu*), as I discuss in detail in this chapter. In section 6.1.1, I discuss how the precariat in Tokyo has tried to distinguish their activism from NPOs or the civil movement based on the desire for an autonomous life. While the need for survival and the desire for an autonomous life had never been separated but coexisted among individual groups in the precariat movement scene, it has been the desire for autonomy that has driven Tokyo’s precariat movement, creating the movement’s distinct qualities. In 6.1.2, I explore how autonomy from the social order has constituted the most significant attitude of the precariat in Tokyo. In doing so, I discuss three interconnected aspects of the precariat

³ In 2008, mass redundancies of dispatched workers took place following the Lehman Shock. NPOs, activists (including the General Freeter Union), and associations of lawyers held a five-day winter struggle (from 31 December 2008 to 5 January 2009), called “*Haken Mura* to Survive the Winter.” Many of the attendees had lost not only employment but also a place to live, as they were kicked out from the company dormitories designated for dispatched workers. The establishment of *Haken Mura* highlighted the severity of poverty faced by those in precarious employment in Japanese society. *Haken Mura* provided people with food and shelters and also organised a group application for life protection, which had not been readily available to able-bodied adults (see Chapter 4). Two hundred thirty-two people were able to secure life protection with the support of lawyers.

movement in Tokyo – namely position, action, and space. Finally, in section 6.1.3, I discuss how the precariat in Tokyo has tried to create alternatives to work and home outside of the system.

6.1.1. Making the precariat movement different from the civil movement

Cassegård (2013) discusses how the precariat movement in Tokyo has developed out of the tension between “survival” and “life”, two keywords that were central to Vaneigem’s (1981) critique of capitalism (see also Kurihara, 2015). From this perspective, Shirōtono-ran might be the most well-known example, leaning toward greater autonomy in celebration of “life” beyond “survival”.

Amamiya (2017) introduces Shirōtono-ran as “a group of people who intend to start a revolution, if they haven’t already done so, in a unique way”. Matsumoto (2009, p. 138), the central figure of Shirōtono-ran, made the following statement:

They (labour unions) demand improved working conditions and welfare systems by appealing to the government and corporations. But I am trying to exit such a world as completely as I can.

Nevertheless, the practice for autonomous life is actually not separated but linked to the practices for survival in various instances across the precariat movement in Tokyo and vice versa. For example, the General Freeter Union, which has problematised the issue of precarious labour and life, has demonstrated strong prefigurative qualities. Fuse (15 December 2018), a member of the General Freeter Union, notes that, “the Freeter Union is not just a labour union but the survival union, which promotes the idea that life is just fine as it is. You don’t have to work. It is even better to quit wage labour”. This is to say, the term “survival” in the discourse of the General Freeter Union does not merely express a material concern for mere survival, but desires towards autonomous life. This includes psychological and social freedom from guilty feelings imposed by the ideology of “self-responsibility”, the anxieties of dropping out, and the generalised stressfulness caused by the strong labour ethics of the society: “You need to live free from the various sources of repression from society”, to use Fuse’s (ibid.) words.

We should also note that this so-called prefigurative form of movement has relied on the social security system as well as commons within the activist scene. In terms of income, for example, quite a lot of people in the precariat movement scene earn their living by working as personal care-workers for the disabled; their work is part of the government welfare measures for the disabled. It would be more accurate to say that the disability movement had demanded that the government establish the individualised care-worker system through constant struggles, primarily carried out in the 1970s (see Hayashi and Okuhira, 2010). The achievement began to function “as a kind of workfare for

activists”, as observed by Mukai (17 September 2018), an activist of San’ya who was once involved in the disability movement in the 1990s. Also, even though the old day labourers try to earn their living by collecting garbage, the most significant income source is from the so-called “rotating job (*rinban shigoto*)”, which is “the special employment program” launched by TMG in 1973 to quell the riots of San’ya day labourers (see footnote 30); Sōgidan also receives donations (*kanpa*) from those who have engaged in the movement and support San’ya.

Although the people engaged in the Nantoka Network and Shirotono-ran tried to create alternative spaces for valorising their work outside of mainstream society, as I discuss in more detail in this chapter, they secured their space by drawing on legal protections as well as social resources within the activist scene. Rents of many alternative spaces in Tokyo are surprisingly cheap. In many cases, the landlords, who are of the older generation in and around the activist scene, provide very affordable rent. Also, the Act on Land and Building Leases (*Shakuchi Shakuya Ho*) prevents a landlord from terminating a lease or raising the rent. For example, Shirōtono-ran rented places in an old, dilapidated shopping district behind the Kōenji station. “Most shops were closed, and the owners were elderly people without energy to do anything about it. We thus could rent spaces unbelievably cheap”, says Matsumoto (14 December 2018). Since Shirōtono-ran began operation, the district has become re-energised, attracting youth on an international level. Despite such change, the rent has not increased thanks to the Act on Land and Building Leases.

Thus, the need for “survival” and the desire for autonomous “life” have coexisted in Tokyo’s precariat movement. As the urban poor, the precariat cannot help but demand a secured position within capitalism, the current axiomatic system, to survive. At the same time, however, there has been a line of flight to break away from this position by challenging existing social codes and boundaries. The most vivid example is in San’ya, where rough sleepers have refused life protection and continued to keep living on the streets even after achieving life protection through a vigorous struggle in 2007.⁴ In other words, the tension between autonomous “life” and “survival” has appeared in the precariat movement scene as different vectors, either toward the inside or the outside of the system. Each group of the precariat has taken a different strategy to address the need to secure a place within the system for their survival on the one hand and to desire an escape from the system

⁴ In 2007, Sōgidan had struggled for over a year to demand the government to provide livelihood protection with “poverty” as a basic condition for eligibility, regardless of age or existence of address. They were able to push the government to concede through a collective application in the Taito borough and the Sumida borough for the first time in Japan. This strategy was adopted at the *Haken Mura* in 2008 mentioned in footnote 3.

on the other. Such competing strategies, though they are collaborative and involve negotiating, have characterised the precariat movement in Tokyo.

The important thing is that the activists in Tokyo recognised a clear threshold that marks the precariat movement from a civil movement (*shimin undo*). The activists often used adjectives such as “anarchist”, “non-sectarian”, “freeter-style”, or “the precariat” to distinguish their movement from the civil movement, the movement organised by sectarian political organisations and NPOs that largely aimed at reforming the society. Kami (Dameren) notes (12 December 2018):

We should fight. There is no way to escape. They (the Liberal Democratic Party, the perennial ruling party) will cut various welfare programs while increasing military spending. Unless we say “no” to their policies, one by one, they will become remorseless. We have to say “no”. That is one thing. But, at the same time, we cannot leave all that to the government. Also, it is not fun at all to live by relying on the system. (...) The movement is stagnant now. That is true. But I believe that what is essential still lies ahead of us from now on.

What has created the precariat movement in Tokyo, setting them apart from other social movements, is the desire for autonomy. A movement would become institutionalised by passing the threshold, losing qualities of the precariat movement, giving up its autonomy to the order of the Japanese capitalist system, which is what they call “civil society (*shimin shakai*)”.

6.1.2. Autonomy as the core value of the precariat movement in Tokyo

In this section, I discuss how autonomy has been the core value of the precariat movement in Tokyo. Based on my analysis of interviews and archival data, I have generated three categories showing how autonomy is pursued in the precariat movement in Tokyo: position, action, and space.

(1) Position

What is the precariat’s position in Japanese society? Unlike Europe, where the concept of “creative precariat” is widespread (see De Peuter, 2014; Miller, 2010), the Japanese notion of the precariat has more affinities with social dropouts, such as the elderly day labourers in *yoseba*, the homeless, immigrants, those categorised as NEET, and the mentally disabled (see also Cassegård, 2013). In this regard, enquiries into the position of the precariat in Japanese society would benefit significantly by paying attention to the movement of San’ya, where the early precariat came together during the era of the rapid growth of the Japanese economy (see Chapter 4).

As San'ya grew as a major gathering place of the early precariat, or day labourers, since the 1960s, it became a place where non-sectarian student activists came in contact with the underclass in Tokyo.⁵ They joined San'ya at various levels, connecting the movement of the *yoseba* labourers to other struggles beyond *yosebas*. Day labourers of *yosebas* turned into rough sleepers in the late 1980s. It was also when the neoliberal restructuring of the university began. In this context, non-sectarian student activists came out to the streets, creating an open and communicative movement on the street with freeters (see Chapter 5). Many non-sectarian student activists who joined San'ya engaged in freeter activism, and vice versa.⁶

Against this backdrop, freeters and the younger generation of the precariat recognised themselves in the vein of the rough sleepers of *yosebas*.⁷ When Pepe (Dameren) states that “there is a link between why people become broken in the current society and how the society functions” (Kaminaga & Hasegawa, 2000), such an argument echoes significantly what Funamoto (1985) wrote about the San'ya Winter Struggle of the 1970s: it was not only for the young day labourers but also for those “who were broken in the course of capital accumulation”, such as the sick and alcoholics (see Chapter 4). Needless to say, the winter struggle adopted by *Haken Mura* for the laid-off dispatched workers in 2008 was clearly an ongoing legacy of the *yoseba* movement.

Different emotions coexist in terms of how the younger generation views the single males in *yosebas*, the very symbol of dropouts in Japanese society. Many committed activists engaged in the precariat movement emphasise continuity between *yoseba* labourers and the younger generation, as both can be identified as a cheap, disposable labour force created by the capitalist system. Precariat activists call

⁵ Sōgidan was founded in 1981 by those who had engaged in Gentōi together with anarchists, members of Yasen (the tent theatre group), and other non-sectarian activists. While some people belong to sectarian organisations, Sōgidan had never been dominated by a sectarian group, according to Abe, who has been engaged in Sōgidan since the early 1980s. “Various groups and individuals have worked together, having constant inner discussions”, Abe says (15 December 2019).

⁶ Some activists of San'ya, such as Abe and Mukai, engaged in organising the Anti-Iraq sound demonstrations. E., a former activist of San'ya, was one of the founding members of the General Freeter Union. Meanwhile, Dameren often came to San'ya, joining the “people's patrol”. When Akino-Arashi disbanded in 1991, some members founded “*Inoken*” (a Shibuya and Harajuku association for protecting life and rights) in 1992 to support rough sleepers and Iranian migrants in Shibuya and Harajuku. Hirano, a San'ya activist, worked together with *Inoken*. In 1994, the activists of San'ya and *Inoken* formed the Network of Shinjuku (*Shinjuku Renrakukai*) to struggle against the evictions of rough sleepers at the Shinjuku Station. Ryu, a former member of Sōgidan, continued participating in the disputes of the General Freeter Union. The members of the General Freeter Union also joined the San'ya Winter Struggle.

⁷ During the San'ya annual forum in 2018, members of the General Freeter Union and the activists of San'ya discussed how contemporary precarious labourers (*buantei rōdōsha*) who quickly turn into net refugees existed in the same vein as day labourers/rough sleepers.

rough sleepers “*senpai*” (a Japanese word to refer to a senior colleague), implying the continuity between the older and younger precarious beings:

If day labourers lose jobs, it means they turn into rough sleepers. It is very similar to how precarious young labourers these days are easily turning into net cafe refugees. (E., a former activist of San’ya, 12 October 2018)

Also, there is a fear of becoming a dropout, as Ukai (Ukai et al., 1997, p. 305) pointed out in a Dameren speaking event:

This (fear) is a shared perception when it comes to the single males in *yosebas*. Probably all of us heard, growing up, from parents, “You should not be like them when you grow up”. That is why it is so fearful of accepting our own existence as “*dame*” (good-for-nothings).

We should, however, also pay attention to another line of sensibility, which revolves around neither sympathy nor fear, but one that involves fascination and attraction. Kohso (2006, p. 423) points out that *yosebas*’ day labourers have attracted young activists with their “more fluid, omnipresent, and rhizomatic force ... aside from the fact that they (*yoseba* workers) were victims of social inequality, existing as they were at the bottom of the social hierarchy”. Indeed, some of the most committed activists of San’ya actively sought to become day labourers themselves, voluntarily leaving what they call “civil society”, just as Funamoto and his colleagues did in the 1960s. H., who has been an activist and a day labourer in San’ya since the early 1990s, often says how liberated she felt when she first came to San’ya in her 20s as a university student. Mukai, who has also lived as a day labourer, says (11 November 2018):

I don’t know why I have been in San’ya for such a long time. Although I am now living as a day labourer, this does not make me a *tojisha* (someone who is directly involved in the issue or the affair).⁸ At the same time, however, I cannot say that I am part of civil society. In this sense, I can explain my identity only in negative terms. Anyway, if I hated it (activities in San’ya), I would have quitted it. Maybe I do not hate hanging around with those old men in San’ya, right?

To sum up, the Japanese notion of the precariat is built around the complicated affective dynamics involving fear, sympathy, acceptance, and fascination around social dropouts who are socially stigmatised as losers, victims, and escapees of the society. Yet, the movement’s specificity, which

⁸ Although this term is used generally in the society, it has a special significance in the social movement in Japan. In that context, *tojisha* refers to the person(s) who is(are) most directly affected or victimised. In the case of the rough sleepers’ movement, rough sleepers are *tojisha*. Essentially the same word, based on Chinese characters (*kanji* or *hanja*), is used with a different pronunciation (*dangsaja*) in Korean society and the Korean social movement as well. See footnote 46.

distinguishes it from the movement which demands restoring welfare and normalcy for all citizens, is how the movement has broken away from the society by producing what Agamben (2014) calls “a form-of-life”.⁹ The Japanese precariat activists not only found social dropouts as bearers of the movement but also, through their encounter and discovery, actively chose to be dropouts of society. The vernacular terms such as “good-for-nothings” (*dame*), “paupers” (*binbo*), and “the underclass” (*kasu*) vividly show the activists’ value struggle to reposition social dropouts as a rebellious subjectivity who can make a complete leap from what they call the social order (*shakai chitsujo*).

(2) Action

“Direct action”, defined by Graeber (2009), best captures the style of the precariat movement in Tokyo. According to Graeber (*ibid.*, p. 203), direct action would neither “seek to pressure the government to institute reforms” nor “seek to seize state power” but “wish to destroy that power”. The spontaneous riots (*bodo*) in San’ya during the 1960s can be seen as an exemplary case of direct action. As a precursor of the later precariat movement, the riots of day labourers expressed collective discontent and violently broke away from the existing order. While most leftists considered the spontaneous riots in *yosebas* as something that should be controlled to be part of the organised labour movement, the activists of Gentōi found their significance as a “self-expression of the underclass” (see Chapter 4). Gentōi saw, in the action of day labourers, not only acts that exposed social contradictions but also the potential to destroy the social order imposed by the dominant society. A similar attitude and discourse have been found in freeter activism and the precariat movement, albeit with varied intensities.

Akino-Arashi (1987-1991), the pioneer of freeter activism, would be one of the most vivid examples of how the new generations of the precariat positively and fully approved what Kashima (2004b) calls the “anarchist impulse” of minorities. According to Kashima, a former member of Akino-Arashi (29 December 2018):

What Akino-Arashi pursued was neither solving social problems nor changing the policies of the Japanese government through political struggles, such as a protest in front of the National Diet building. Rather than that, Akino-Arashi focused on making actions (*kodo*),

⁹ According to Agamben (2000, pp. 3-4), a form-of-life is a life that can never be separated from its forms, which is impossible to isolate as a bare life. “It defines a life – human life – in which the single ways, acts, and processes of living are never simply *facts* but always and above all *possibilities* of life, always and above all power (*potenza*)”.

which was the self-expression of those who did not have polished words to express their anger towards the suppressing society, such as freeters, punks, and teenage runaways.



Figure 6.2. Akino-Arashi performing “Zombie Hirohito Action” in front of the Shinjuku station in December, 1988 (Source: <https://twitter.com/akiara2019>).

Higuchi’s (2009) writing also demonstrates how Akino-Arashi did performative direct actions, which maximised spontaneous activity and, by doing so, ruptured the social orders and attracted passers-by. In the following quote, Higuchi begins by describing society after the death of the former emperor Hirohito in the year 1989:

The whole nation was dominated by the enforced mood of self-restraint. Thus, “playing loud music on the street” itself was a protest demanding freedom. (...) The next day, three people were arrested. Yoshiaki, who hung a big banner of “Goodbye, Hirohito” on the pedestrian bridge in the Yoyogi Park, was arrested on the charge of a misdemeanour. At the time, around 300 people, including some punks and bystanders who refused to obey the self-

restraint order, surrounded a police car.¹⁰ A chaos overtook the pedestrian mall (*hokoten*) for a while. (Higuchi, 2009, p. 126)

Police responded by cracking down, arrests ensued, and even leftists criticised Akino-Arashi, calling them ‘the Storm (*Arashi*) of Fools’, ‘those who enjoy being arrested’, or even ‘criminals’ (see Higuchi, 2009).

Notably, Akino-Arashi called their direct action “*jiken* (event/incident/case)”. In Japanese, the term *jiken* is often used to refer to criminal cases. For example, “regarding the *yoseba* riots in the 1960s, the media and newspapers never used the term riots but called them *jiken* to erase their political significance”, according to Mukai (8 April 2019). This is to say, Akino-Arashi tried to re-appropriate the rebellious sense of the term as an act of staging a rupture in a situation that was ultimately enforced by the state. Mitsu (1995, p. 12), a founder of Akino-Arashi, states that “*jiken* is not a crime” but “what gets us involved”. For Kashima (2004a), *jiken* was an act of “destroying the order” of controlled space, which prevented them from “encountering possibilities”.

The nature of direct action underwent a transformation in the 2000s. At this time, the notion of “commotion” (*sawagi*) replaced “event” (*jiken*) or “riot” (*bodo*). The most vivid examples of commotions created in the precariat movement scene would be the sound protests that have been organised since the Anti-Iraq War protests. Shirōtono-ran is also famous for their inspiration of creating commotions that turn urban public space, such as a park, streets, and even inside of a subway train, into what Bey (2015) calls a “temporary autonomous zone”.

An interesting tension is found inside the term commotion, however. For example, Matsumoto (Shirōtono-ran) often uses the term commotion as a synonym of revolution/riots/*ikēi* (a Japanese word for an uprising against feudal rule), which is aimed at “turning the world upside down” (Matsumoto, 2007). At the same time, however, their notion and practice of commotion is much more light-hearted, carefully taking out seriously illegal or dangerous nuances, as the following quote demonstrates (Matsumoto, 2009, p. 108):

Let us riot! Of course, the word riot has various meanings. Out in this world, there are those far-out ones who launch handmade rockets at the emperor’s residence or bomb major corporations. But, my lads! If we attempt to do such things, we’re going to fail and just get arrested even without a chance of escaping. That would make us look dumb. Moreover, doing something so extreme is no fun. So, let others do such serious things while we do

¹⁰ In 1989, the so-called the mood of “self-restraint” was imposed in Japanese society following the death of the former emperor.

something else. What shall we do? Yes! Let us go out to the street and hang around! Make a commotion!

They want a commotion, but not one that gets them into trouble with the authorities.¹¹ How are we to understand their political stance?

Citing the case of the Anti-Iraq War protests of 2003, Mōri (2005, p. 27) argues that the key characteristics of freeter activism are “non-violence and direct action”.¹² His view, however, is not entirely accurate according to Mukai, an activist who engaged in the Anti-Iraq War sound protests. Mukai (16 December 2019) states that “We fought the police, of course, as much as possible. But, at the same time, we needed to deal with citizens who insisted on being peaceful”.

Noiz (2009) also describes how the “tendency of non-violence to avoid conflicts with police” became stronger as the “platform of the movement got bigger, and more individuals and groups joined” in the Anti-Iraq War protests. According to Noiz, “non-sectarian/anarchist activists” and “individuals who were frustrated by the sectarianism of non-violence” decided to organise a series of “Sound Demos Against Street Control”, which was connected to various sound protests in the precariat movement scene. A similar narrative is found around the anti-nuclear protests organised by Shirōtono-ran in 2011. The festive protests attracted a huge number of people, creating an effective rupture in the intense mood of self-restraint (see Brown, 2018). However, as the protest got bigger, the power of controlling the vital energies of participants became strong. Both Kami and Matsumoto recollect:

The anti-nuclear movement itself kept expanding. But the hegemony of the anti-nuclear movement was handed over to those who were less anarchistic people ... how can I put it? I mean, more ordinary people. (Kami, 12 December 2018)

We stopped organising protests in the end. I mean, it was not fun anymore. I believe that Japanese people are particularly obsessed with following orders. I mean, of course, we need some orders. But it seems like people follow orders just because there are orders. (Matsumoto, 14 December 2018)

¹¹ This does not mean, however, that they have avoided getting into legal trouble. People associated with the project have been arrested on multiple occasions at demonstrations, such as the protest against the G8 summit in Hokkaido in 2008 as well as the anti-nuclear protest after the meltdown of the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Plant in 2011.

¹² In Mōri’s definition, direct action is “a way to problematise issues that parliamentary representative politics would not take into serious consideration and to call for media attention”. This definition clearly differs from Graeber’s definition of direct action.

For the activists, the protests were not peaceful appeals of demands to the government but “riots” to directly conflict with “the order of the streets and the participants’ own sensibilities” (Futatsugi cited in Noiz, 2009). However, the activists’ direct actions to cause a rupture within the existing social order became overwhelmed by the civil movement that dictated that participants follow their orders. Noiz (ibid.) states that “[t]he strong atmosphere of avoiding conflicts with police in the Anti-Iraq War protests shows the incapability of the masses who have neglected police control on the streets for decades”.



Figure 6.3. Shirōtono-ran’s notice for the demonstration for “making the rent zero” in 2006 (Source: rll.jp/hood/).

Based on this recognition, Noiz (ibid.) states that “festive commotions” might be one way to devise a strategy in the era in which “direct action colliding head-to-head with the authorities had disappeared, and the site of struggle and relations in which people collectively learned direct action had long disappeared”. I would say that Shirōtono-ran has developed this strategy even further by carefully

adjusting the tone of direct actions corresponding to a given situation in order to not make things too serious and thus avoid legal troubles as far as possible.¹³

Two things must be noted. First, there are many instances in which the precariat's action, unintentionally, took on the character of a slow-paced, direct action. These include Dameren's rejection of employment and rough sleepers' decision to continue living on the streets and refuse governmental protection. The activists of Sōgidan see the act of living on the streets clearly in the same vein as the spontaneous riots of day labourers. In a public talk about the rough sleeping movement, Mukai (2018) points out how the riots in the 1960s and the 1970s pushed the government to set welfare measures for day labourers, even without their demanding such things (see also Haraguchi, 2016). Likewise, "thousands of *keoya* (makeshift tents with wooden frames and blue sheets), which appeared spontaneously in the late 1980s, occupying all major public parks and riverbanks in Tokyo", demonstrate the power of the underclass to live without submitting demands to the system while compelling the system to see "the contradictions of the society", according to the activists of Sōgidan (SLWCAC, 2012).¹⁴

Second, the precariat's inspiration toward autonomy conflicted not only with the rules and social common sense, but also with those in the activist scene. Indeed, both Sōgidan and Shirōtono-ran came under fire during my stay in Tokyo. Here, I briefly explain the case of Sōgidan, which has gotten criticised by other activists since 2012 for their anti-eviction struggles to support rough sleepers. The critics consider the rejection of life protection as an act of throwing away rough sleepers' own right to "live like a human being" (San'ya Joint Struggle Committee, 2012). They further argue that the anti-eviction struggles by Sōgidan were led by "dogmatic activists" who misguided rough sleepers.¹⁵ They blamed the Sōgidan activists for adhering to the logic of conservatives who blame the recipients of life protection and enforce the ideology of "self-reliance".

Mukai (16 December 2019) says that "it might be a reasonable criticism in a sense", adding that, "from their (the critics') perspective, it is just ridiculous for the social movement to support the act of

¹³ Shirōtono-ran's strategy of creating commotions as the meme of riots is actualised as their principles of "*nobinobi* (doing things in a relaxed manner without the fear of reprimand; stretching and extending oneself without tension as the body does)" and "*katteni yaru* (doing things as one wants).

¹⁴ SLWCAC is the abbreviation of the San'ya Labourers' Welfare Centre Activity Committee.

¹⁵ Ironically enough, the criticised activists of Sōgidan are those who devoted themselves to a year-long struggle to achieve life protection for those without a registered address in 2007 (see footnote 4). Since then, they have supported those who want to acquire life protection each week while dedicating the last day of the annual Winter Struggle to a group application practice.

rough sleeping when rough sleepers can get life protection, which is a great achievement for the movement”. At the same time, he says, “rough sleepers, however, do hate welfare. Mr. T. is complaining that the staff of the borough office keeps coming. ‘So, annoying!’, Mr. T said. (laughs)”.¹⁶ The veteran activist of San’ya writes about the rough sleepers’ logic of rejecting welfare as follows:

Those who are living on the streets do so with a certain conviction. (...) They express it in different words. They would say things such as: “I would like to earn my food myself as long as my body works”; “I don’t want to be beholden to the government office”. Of course, most rough sleepers do not even utter a word. What exists there is the primitive form of anti-authoritarianism, or a gut-level rejection against being incorporated into the system made for some leftovers. (...) In this sense, for them, rough sleeping is an act of continuing day labouring just as they did in the past. This might as well be a totally absurd, nonsensical view on the part of the underclass labourers, what is wrong with that? (Mukai, 2020)

Obviously, two different sensibilities clash here. One gestures toward an integrated society, asking the other to act properly to build a better world. The other is resistance to being “incorporated into the system”, as I discuss again in the section, 6.1.3.

(3) Space

The essential practice of the precariat in Tokyo is the production of spaces of autonomy in order to exist outside of the system. Two interrelated factors constitute a significant part of the background of these practices. First, during the 1980s and 1990s, non-sectarian student activists focused on achieving autonomy on university campuses, avoiding the tyranny of sectarian political organisations as well as police intervention.¹⁷ They mainly focused on the production of autonomous spaces such as student halls, student self-rule dorms (*jichi ryō*), and student society rooms. Indeed, many of my research participants mention their experience of autonomous spaces. For example, Matsumoto lived in a university for three years before graduating. He says, “When I entered the university, I was shocked. How to put it? Extraterritoriality? The university was a self-ruling space of students, about which I had never known at my high school” (14 December 2018).

Since the 1990s, however, autonomous spaces in universities began to disappear through a series of attacks by university administrations (see Karatani, 2021; Sakai, 2020).¹⁸ The non-sectarian student

¹⁶ Mr. T. is a rough sleeper at Arakawa Riverside. During my fieldwork in San’ya, the staff of the Sumida borough office regularly visited the rough sleepers camp on the bank to persuade them to get life protection.

¹⁷ Regarding non-sectarian student activism and sectarian organisations, see Chapter 5.

¹⁸ These attacks were a part of the policy pushed by the government and businesses. Their aim was for the privatisation of universities in order to refashion them as corporate-friendly and profit-

activists came out to the streets under such circumstances, forming a new kind of collaborative movement (see Chapter 5). In other words, many of the so-called “new-types of activists” who appeared in the 1990s and the 2000s were those who had engaged in the non-sectarian student movement (see also Higuchi, 2009).

It appears that three attitudes are embedded in the concept of autonomy in the activists’ discourse around autonomous space production. First, autonomous spaces on campus, such as the student hall, student self-rule dorms, and student society rooms, served as a kind of original experience of self-governed space for those who experienced them as students. For them, autonomy means, above all things, autonomy from the controls of (university) authorities as well as police. For example, Matsumoto (2021, p. 112) recollects the autonomous space on campus as follows:

The university staff could not enter the buildings self-ruled by students even one step. Of course, the police also could not come in (...) This is to say; it was quite an anarchist place with lots of political posters on the wall.

Second, many activists talk about the inexplicable charm of the autonomous space on campus, which is often expressed as “*wake-wakaranasa* (incomprehensibility, nonsensicality)” (see Hasegawa, 2021, p. 95). The nonsensicality of autonomous space came from the participants’ flexible attitudes and vague boundaries of the space. On the one hand, many people mention how they could do anything “deviating (*zureru*)” from social norms in the autonomous spaces on campus (see CKKR, 1997; Hashimoto, 2021).¹⁹ On the other hand, as I discussed in Chapter 5, the non-sectarian student activists strived to keep an open and egalitarian attitude, setting their anarchist-like practice apart from sectarian organisations. Such flexibilities produced the autonomous space as “a base of socialising”, to use their own words, which was opened up to non-students without imposing ideological conformity. According to CKKR (1997, p.146), “[v]arious people who have different political tendencies” made “a big household”, producing a “politics of the everyday life of people”. Sakai (2020, p. 117) also describes how the flexibilities of autonomous space on campus were actualised as spontaneous “rhizomes” like the movement of “rabbls” (*uzomuzo*). They diverged from

making institutions. The fact that neoliberal attacks on universities began with demolishing autonomous spaces paradoxically demonstrated how the idea of self-rule in universities had been actualised mainly in spatial forms.

¹⁹ CKKR is the abbreviation of the Committee for Keeping Komaba Ryo. Komaba Ryo is the student self-rule dormitory of Tokyo University.

the forms of “common sense” shared by “people who belong to organisations regardless of being radical, liberal, or conservative”.²⁰



Figure 6.4. A student room in the Kobama Student Self-rule Dormitory (Photo taken by Sekine in 1998, published by Digital Creators, 2019 <https://bn.dgcr.com/>).

Last but not least, self-rule appears to be a specific method of producing autonomous space at a distance from authorities as well as tuning differences to produce a communal rhythm. How students collectively ran self-ruled dormitories is particularly noteworthy. Students kept running the dormitories in many universities even after the university authorities officially shut them down,

²⁰ In the case of San'ya, this aspect appears to be more complicated. On the one hand, “you cannot expect people are acting decent here”, according to Hirano, “because San'ya is a place for such (problematic) people”. People also do not ask about a person's life story, as “some had been in *yakuza* and others had gone to jail”. At the same time, activists try hard to manage their activities by keeping any *yakuza* or violent sectarian group away—for example, members of Sōgidan have been physically attacked in the past. “If you want to join the activities of Sōgidan, you should cut the relationship with them (*yakuza* or the sectarian groups). Think about it”, as they often say to a newly-joined person. Mukai says, “we do not intend to make a place where anyone can come. It sounds great if you are in the civil society, but in the society of the underclass, where both good things and bad things appear in extreme forms, you should keep distance from such violence carefully. Otherwise, the site of the movement soon becomes hierarchical, like a *yakuza* group” (16 December 2019).

cutting electricity and gas. The following excerpt is from an article by Hashimoto (2021, p. 74), a former activist of San'ya who had lived at a self-ruled student dormitory as an illegal resident.

On the day of the university exam, I received a leaflet for recruiting residents to the dormitory. There was a weird sentence on the leaflet. As I recall, it went like this: “The university has stopped recruiting residents of the dormitory, but please join as a resident. It is no problem to live there”. (...) Those who moved into the dormitory at the time, like myself, ran into problems, such as the university refusing to issue student identification cards to us or mailing threatening letters to our parents”.

Hashimoto's writing shows how students produced autonomous space by “acting as if one is already free”, to use Graeber's (2009, p. 203) words.²¹ Ignoring authorities, students reproduced the space through a radical form of direct democracy without “a janitor”, “hierarchy”, “obligation”, or “so-called person in charge”, which was never easy. “The general assemblies of residents often went on overnight till morning” to deal with “issues of internal discord”, according to Hashimoto (*ibid.*, p. 73).

Internal strife within the autonomous space also carried over to the precariat movement, and the controversies around Shirōtono-ran vividly demonstrate the difficulties around issues of flexibility. As I mentioned in Chapter 3, Shirōtono-ran encountered criticism in their preparation of the Nolimit Seoul event in 2017. Over 60 people in Tokyo who engaged in the precariat movement scene were invited to a social media chat room about an inter-East Asia event called the Nolimit festival. A male (let us call him Z.) made a supposedly inappropriate proposal in the chat room.²² A female criticised the proposal and questioned if the festival was prepared based on the shared awareness to make the festival safe to all minorities. While people agreed with her criticism about Z.'s proposal, Matsumoto gave a different opinion regarding her request to build a shared awareness:

You say that every problem is connected, and we should be aware of such related issues first to take action. I think this is difficult in terms of OOOO (the name of the event, which is the Nolimit festival). Of course, when people begin a social movement or form a group, they should share the objectives and critical issues for the group. However, OOOO is an act of making an abnormal society of weirdos temporarily. (...) There are humble bastards and weirdos in any society. People who have different ideas are coexisting. OOOO is the same. People who are quite different are preparing this festival together, which is fun. Moreover, even when we share the same idea, new weirdos will come one by one. Sharing ideas thus

²¹ Sakai (2020) points out, from his experience of managing the underground student society rooms in Waseda University, that such places could not be sustained without a continuous process of struggles and negotiations.

²² The proposal was for running an “Asian host bar and Asian girls bar” for raising funds. Z. made a public apology for the proposal. For the details, see Chapter 3.

must be a perpetual process. It is crucial to work together to deal with problems when they arise, but everyone cannot speak from the same perspective from the first. (Matsumoto, cited in the Anonymous Many, 2017)

The critic and one more female left the chat room, arguing that what Matsumoto said reflected the hierarchal atmosphere of “Kōenji”.²³ Then, a group of activists in Tokyo and Seoul who supported the critic called out the “sexist and imperialist culture of Kōenji” on social media in Japan and Korea under the name of “the anonymous many” (2017).

What is at the heart of the disputes are different sensibilities in relation to the social movement. Those who called out the culture of Kōenji believed that the social movement should be a safe space to protect minorities. They defined those who had left the chat room as “victims” and considered any attempt to contact them by those who remained in the chat room as violent. Meanwhile, those who participated in the festival, albeit with various views on Z.’s proposal, say that they felt an incompatibility with the critics’ act of exclusion. They tend to see social movement as a place where differences involve “talking or disputing ... to make some points”, to borrow a participant’s words. From this perspective, “having trouble is the very first step for self-rule”, to borrow Matsumoto’s words. In other words, self-rule is a method of tuning troubles and finding communal consensus through ongoing conversations:

Sometimes, I feel like we have endless meetings over and over. Amongst those who come to Akane, some have difficulties.²⁴ I mean, mental issues. Moreover, some of them misbehave, including sexual harassment, without realising it. Since we do not pre-set a clear rule in Akane, we should deal with each case by discussing what to do. I hope Akane is a space without exclusion (*haiji*), but people have different ideas. It is often totally nonsensical (*wake wakaranai*) in a bad sense. Having said that, there are some delightful moments. (Pepe, 14 December 2019)

Nolimit is opening its door widely. (...) When those kinds of (different) people appear one after another, I wonder how effective our self-rule can be? This is the point, I guess. I thus believe it would be better to keep discussing whenever a problem arises while opening the event without limitation. (...) This is why we call the event an “autonomous zone”, which is neither an organisation nor a social movement group. (Matsumoto, 14 December 2018)

To sum up, the precariat movement in Tokyo has formed with autonomy as its core value in order to break away from the strong social norms. The *yoseba* movement and the non-sectarian student

²³ Kōenji is a name of the area where Shirōtono-ran is located.

²⁴ Akane is a small pub near Waseda University. It was opened in 1998 by a person who was close to Dameren. Many people engaged in Dameren have worked there voluntarily. For a discussion of Akane, see Cassegård (2013, pp. 57-67).

movement have significantly influenced the formation of the precariat movement in how they form their theory and practice in relation to position, action, and space. In their endeavour to live freely from the oppressive norms of Japanese society, the precariat has also tried to keep a flexible attitude and openness, producing a heterogeneous space where different people socialise. The term “*wake wakaranai*” (nonsensical) is often used by those who engage in Dameren and Shirōtono-ran with a strong sense of both delightfulness and pain caused by openness.

6.1.3. The use of autonomous space: Work and home

(1) Workspace as valorising space: Shirōtono-ran

The precariat movement in Tokyo has struggled to create alternative spaces and relations, i.e., commons, in their efforts to live outside the system. But, how can the precariat create “a post-revolutionary world in advance”, to borrow the words of Matsumoto, when the once-celebrated subjectivity, the “freeters”, became mere disposable workers suffering from economic insecurity? In this regard, Shirōtono-ran provides us with an example of how the precariat tried to earn a living outside the capitalist value system.

In his comparison of Shirōtono-ran and Dameren, Fukui (2012) argues that Dameren, which rejected all kinds of profit-making activities, was more radical than Shirōtono-ran, thanks to the more favourable economic conditions of the 1990s. However, I disagree, as the people engaged in Shirōtono-ran have tried to build on Dameren’s idea of the “refusal of work” and go a step further by creating spaces to valorise their activities. This means that the practices of Shirōtono-ran correspond to Negri’s (1991) argument that the “refusal of work” should be complemented by the process of “self-valorisation”.²⁵

While Shirōtono-ran is the name they have given themselves in reference to a series of small shops in the area of Kōenji, many activists in Tokyo consider Shirōtono-ran as a part of the Tokyo Nantoka (the phrase *nantoka* can be translated as “somehow” or “so and so”), or the Nantoka Neighbourhood, rather than just a group or a name of shops in Kōenji (see Brown, 2018). The Nantoka Neighbourhood refers to a loosely-networked collection of small shops and activist spaces

²⁵ In order to refuse work embedded in capitalist wage-labour relations, we need to find a way to create various use values and share/exchange/communise such values outside of the system. Negri’s concept of “self-valorisation” refers to “the concrete constituting process” of creating values in autonomous space and time. (see Ceaver, 1992).

dispersed across metropolitan Tokyo along the Chuo railway line. Although the nature of the spaces varies from one to another, they generally share a common orientation in terms of social/cultural values and lifestyles.

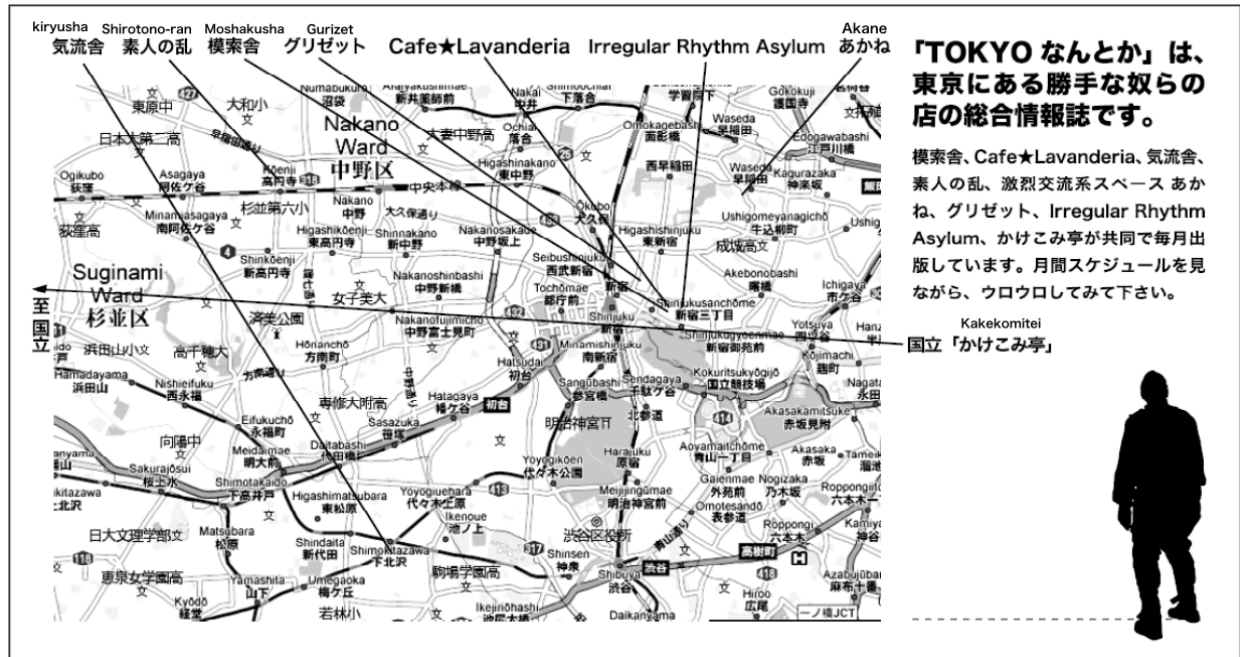


Figure 6.5. The map of Tokyo Nantoka (Source: Tokyo Nantoka).

Since 2005, Shirōtono-ran has operated 18 shops, including recycling shops, a bar, a free space, and a guesthouse in total, in the neighbourhood of Kōenji. As many of them had closed, only five remained by the time of my fieldwork between 2018 and 2019. In any case, their attempt to organise such a variety of spaces with a diverse group of people is notable. By running small recycling shops and spaces for various gatherings, the precariat valorised their work as a monetary form and circulated the money within the network as much as possible. At the same time, in their spaces they continued trying to directly share various forms of *surplus*, including the idea of anti-consumerism and affective relations, beyond the monetary form of valorisation. By doing so, they created a relatively desirable living environment for those who pursued alternative lifestyles, albeit on a limited level and scale. For example, Ashang (4 December 2018), a Taiwanese youth living in Kōenji, made the following observations:²⁶

²⁶ When I conducted my fieldwork in Tokyo, the Kōeinji scene had vibrant energy, especially with those artists and activists who visited Shirōtono-ran from outside of Japan. Some of them worked at Nantoka Bar or the Manuke Guesthouse.

I have been here (in Kōenji) for four months. I work twice a week at Manuke Guesthouse or the recycling shop for a bed at Manuke House. I run the Nantoka Bar 2-3 times a month to earn a living. I also sell food at the Kōenji night market once a month. That is enough for me to live. More than enough actually. (...) Well, I know alternative spaces in Taiwan where my friends are engaged. But Kōenji is the best example, I would say. In Taiwan, most of my friends in alternative communities are still working. They don't like companies. They don't like working. But they cannot escape from work, the wage relationships. Those whom I have met in Kōenji, on the other hand, did not work that much. They live a very simple life. They are not controlled by the economy. Of course, they also need to pay rent. But their life still seems much simpler.

Needless to say, living in a capitalist city and maintaining an autonomous space requires money. So, what we find here is a case in which the need for economic survival and supporting the life one wants in autonomy coincides with creating a workspace. As in the saying, killing two birds with one stone, the attempts to have a space of self-valorisation by Shirōtono-ran met their need to live in the city and create a space of their own. For Shirōtono-ran, running shops is clearly interrelated to a practice of self-rule, and this is initiated and carried out based on individual independence.²⁷ This is further elaborated by Matsumoto (14 December 2018):

The social order should be created as a result of self-rule at each place where people do things. If it is made from top to bottom, it is easy for people to become dumb. Then, it is gonna be over before you can say, "Ah!" I believe that is how communism failed. What matters is if one can achieve self-rule. Even for the shops, the crucial thing is if each shop runs independently. At first, Shirōtono-ran kept growing. It seemed like we could make a big group. But it would not be fun. We thus decided to run shops individually while only sharing the name. Nobody meddles with other people's ways of running things, otherwise they ask for help or advice. That is what we practice.

Koizumi (10 December 2018), who runs the Nantoka Bar once a week, also says:

DIY means that you do something not because you are forced to do it but because you want to do it. At the same time, you should take responsibility for what you have done. I believe that is what Shirōtono-ran is doing.

²⁷ Obinger (2014) views Shirōtono-ran as an alternative economy based on DIY culture and a gift economy. Strictly speaking, however, it is an exaggeration to characterise Shirōtono-ran as an alternative economic practice. In terms of running shops, only Nantoka Bar looks unconventional for its flexible co-management. But, in the end, even with Nantoka Bar, individuals run their own business independently by renting the space. In other words, their alternative nature does not come from the economic arrangement itself but the sense of autonomy. For a better example of economically-based alternative practices, one can find it in the case of Bin-Zib, which I discuss later in this chapter.

When things go well, work in Shirōtono-ran becomes a joyful activity of creating tangible values. The following is again from Koizumi (ibid.):

I earn around 10,000 yen (JPY) by working at Nantoka Bar for a night.²⁸ If I convert it to an hourly wage, it would be like 600 yen, which is even lower than the minimum wage. But I like it because I can do things freely as I want. It might sound trifling, but, for example, I develop a new menu with a sense of the season and wonder if anyone would notice it. These kinds of things are so pleasant. (...) I don't like work when I don't know what I am doing, such as paperwork at a company. I also hate that I earn money without knowing where the money comes from, like investing in stocks. But, at Nantoka Bar, I have this concrete sense that I make things people enjoy.



Figure 6.6. Nantoka Bar. Pepe takes charge of the bar for the night. They rotate the role to share work and income (Source: The photo above taken by Shigeta, 2020 <https://shige-gourmet.jp/>; the photo below was taken by Masuyama, 2015 <https://www.hotpepper.jp/>).

Yet even when one can do things as one likes independently, things often become harder than one initially thought. Above all things, it is not that everyone can run a shop skillfully. More than a few people in the precariat movement scene in Tokyo jokingly say that “Matsumoto is a competent

²⁸ 1,000 JPY is approximately 9 USD as of May, 2021.

person (*dekiru hito*)”. Some activists even said, “Shirōtono-ran is a movement of capable people”, implying the fine line it treads between individual entrepreneurship and alternative space.

Here, I would like to note that various “survival skills” without money have been developed and circulated in the precariat community, such as Shirōtono-ran and Dameren. For example, at the end of 2017, I attended an event in Tokyo. It was dedicated to a talk about the newly published book, “*Living Without Money*” (2017) with Tsurumi, the author, and Kami, one of the founders of Dameren, as main guests. They talked about various skills to live without money from rough sleeping or making self-sufficient life to building various alternative relations and communities. However, as a person in the audience pointed out, many people saw such practices as “awesome but fearful” while considering those who lived such a life “exceptional”.



Figure 6.7. The recycling shop of Shirōtono-ran is temporarily closed due to the Covid-19 pandemic, April 2020 (Source: twitter.com/recycleshirouto).

Most obviously, the fact that their autonomy is dependent on their abilities also means that they are still individually exposed to the danger of precarisation. Even the most capable people’s projects are

affected by economic or social situations under the capitalist economic system.²⁹ The people who initiated freeter activism and the precariat movement are ageing: those in their twenties in the 2000s are now in their forties as of 2021, and they are no longer young people. In fact, many in the precariat movement scene in Tokyo, including those associated with Shirōtono-ran, express their feeling of unease about “the real problems such as rent and living costs, as well as an unforeseen future”, to use their own words.

The sense of precariousness based on the uneven abilities of individuals and vulnerabilities of autonomous space in the capitalist world is fundamentally connected to the ontological precariousness of human beings. Those in Tokyo’s precariat movement scene are aware of the necessity to build on their existing practice to build alternative relations for themselves and others to expand interdependence beyond the normative family and state welfare. Kami asserts (12 December 2018):

Many of us have chosen different lifestyles other than being hired, getting married, and having children. This means that now we need to think about how we live our later years in life differently from those supported and cared for by their offspring. How are we to make a living? Can a freeter, precariat, or people in this milieu (the precariat movement scene) help and care for each other even when everybody, including myself, becomes older and weaker? This is the very experiment or task we face now.

Perhaps *Chinbotsu Kazoku*, discussed in Chapter 5, was one example of making such relations. San’ya also provides a unique and long-standing example of how the precariat in Tokyo has created an alternative relationship of interdependence beyond what society commonly recognised as home or a community. Let us now turn to the case of San’ya’s practice of building a home on the street.

(2) Home on the street: The case of San’ya

- **Making sense of rough sleeping**

Since April 2020, Sōgidan has run their communal kitchen, a weekly, 6-day event, to provide food to rough sleepers who lost their job during the Covid-19 pandemic.³⁰ Each day, around 100 rough

²⁹ Indeed, the Manuke Guesthouse was closed in 2021 due to the Covid-19 pandemic (see Figure 6.7).

³⁰ The TMG suspended the so-called “rotating job (*rinban shigoto*)”, which is “the special employment program” launched in 1973, to quell the riots of San’ya day labourers. The work was originally designed to give work three times a year to supplement jobs when the employment of day labourers decreased. With the dismantling of *yosebas*, however, it became the primary source of income for rough sleepers. As of 2020, around 1,700 people register at job placement offices. Each day, 255 people get jobs, such as cleaning roadsides or parks, getting 8,800 JPY per day. A person has his turn 2-3 times a month (see The Nikkei, 2020).

sleepers come to have a meal.³¹ Around 20 to 30 rough sleepers actively participate in the activities of Sōgidan, such as the preparation of food, meeting, collective bargaining with the government, and protests. Rough sleepers refuse livelihood protection, which pays them approximately 130 thousand JPY (approximately 1200 USD as of 2021) per month and lets them stay in a flophouse in San'ya. Some of the rough sleepers say, for example, “I like things just the way they are”, “Those who got livelihood protection tend to die soon. I would like to move my body as long as I can”, “I just don't like to hear things from the borough office”, or “I'd rather die than get livelihood protection. It is just awesome as it is, you know. Sleeping under the stars feels just great”. However, should a movement support rough sleeping when social welfare provides shelter and cash benefits to cover living costs? In this section, I discuss how the activists of Sōgidan answer the question differently than the answers offered by the common sense of civil society. I also look at how the activists have produced the *yoseba* as a self-help space to support day labourers' “way of living” (*ikikata*).

According to Tsumaki (2003), who surveyed 722 rough sleepers who rejected the government's livelihood protection scheme, most people who keep sleeping rough are former day labourers. Based on my observation and Tsumaki's study, I identify three kinds of explanations as to why the former day laborers in San'ya maintain their lives on the street even when they could receive the state welfare provision. Firstly, “laziness and self-indulgence” of the rough sleepers can be noted (*ibid.*). Those who support this view tend to believe that rough sleepers must be disciplined, believing that they can do away with and solve rough sleeping problems. Secondly, some perceive the rough sleepers' rejection of life protection as irrational. Those who hold this view also believe that such irrationality is supported and even promoted by what they perceive to be the dogmatic activism of Sōgidan, as I have discussed. The third theory, held by Sōgidan themselves, posits that what preserves the act of rough sleeping is the “rebellious bodies” produced through the experiences of day labouring (Mukai, 2020).

Despite their different political stances, the first and second explanations are in agreement in their regard for rough sleeping as something that should be abandoned through discipline, in the case of the former, or assistance, in the case of the latter.³² The activists of Sōgidan, on the other hand, do

³¹ As of October 2018, the number of rough sleepers in San'ya was 160. Amongst them, 74.7% were in their seventies or older than seventies (TMG, 2020). Several NPOs and religious groups support rough sleepers and life protection recipients in San'ya, providing soup kitchens and medical services. According to the activists of San'ya, however, those who lived as day labourers for their whole lives tend not to even come to soup kitchens.

³² If the former generally represents the moral ideology of the Japanese capitalist order, the latter is a view supported by those in NPOs, whose members hold centre-left and formerly ultra-left positions.

not find the reason for or against rough sleeping in ideology. Their understanding of rough sleeping is based on the phenomenal approach to the world of the rough sleepers by trying to decipher their “feeling” (*kimochi*), “attitude” (*taido*), “way of thinking” (*kangaekata*), “way of living” (*ikikata*), and “bodies” (*karada*). This is elaborated on by Hirano and Mukai, two of the San’ya activists:³³

Since everybody has earned a living as day labourers for their whole life, everyone has their way to do things, firmly. I mean, they never listened to what other people say. They hated so much to hear any sort of instruction or order. It was impossible to organise day labourers in San’ya. It can be said that they were rebellious in the most fundamental sense. They could be right-wing in their thoughts. But their bodies (*karada*) were totally leftist (*sayoken*), I would say. (Hirano, 12 September 2018)

They have been completely expelled from the window of life protection for like 15 or 20 years. They have this strong feeling of fury, of course, like, “What is all this nonsense now when you did nothing for us before?” More importantly, living as a day labourer means you do not have anyone else or any place to depend on but your own body. In this sense, getting life protection means, for them, giving up the very means of survival, such as their tents, which give them a place to stay and store the cans they pick up. (Mukai, 17 September 2018)

As I have noted above, activists attribute rough sleepers’ insistence on continuing rough sleeping to their experience of day labouring. In other words, people who do not have the experience of living as day labourers would have difficulty understanding their reasoning. Therefore, from the beginning, the old labourers’ sensibilities are not to be understood according to the logic of civil society, according to the activists of Sōgidan. The following excerpt, which relates this attitude to a question of dignity, is from a recording of a talk:

This kind of attitude or way of thinking (of the day labourers) is hard to explain by the terminology of rights, I guess. When we think of rights, we cannot help but think of them as part of the institution. Of course, having a good institution is essential. But it can also be short-sighted, if you do not think about a bigger structure, like the state or the class, which sustains the institution. When people talk about the issue around the underclass, what people problematise is “their exclusion from the system”. But another aspect of this exclusion is their “exclusion from the deception of the system”. I believe this is the point. Anyways, it (rough sleeping) is not about rights or social justice. How can I put it? I cannot find any word except “dignity”. It is not something you can reason with. When somebody tries to take away the most precious thing from you, you defend it, refusing to give in to some sort of niceties. I use the word dignity in that sense. (Mukai, 22 January 2018)

³³This does not mean that the activists romanticise the rough sleepers or the underclass as rebellious subjects. They have faced problems within the underclass, including severe violence, and have tried to address them as an issue of power within the movement.

From this perspective, the activists of Sōgidan have developed two key strategies for protecting the homes on the streets and building relationships with rough sleepers.

- **Building homes on the street by working together**

The first strategy concerns their focus on the historical nature of rough sleeping. While this might sound rather academic to some, emphasising the historical nature of rough sleeping has practical implications in San'ya. At bottom, the historical nature of rough sleeping depends on this fact: the choice to sleep roughly is premised on the underclass's collective experience of exclusion from society. "What is important is the fact that day labourers are a specific class that have been produced in the history of Japan's industrialisation", Hirano says (12 September 2018).

In addition, the Sōgidan activists articulate rough sleeping according to a long human history beyond the modern capitalist political economy of Japan. In several articles and talks, Mukai points out how the poor have always occupied spaces in the city to build their livelihood regardless of government imposition, citing examples from "the farmers of the *Edo* period who settled down on riversides" to "rag pickers (*bataya*) who formed villages in the periphery of the city after World War II".:

Rough sleeping as a practice is forms very much like the slums of the third world, for example. In a sense, they are both forced to inhabit a place. And they share the fact that their habitation is not only an act of living in itself but also very much connected to access to work and food. Moreover, they are subject to eviction by urban redevelopment. (Mukai, 2013)

The figure of the day labourer was produced by Japanese society as the domestically excluded Other. Their othering was necessary to use them in the construction of major cities as disposable goods. Yet, day labourers produced their own "way of living" by reappropriating social and geographic resources, developing "skills to survive" such as rough sleeping and working in rag picking.

Framing rough sleeping in this light clearly goes against the grain of the socially accepted understanding of taking residence in and making a home in the city. The activists of Sōgidan are fully aware of this, and continue to reference the historical nature of rough sleeping to the officials from the borough office during their negotiation. In my fieldwork, I often saw the officials displaying their irritation as the activists kept asking them to be aware of the history around day labouring and rough sleeping, as if this were the officials' responsibility. We can interpret this practice of cultivating the understanding of rough sleeping not only as a strategy of collective empowerment in itself, but also against the objectification and othering carried out by mainstream society.

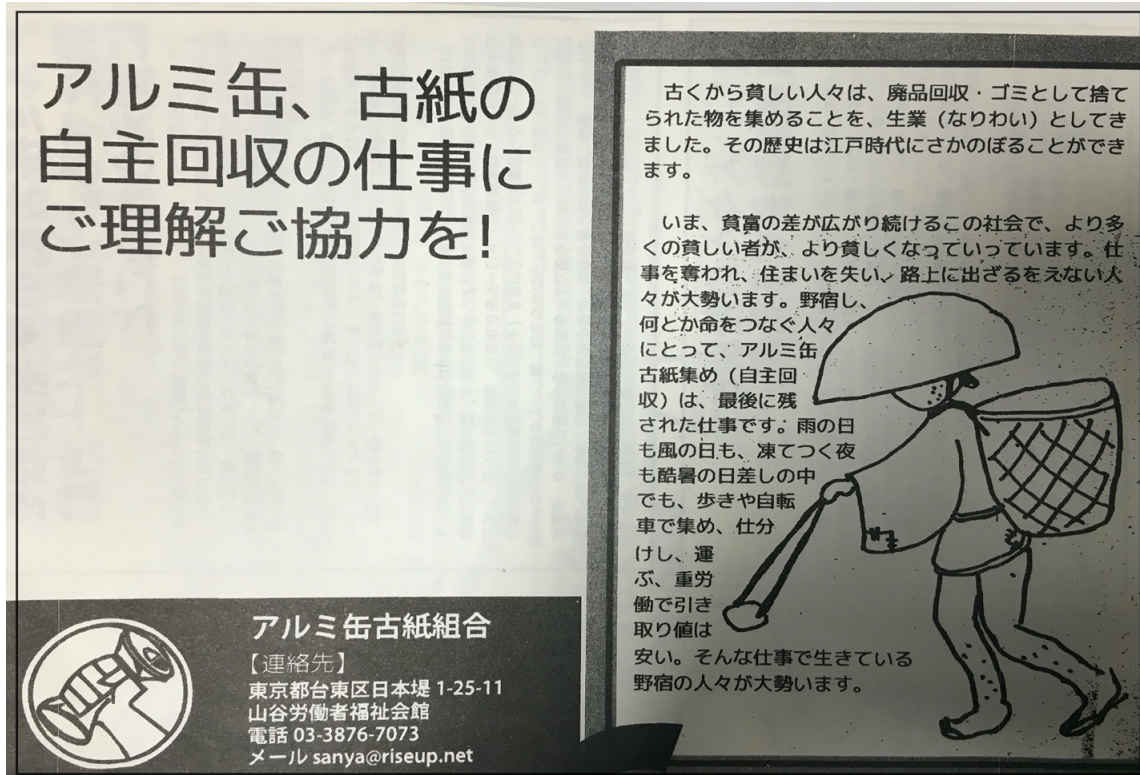


Figure 6.8. A leaflet produced by the “Aluminium Can Collectors’ Union” organised by San’ya Sōgidan. It was circulated to explain to local residents how rag picking has been the work of the poor historically and to ask them for “the understanding and cooperation for the work of the autonomous collecting of aluminium cans and abandoned papers”.

Secondly, the activists have developed practical strategies to encourage people (including activists and rough sleepers) to work together. The “communal kitchen” run by Sōgidan is perhaps the most vivid practice illustrating their strategy of working together. Unlike typical soup kitchens, where volunteers make food and distribute it to the needy, in a communal kitchen, people prepare food together and get it without making a queue. According to Hirano, it began in 1994, when “eating became a real issue of San’ya”. The following excerpt is from a pamphlet published by Sōgidan, describing how the communal kitchen began:

People were dying on the streets. It was obvious that we needed to do something. People said, “Let’s provide food”. But the way we do this should not put activists in the role of providers and labourers in that of recipients. We decided to let people who need food prepare it and eat together without making a queue. (SLWCAC, 2017, p. 6)

Managing a communal kitchen is much more cumbersome than running a soup kitchen. “It is not only inefficient but also dangerous. Actually, people were often hurt by knives or hot pots in its early days”, says Hirano. Yet, Sōgidan kept running the communal kitchen by intentionally increasing work, because “giving something to labourers and, by doing so, putting them in the position to say ‘thank you’ is a huge disrespect” (SLWCAC, 2017, p. 6). This episode shows that what the activists of

Sōgidan care for the most is to do the opposite of what the Japanese civil society did to them. That is neither to despise them for their underclass way of living nor to rescue them from their plight but to pay respect to and support “the way of living” of old day labourers, who have lived on their own and have refused to be beholden.

Through this strategy of creating a network of care by working together, the activists and the rough sleepers of San’ya have protected their homes on the streets in a unique way. On the one hand, the actual actions of Sōgidan amount to facilitating care and communal relations. Providing basic material support for rough sleeping is an important part of Sōgidan’s practice.³⁴ They ensure the safety of rough sleepers/rag pickers from eviction attempts by the municipal government as well as attacks from some malicious citizenry. On the other hand, they put conscious efforts toward not making the movement a kind of community. Neither the activists nor the rough sleepers use the word “care”, while activists of Sōgidan often say that they are not interested in any “community-making sort of thing”. They have a strong antipathy towards “community-building projects” promoted by the local government and NPOs alongside the process of gentrification. At the same time, they are clearly aware of the violence existing in the underclass community as well as the violence of the civil society against rough sleepers. Indeed, one cannot find a community of rough sleepers engaged in Sōgidan’s movement in a conventional sense. In the tent villages in Tate Riverside and Arakawa Riverside, which they protected through a vigorous struggle, the rough sleepers cook individually without having meals together (see also Yuki, 2015). Mukai says, “of course there are rough sleepers who often drink together. But, in such groups, people’s relations always turn into relations between the boss and underlings (*kobun*). This is a definite fact. Those who hate that sort of thing act individually” (22 January 2018).

The Sōgidan activists have activated a network of communal care by engaging rough sleepers to act voluntarily, or to borrow the activists’ expression, to become subjects of their own (*shutaitekini*) to care for themselves and others instead of treating them as recipients of charity.³⁵ By doing so, the

³⁴ Sōgidan receives donations (*kanpa*) from various people, who have engaged in the movement and support San’ya. “It is because Sōgidan has a long history in the movement”, according to Hirano. The activists use the donations to run the communal kitchen and other activities in a considerably strict manner. Any material support is given to individuals. A financial report is announced through the Yamakara, the newsletter published by the Sōgidan activists four times a year. Letters of appreciation are thoughtfully sent to donors.

³⁵ For example, in 2014, there was a series of seriously violent attacks on rough sleepers by teenagers. Besides the legal process, the activists did night patrols together with rough sleepers. They also negotiated with the Education Committee in the borough to conduct a program in all the elementary schools and middle schools to let students have a better understanding about rough sleepers and

activists effectively engaged rough sleepers, who have resisted being in any bounded relations for their entire lives. Mr. A. and Mr. T., former day labourers in their 80s living at a tent at Arakawa Riverside, explain why they join the activities of Sōgidan as follows:

Sōgidan is on our side. They are helpful, I would say. I thus attend their activities when they are swamped, like the summer festival and the winter struggles. (Mr A., 2 November 2018)

I would say that Sōgidan people know things. That is why I have done things with Sōgidan like the Aluminium Can Collectors' Union (*Arumikan Kumiai*) even though I hate groups or organisations very much. I hate being with people. I get into trouble with people in no time because I really hate being told what to do or not to do, that sort of thing. (Mr T., 3 November 2018)



Figure 6.9. The cats living with rough sleepers at Arakawa Riverside (Photo taken by the author).

human rights. The program was designed and conducted based on rough sleepers' voices (see Yuki, 2015).

The practice of working together creates San'ya as an actualised site of movement in three ways. First, it enables the activists to “connect to colleagues”, as they say. For example, the annual Winter Struggle turns the two blocks of the alley in front of the Jōhoku Centre into a site of communal work for a week. It started by constructing a huge frame with iron bars to make a place to sleep. The site is filled with sounds of hammering iron bars and yelling of warning or asking for what they need from each other. From old former day labourers in their eighties to students in their twenties work together, making a collective rhythm of the work, and practically the entire Winter Struggle is built on this type of communal work. For the activists of Sōgidan, this is the most important way of “meeting with colleagues”:

Making an open-air fire (*takibi*) is really important in San'ya's movement. You do not need any money to prepare it, while everyone can jump in to work on it. We chopped firewood with axes even a few years ago. It needs more people, including those who have experience. You need to learn how to do it first. Making a fire is a kind of work that attracts good people and makes people get along. (Mukai, at a talk with student volunteers in the Winter Struggle of 2019)³⁶

Second, the practice of working together exposes what is normally invisible to the people who live in San'ya and the surroundings as well as to society in general. This display of the “invisible” runs counter to the persistent attempts by the officials of the Jōhoku Centre as well as the TMG to remove San'ya as a space of rough sleepers and day labourers under the “cleaning up project” and “renewal of the local environment” (TMG, 2020, p. 5). Indeed, gentrification in San'ya has proceeded for a decade (see Kohama, 2019; Rusenko, 2020; Umezawa, 1995; Yamaguchi, 2001). Many of the flophouses have turned into guest houses for travellers. Apartment complex buildings have gone up where there had been small bars for labourers. Despite this development, the scene of working together weekly and during the Winter Struggle at the turn of the year asks people to differentiate their “partition of the sensible”, to use Rancière's (2010) term. I still remember how I was surprised and fascinated by the Winter Struggle on my first visit to San'ya. Collective movements of bodies working together, huge steaming pots on drums of fire, and the sounds and smells that filled the air produced a huge, wild, moving kitchen on the streets. When I shared my memory of the first encounter, veteran members of the Winter Struggle would nod in agreement.³⁷ Although I cannot share their rich stories here for the lack of space, what is clear is that everyone I talked to felt that

³⁶ With the words “good people”, Mukai means those who have lived as day labourers. They tend to have a distance from hierarchical relations, considering people who they encounter at worksites colleagues (see Chapter 4).

³⁷ A veteran activist told me: “In the old days, even more people joined. Actually, San'ya itself was totally different from other places at the time. How can I put it? San'ya had a different air”.

San'ya had a different presence and visibility, which concretely ran counter to the forces that incessantly cleanse (“regenerate” in their language) the urban environment.



Figure 6.10. Making food in the Winter Struggle in 2020/2021 (Source: San'ya Sōgidan).

Finally, by working together, Sōgidan effectively (re)produces the *yoseba* as a space for day labourers to maintain their way of life. As one can observe, San'ya has actually evolved from its original function as a *yoseba*, a labour market, and turned into a hometown of rough sleepers. The practice of working together re-established San'ya's proud roots as a space of working people and thus defended their way of life in the very place of their habitation. Those who blame Sōgidan's activism as being complicit with the trend of the neoliberal ideology of “self-reliance” cannot see the fact that “the term self-reliance has a completely different meaning depending on whose, which class's, self-reliance on what”, as Mukai (16 December 2019) points out. The open-air fire symbolically demonstrates what the home means for the day labourers in San'ya in this regard. “In old days, labourers made fires everywhere in San'ya to warm themselves and get along”, Machida (29 December 2020), an activist in his sixties, says, “Even though it was banned, we still do it in the week of the Winter Struggle, you know. The open-air fire is what has protected labourers' lives in San'ya, which is the town (*machi*) of the labourer”. The fire is made not for specific community members but for what the activists call “the drifting underclass”. Day labourers come and go, without even saying goodbye. The

activists tend not to mention those who suddenly disappeared. Yet, the practice of working together to keep the fire going allows the underclass to come and warm their bodies whenever they need it. When they warm their bodies, they chop wood and put it in the fire without asking, and, by doing so, they join in the activities of preserving the *yoseba* as the home of the drifting or fluid underclass.

6.2. Imagining sustainable commons for the urban precariat: The case of Seoul

It was in the 2010s when precarious youth under the neoliberal regime appeared on the social movement scene in Seoul, maintaining the identity of the precariat. On the one hand, labour unions for precarious youth were founded to reclaim the rights of precarious labourers.³⁸ These organisations have focused on campaigns appealing to the broader society with agendas such as raising the minimum wage and criticising vicious enterprises in order to reform society (see Yoo, 2015; Yang & Chae, 2020).

On the other hand, a more prefigurative or anarchist form of urban precariat activism emerged at various sites of anti-eviction struggles of shop tenants. The Duriban struggle is considered to be its beginning: scholars have paid attention to Duriban and similar cases as “the new social movement interconnecting a movement with various cultural activities” (Ok and Kim, 2013). According to Kim (2013a), the youth precariat encountered at the site of anti-eviction struggles promoted “prefigurative politics” of related to egalitarian, affinity, and cultural movements, while expanded the spatiality of the movement by, for example, organising the first Precariat General Strike held on May Day in 2012. Lee (2017) looked at how these cases led to an “alternative urban movement”, which has a lot in common with the Japanese “new cultural movement” defined by Mōri (2005). Both movements emerged under the process of precarisation, and the participants shared “anarchist qualities” and “cultural characteristics”. However, the styles of the youth precariat activism that emerged in the 2010s were not entirely new. They shared a significant commonality with the youth movement led by the so-called Generation X in the 2000s, especially due to their anarchistic and egalitarian qualities (see Chapter 5).³⁹ At the same time, the anti-eviction struggles in the 2010s confronted difficulties

³⁸ Youth Community Union, founded in 2010, and *Alba* (arbeit, meaning part-time work) Labour Union, founded in 2013, are the most significant cases.

³⁹ Researchers often mention how the youth precariat in the movement scene in the 2010s spoke to each other casually regardless of age as a significant example of their egalitarian culture. The practice was developed in the 2000s by activists networking through the Jinbo blog (see Chapter 5; Han, 2015).

similar to the ones that were found in the anti-eviction struggles of the urban poor in Seoul in the 1980s, discussed in Chapter 4.

In this part of the chapter, I look at how the urban precariat movement in Seoul has been unfolding by developing and improvising spatial and financial discourses and practices to challenge real estate capitalism in the genealogy of the urban poor movement. In Section 6.2.1, I discuss how a new kind of urban youth activism appeared at eviction sites such as Duriban, reflecting a situation in which precarity has become normalised in Korean society. I also look at how individual anti-eviction struggles confronted difficulties, pushing the activists engaged in the anti-eviction movement to imagine a common ground for the urban precariat movement. In Section 6.2.2, I look at two specific cases, Citizens' Action for *Gyeong'ui*-railway *Gongyuji* and Bin-Go, in which efforts have sought to establish a more sustainable ground for the urban precariat by sublating "community", which has been emphasised in the legacy of the urban poor movement. Section 6.2.3 discusses the meaning of work and home found in *Gongyuji* as well as Bin-Go's practices of commoning the urban.

6.2.1. The question of the "common vision" of the precariat movement at sites of evictions

The Duriban struggle (2009-2011) was an anti-eviction struggle to protect a small noodle restaurant called Duriban. It marks the first and the most famous case in which the youth precariat joined the anti-eviction struggles of shop tenants, turning the protest into a festive happening in the 2010s. The couple had opened Duriban, spending all their available assets and loans to lease and remodel the space. They were told to move out by GS Engineering & Corporation, a large construction company that became the new owner of the building where the restaurant was located. It was only two years and ten months after the restaurant's opening, and the suggested compensation would only pay the moving costs. The couple, went to court with eleven other shop tenants, but lost. While all the other tenants left, the owner of Duriban began a sit-in protest. The struggle went on for 531 days, including 324 days without electricity.

Duriban's struggle ended in a victory. Many precarious artists and youths joined the Duriban struggle and held various cultural events almost every day, attracting the attention of the media and society.⁴⁰ The owners received a significant concession from the major construction company. It was the first

⁴⁰ Duriban was located next to Hong-ik University Station. As university is known for its art program, the area around the station had been a mecca for artists and independent musicians. As the area began to gather commercial and development interests, however, small clubs, theatres, and poor, young artists were expelled, making the area a symbol of gentrification. It was against this background that many musicians desiring space to perform joined the Duriban struggle.

case in which an agreement was reached through a formal and transparent negotiation between the displaced tenant and a developer in Korea. The Duriban struggle was seen as a successful benchmark for other anti-eviction struggles. Similar struggles of the urban precariat kept springing up at small restaurants and cafes against evictions. Many members of the young precariat who had participated in the Duriban struggle also went on to join other anti-eviction struggles.

While sites of evictions in Seoul have always been where young people have gathered in solidarity (*yeondae*) with the most precarious urban population, two notable changes have taken place through the emergence of urban youth activism during the 2010s. First, the mode of urban redevelopment projects and their main targets have changed. As most of the shacktowns in Seoul had been bulldozed by the 1990s, the urban development policy shifted from wholesale redevelopment, which caused massive displacements, toward what planners called “urban regeneration”, in order to raise the property value of relatively deprived areas by transforming them into more desirable environments for investment.⁴¹ The “District Unit Plan” was announced in 2000 to facilitate the regeneration of specific areas by involving private developers. In 2002, Lee Myung-bak, a former president who was the mayor of Seoul at the time, launched the so-called New Town Project with much fanfare.⁴²

As these projects targeted commercial areas and downtowns in addition to residential areas, “the rights of shop tenants took on a greater significance”, according to Won-ho, an anti-poverty activist. He says:

In the old days, anti-eviction struggles were mainly done by tenants or landlords of unauthorised houses. Thanks to their struggles, changes were made to the rules (on housing rights) little by little. But there has not been any history of struggles for shop tenants’ rights. There is neither an institutional framework nor a measure for shop tenants. When the “New Town Project” began in the 2000s, shop tenants’ rights emerged as a significant issue. The tenants faced a situation in which they lost their means of livelihood for the household. This meant that their struggles tended to take on a more extreme form. (Won-ho, cited in Jo, 2019, p. 36)

The so-called Yongsan disaster of 2009 demonstrates what Won-ho says most tragically. In 2001, Yongsan was designated as a target area of the District Unit Plan. Major construction companies

⁴¹ According to the planners, urban regeneration sought to reform outdated urban areas based on the existing urban fabric of the area (Kim and Yoon, 2001; S Kim, 2013a). Regarding the concept of urban regeneration, see Robert et al., 1999. For urban regeneration in the Korean context, see Kim (2016), Lim et al. (2013), and Shin (2019).

⁴² The project targeted old neighbourhoods in the northern half of Seoul, which is commonly referred to as the north part of Seoul divided by the Han River (*Kangbuk* area) (Kang, 2012).

began to work on the redevelopment of the district despite strong resistance by shop tenants. In January 2009, the police came in with a brutal crackdown, resulting in the death of six people and wounding 23.⁴³ Only 11 months had passed when the owners of Duriban and other shop tenants were evicted based on another District Unit Plan. The sequence of these events highlighted the severity of the problems speculative urbanism has caused. The struggle that resulted from the new impetus of urban redevelopment featured shop tenants as victims, introducing “gentrification”, a newly introduced keyword for the anti-eviction movement since the late 2000s.

The second shift concerns the activists who came out in solidarity with the evictees. Before the 2000s, most young people who joined the anti-eviction struggle did so as ideologically conscious activists. They entered slums and sites of anti-eviction struggles with a sense of duty to liberate the urban poor, although their ideas of liberation varied.⁴⁴ In contrast, many young people who joined in the Duriban struggle were not ideologically minded activists but young musicians and teenagers who shared an identity as “surplus” (*ingyeo*) of the society.⁴⁵ The following excerpts are the words of those who participated in the Duriban struggle:

The so-called *ingyeo* (surplus), the precariat who did not have a regular job, independent musicians and artists, I mean, they were also the precariat, came to Duriban. Of course, there have always been musicians at the sites of struggle. But these musicians were those who belonged to the activists’ circles, making songs with political meanings. In Duriban, not only people in the activists’ circles but also many musicians who were non-political came. Then, this attracted more people to Duriban. (Meong-gu, 20 December 2019)

We have this shared awareness that we are already doomed. This means we can never win in a capitalist society. If you cannot enter the top 20% in capitalist society, you remain in the bottom 80%, which means you are doomed regardless of the level. Those who joined the Duriban struggle realised this at least earlier than others (Danpyeonseon, interviewed by Kimgang, 2011)

These changes reflect how precarisation became widespread in Korean society. Before the 2000s, violent evictions occurred in low-income neighbourhoods. The middle-class citizenry was generally exempt from such violent treatment. However, sites of evictions started to appear in the middle of

⁴³ Before the disaster, the evictees were extremely isolated without attracting social attention.

⁴⁴ This aspect will be discussed later in another part of the chapter.

⁴⁵ Since the late 2000s, young people began to be referred to as a precarious labour population in social discourse. The media has strengthened this discourse about the precarious youth by referring to the Japanese discourse around freeters and NEET. Scholars began to discuss how the young generation appeared to be what Ko (2016) calls “the entrepreneurial self”, who tried to develop themselves as human capital, internalising the discourse of self-realisation through competitions and renovations. See also Cho (2015), Seo (2009).

downtown in the 2000s. The tragedy of Yongsan was an event that announced the arrival of a new era in this regard. The perpetual intensification of speculative urbanism made even the lives of the middle class extremely precarious. The youths who found themselves as *ingyeo* joined the Duriban struggle because they shared an affect of indignation against capitalist society that felt no remorse for expelling honest shopkeepers. It was also this awareness of generalised precarisation that compelled the young precariat to engage in the movement as “*dangsaja*” (those who are directly involved in the issue or the affair)” rather than “*yeondaeja*” (those who join in solidarity) of the struggle:⁴⁶

The famous musicians become more famous while unknown ones cannot find any place to perform. This trend has become extremely harsh these days. They (musicians) came across Durban in such a context. This is why they say something like, “this is not solidarity based on sympathy. It is a struggle for my own future”. (An activist C. in her 20s, interviewed by Kimgang, 2011)



Figure 6.11. A punk band playing in Duriban (Source: A documentary film, Party 51, captured in Danbi News).

⁴⁶ The Korean word, *dangsaja* refers to those who are most directly affected or victimised. In anti-eviction struggles, *dangsaja* means those who are evicted while others in the movement are usually identified as “*yeondaeja* (referring to those who support *dangsaja* by acting in solidarity)”. According to these definitions, the youth of Duriban were *yeondaeja* while the owners were *dangsaja*. But the Duriban struggle was often called a *dangsaja* movement of the youth because the youth commonly said that the Duriban struggle was their own struggle (see S Kim, 2013b). See footnote 8 for the Japanese equivalent, *tojisha*.

The success of the Duriban struggle, however, did not result in any sort of systemic change. News of small shop tenants in Seoul facing eviction, one after another, circulated on social and mass media, as if to compete for the public's attention.⁴⁷ Meong-gu (20 December 2019), who is a veteran of numerous anti-eviction struggles since the early 2000s, has made the following observation about the situation:

The success of an anti-eviction struggle depends on various factors. Of course, having a good number of dedicated people to prevent *dangsaja* (evictees) from being isolated is most important. But this is not a sufficient condition. For example, in the case of OOOO, they had severe internal troubles between *dangsaja* and *yeondaeja* (those who make solidarity), failing to come to a solution. In the worst cases, *dangsaja* exploit *yeondaeja*, or *yeondaeja* call out *dangsaja*. Duriban was a fortunate case in this sense. The location was great. Lots of musicians came, as well as their fans. The *dangsaja*, Mr. Yoo Chae Rim, also was a great person who did not pursue personal interests. There were conflicts, of course, but people managed to communicate with each other. I mean, people were changed little by little through collective experiences, even though they had constant quarrels. That is why people felt that they made an alternative community in Duriban. When the struggle ended in a victory, many participants actually said that they felt a sense of loss.

Meong-gu's observation highlights two kinds of problems that the anti-eviction struggles faced in the 2000s. Both concern the question of community in struggle and ultimately how the urban movement produced commons.

First, we can see that difficulties in building and maintaining a "community" in anti-eviction struggles persist since the 1980s (see Chapter 4). While the urban poor activists emphasise the importance of community in anti-eviction struggles, such community building is destined to face fundamental difficulties and contradictions embedded in the nature of anti-eviction struggles. The accounts of activists and evictees show that conflicting desires and sensibilities under the precarious and precarised conditions of capitalist cities created difficulties for forming a community. Even when the participants of a struggle went on to form a community, it was easily segmented after a long and exhausting struggle.

Second, the basic condition of anti-eviction struggle changed in the 2000s. As mentioned above, the new wave of redevelopment that became widespread in this period targeted not only the poor areas but also areas the livelihood of the middle class depended on. While many evictees of the previous

⁴⁷ In this context, a social movement organisation named Mamsangmo was established in 2013. As an abbreviation of a Korean sentence meaning "A group of shop tenants who want to do business without worry", Mamsangmo has collectively demanded the reform of the Commercial Building Lease Protection Act to protect the rights of shop tenants, leading to revisions of the Act in 2018 (see Lee, 2020).

era struggled for “the right to subsistence” (*saengjon'gwon*) or “the right to housing” (*jugeo'gwon*) (see Shin, 2018), the evictees of the 2000s were trying to protect the value of their property.⁴⁸ As Won-ho (Lee, 2019, p. 163-164) points out, “the struggles are connected to the idea of ‘protecting personal assets’ and thus strengthening the logic of property ownership”. In other words, when shop tenants prioritised fair compensations above all other concerns, the struggle tended to turn into one that revolved around the notion of individual ownership. As Meong-gu briefly described above, people are divided when this tendency became overbearing. This meant that the owner and activists, each in their own ways as precariat in the anti-eviction struggle, failed to create a community.

In both of these problems, the precariat could not sustain a community that coincided or went beyond the struggle against speculative urbanism. Sang-cheol, an activist of *Gongyuji* who has also engaged in many anti-eviction struggles, says that “we need to build a common vision” (5 July 2018). However, of what can a common vision consist in an era in which not only the urban poor, but also unemployed youth and even the middle-class shop tenants, appear as the precarious population?

Two kinds of “common vision” existed in the urban poor movement between the 1960s and the 1990s. The first one is “community”. Starting in the 1960s, the notion of community had been set as the aim of the “resident movement” to build self-help communities of the urban poor (see Chapter 4). The activists, primarily trained in religious institutions, lived in urban poor villages as residents themselves, trying to engage other residents in building self-help communities. Naturally, the urban poor communities were created together with the development of self-help economies such as credit unions and various livelihood, medical, and producer cooperatives (see J Kim, 2015). However, as I discuss later in this chapter, five decades of efforts at building grassroots communities and alternative economies of the urban poor, in some sense, came to take on the functions of new forms of neoliberal welfare in the 2000s.

The second common vision is the idea of “revolution”. This idea was strengthened, especially during the 1980s. A considerable number of student activists belonging to political organisations joined anti-eviction struggles to fight against haphazard evictions and organised the urban poor under the large umbrella of the revolutionary movement. That was when the poor (*binmin*) were considered a part of

⁴⁸ According to In-gi, a committed urban poor activist, there were disputes in the urban poor movement scene about how to define these shop tenants: “Are they labourers or petit bourgeois?” (11 July 2018).

the revolutionary class by radical activists, even though different analyses existed within the movement.⁴⁹

What can a common vision of urban activism for the precariat when the precarious people of the city neither belong to the same class nor hold the idea of a sweeping revolution? Can a community still be an answer when the neoliberal government began to utilise the concept of community? *Gongyuji* (2016-2020) and Bin-Go (2010-present) are a part of the precariat movement in which people put great efforts into answering these questions by working on the concept of *commons* to sublate community. In the following sections, I look at how *Gongyuji* and Bin-Go have tried, each in their own ways, to configure *commons* through their value struggles against the real estate capitalist society. Then, I discuss how their grammar of *commons* enable them to reimagine work and home to advance the practice of urban commons.

6.2.2. Attempts of creating *commons* beyond the capital, state, and family (community)

(1) Configuring commons by two value struggles: Gyeong'ui Railway Commons

Gongyuji is the name of the movement which occupied a batch of state-owned land for four years (2016-2020) (see Park et al., 2020, S Kim, 2018).⁵⁰ In 2014, a 6.3-kilometre section of Gyeong'ui Railway in the middle of Seoul was moved underground. While most of the area that appeared after removing rail tracks was turned into public parks, a 3,280 m² vacant lot was left open without an immediate plan for use. The Korean Rail Network Authority (KRNA), together with the conglomerate E-Land Group, established a Special Purpose Company in 2012 to develop the space. However, as the project was postponed, KRNA let the Mapo borough utilise the space temporarily. The Mapo borough then issued a temporary land use permit to a cooperative, named Neul-jang, between 2013 and 2015.⁵¹ Neul-jang ran an open-air market and held various cultural events. Neul-jang successfully turned the vacant lot into an animated space visited by many artists, young people, and local residents. When Neul-jang's land use permit expired at the end of 2015, a group of activists

⁴⁹ "Some saw evictees as a part of the labour class, the revolutionary body, while others argued that the urban poor were a separate social stratum", according to In-gi.

⁵⁰ While around 60% of the space was turned into a park in 2016, a batch of land (5,740m²) with the highest commercial potential, surrounded by high rise buildings near the Gong'deok Station, was left out.

⁵¹ "In Korean, "*neul*" means all the time and "*jang*" means a market. The naming signifies that it is an open-air market that is open all the time.

joined Neul-jang. These activists and some members of Neul-jang founded CAGG and occupied the space, declaring that the land is “*Commons=Gongyuji* (common land)” for all citizens.⁵²



Figure 6.12. Gyeong'ui Railway Gongyuji in Seoul (Source: Wikipedia. Marked by the author).



Figure 6.13. Map of Gongyuji (Source: CAGG).

Declaring the space as *Gongyuji* (*Commons*) the activists criticised the government for letting a private developer develop the state-owned land in the name of public interest (*gong'ike*). In other words, the activists held a clear disagreement with the concepts of public interest around the proposed land use. For those who pursue the development of urban space for its “highest and best use” (Smith, 1979), public interest signifies monetary profit which national economic indicators can record.⁵³ Obviously, this public interest does not include the shares of those who would be evicted in the process. Instead of focusing on individual eviction cases, the activists intended to create a more comprehensive anti-eviction movement:

⁵² In terms of its outlook, *Gongyuji* was a plaza surrounded by high rise apartment buildings. In the plaza, a community garden was surrounded by makeshift structures and a public bathroom. It had individual spaces run by so-called space-keepers (*gong'ganjigi*) as well as shared spaces, while the overall composition slowly changed. When I began my field research at the beginning of May 2018, three common spaces (the CAGG office, a gallery, and a community hall) and eight individual spaces were occupied by space-keepers. When I left the field in August 2018, there were two new space-keepers: an NPO group and a homeless guy who slipped into *Gongyuji*.

⁵³ Indeed, after turning the railway space into the park, the land price of the area went up 59% (see Jang, 201).

There are many spaces in which people fight against evictions, like Takeout Drawing, Gung Jung Jokbal, Ahyeon Pocha, etc.⁵⁴ People get together to support such struggles. As people get together, many exciting projects take place. But there are limitations, as each space ends up as an individual case. We want to have a basic strategy to connect these individual struggles spatially to each other. (Seon-yeong, a *Gongyuji* activist, 6 July 2018)

Inviting various evictees in Seoul to *Gongyuji*,⁵⁵ the activists paid attention to the concept of *commons* in their endeavour to challenge the city's dominant logic. However, what does the notion mean to them? Ki-whang (Jeong, 2019), a *Gongyuji* activist, states that *commons* is “the antithesis” to the existing land system:

Commons in Korea have appeared as an antithesis to capitalism while using a broader meaning. It is the antithesis to the capitalist city and the real estate problem. We are contesting the existing land system in which land is an absolute private property with the concept (of *commons*). However, commons is not a well-defined concept. While it is translated (used) into various terms such as ‘sharing (*gongyu*)’, ‘collective ownership (*chongyu*)’, ‘common resource (*gongdong jawon*)’, ‘common land (*gongyuji*)’, and ‘commons’ (this is the transliteration of the English word), usages of the word are still infrequent and limited. Therefore, it is hard to define the concept clearly. (Jeong, 2019, p. 168)

As Ki-whang writes, the meaning of *commons* is vague, while what *Gongyuji* intends to problematise with the concept is clear. Seon-yeong also says (cited in Kim, 2019):

We tried to find foreign examples of *commons* to consult. But, in general, private property rights are a more flexible concept in other countries. They also have better laws to protect tenants (...) We thus concluded that we cannot help but invent *commons* anew in Korea.

In other words, since there were no pre-existing models or actual instances of using the concept for the activists, they had to figure it out themselves.

The activists tried to maintain *Gongyuji* as *commons*, mainly in two different ways. Firstly, they put great effort into institutionalising *Gongyuji* by engaging in the government's policymaking process and negotiating with government institutions and politicians.⁵⁶ For the activists, collaboration with the

⁵⁴ Takeout Drawing is a cafe, Gung Jung Jokbal is a Korean restaurant, Ahyeon Pocha are street stalls that serve alcohol and food. Their struggle against eviction gained some publicity.

⁵⁵ Two elderly urban poor females, whose food stalls had been evicted from a residential reconstruction project, two evicted small shop tenants in their forties and fifties, and a youth in his twenties who had been evicted from his small room due to the New Town Project all decided to join. Each of them occupied a small makeshift tent or a container in *Gongyuji* to keep their businesses, lives, and protests.

⁵⁶ For example, in 2018 and 2019, *Gongyuji* activists held the Policy Forum for the Collaborative Governance of Seoul (*Hyeopchi* Seoul) with the SMG to discuss “an alternative use of the state-owned land”. Based on the discussions, *Gongyuji* activists formulated “the alternative plan for *Gongyuji*”

Seoul Metropolitan Government (SMG) was a strategic choice to build *Gongyuji* as a sustainable citizens' asset:

Things are very complicated and multifaceted. For example, I am working together with the SMG or joining the policymaking process of the SMG. But *Gongyuji* is an illegal squat in the end. If the government decides to evict us, we will fight against it no matter how much we have joined in collaborative governance. As long as the government does not evict us, we will utilise the government as much as possible. (Won-jae, a *Gongyuji* activist, 3 July 2018)

We try to navigate how *commons* can be institutionalised. It is because we believe that the most important thing in the movement is making an example which can be a reference for a movement elsewhere. (...) It can be a negotiation with the system at some level, but our wish is to navigate the way to a possible utopia. (Sang-cheol, a *Gongyuji* activist, 5 July 2018)

Seong-eun, a former member of Neul-jang who began her engagement in activism at *Gongyuji*, said, with a sense of awe, "People here are using the government well to overcome the status of *Gongyuji* as an illegal squat, I mean, to get to the level beyond the current status".

Secondly, the activists strived to create *Gongyuji* by engaging people in its everyday management, which was declared as a space for all. Not only evictees but also former members of Neul-jang, residents of the surrounding apartments, and literally anyone who was interested in *Gongyuji* could use it as "citizens". According to Seon-yeong, "[e]ven if right-wing grandpas who wave the Korean national flags come, we cannot prevent them from coming because *Gongyuji* is the land for all citizens regardless of their political perspective" (July 6, 2018). The notable thing is that the activists tried not to have rules to govern the space as *commons*. Those who had initiated *Gongyuji* activism obviously had repulsions against a movement holding the same value or an organisation abiding by specific rules and/or hierarchies:

When we (*Gongyuji* activists) imagine *commons*, it is not for creating a community in which people hold the same values. On the contrary, we want to create the way in which we can connect, or co-exist, with different people with the utmost openness and receptivity. (Won-jae, 3 July 2018)

Many political organisations in Korea seem to operate based on private intimacies, like an alumni meeting. Also, many people desire to be with those who hold identical values as themselves in the social movement rather than considering the social movement as a kind of

together with the Seoul National University Asia Centre and Cultural Action and made it an official suggestion to the SMG and the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, and Transport. Also, *Gongyuji* activists applied for the "Participatory Budgeting Program" of the SMC with the project titled "Gyeong'ui Railway Woodway Project of Circulating Woods and Citizens".

social patchwork, making a broad picture with different colours. This tendency makes the movement in Korea something like expanded private relations. (Sang-cheol, 5 July 2018)

I would like to point out two things here. First, the activists' repulsions against setting rules or a unifying value did not mean that the activists would accept all the differences, including sensibilities embedded in capitalist property ownership or the extremely conservative and hierarchical culture symbolised by "right-wing grandpas waving the Korean flag". On the contrary, they held a clear will to use space differently from mainstream society through "value struggles", to borrow Seon-yeong's words (6 July 2018):

We should be co-existing with them, doing internal struggles. People should think about what the value of *Gongyuji* is. That is the very charm of *Gongyuji*.

Second, the activists' attitude was significantly similar to the initiators and early residents of Bin-Zib and created similar dynamics with Bin-Zib, making *Gongyuji* an "argumentative" space.⁵⁷

Two kinds of value struggle took place around *Gongyuji*. First, the value struggle of *Gongyuji* took place against the logic of real estate capitalism supported by the state. The article written by Sang-cheol (S Kim, 2018) demonstrates how the activists of *Gongyuji* recognised Seoul as "the system of depredation" run by the government. According to the article, Seoul is a city which "produces surplus only by evicting somebody with empty hands". Depredations to produce surplus take place in Seoul according to the following process:

In the redevelopment process, economic value is made by a gap between the prices of assets at the moment of T and T+. Of course, the gap is an "imaginary price". (...) Here we can find two phenomena or attitudes. The first is "the present should be cheap". The second is "the future should be expensive". (S Kim, 2018)

According to Sang-cheol, the price of the present can be cut down because "economic value" does not consider values of "memories about family space" or "communities" while treating "tenants" just as a "cost". Meanwhile, the future price is raised not only by the "imaginary" gap but also by a range of government support, from providing developers with an attractive blueprint for investors to putting police at the site of evictions to make the process run more smoothly. In this context, the

⁵⁷ While the initiators and early residents of Bin-Zib promoted building communistic relations, they did not set rules or principles. This led to Bin-Zib being an argumentative place, where disputes constantly happened (see Han, 2018). It is also noteworthy that the many *Gongyuji* activists were also members of Cultural Action, which I discussed in Chapter 5 regarding the emergence of new collective sensibilities symbolised as Generation X.

evictees of Seoul should be seen as “refugees”, he argues, because “it is the government that evicts people for the very reason that they do not own properties” (Ibid., p. 133).

Based on this recognition, the activists built a camp of urban refugees on state-owned land, calling it “the 26th borough of Seoul”. The existence of urban refugees at *Gongyuji* demonstrated how multiple development projects fully supported by the government continued in Seoul, displacing and depriving people of a basic means of life. By taking in these people as refugees, the activists of *Gongyuji* created a symbolic and strategic space for the dispossessed to come together and struggle collectively against the capitalist city, albeit in a symbolic way. The occupation of *Gongyuji*, in this sense, became a rallying point for a value struggle against speculative urbanism by practising *commons* in life right in the middle of the capitalist city. The urban precariat not only created radical discourse that questioned the privatisation of urban space and the government’s complicity but also prefiguratively created a territory that would open up in a city beyond the monopoly of capital.

Second, the value struggle of *Gongyuji* took place between different bodies and sensibilities of ever-changing participants. Various problems arose in *Gongyuji*, caused by vague responsibilities, desires of appropriating the space privately, and the indifferent attitudes of space-keepers.⁵⁸ Often, some activists wanted to set rules to maintain what *Gongyuji* should be used for, but there were always others who tried to open up the value of *Gongyuji* itself to the process of discussion.⁵⁹ Seon-yeong argued that “even if this could result in bad decisions or failures, the failures would become our experience and knowledge” in a meeting. Given this open attitude, constant disputes took place in *Gongyuji* as an essential “process” of creating *commons*, as activists often said. In this practice, I identify the second form of value struggle that *Gongyuji* engaged in as an everyday political practice of *commons*:

I don’t think we can change our desires embedded in capitalism by just changing the system. People, as well as society, make a transition in uneven ways. Our spatial experiment would be the same. Some things and some people would change rapidly while others would take time. Disputes would take place in between. Thus, we should accept disputes as a premise of *Gongyuji*. (Sang-cheol, 5 July 2018)

⁵⁸ About space-keepers, see footnote 52.

⁵⁹ After my stay in *Gongyuji*, the activists of *Gongyuji* finally composed a set of written rules in April 2019 to deal with constant conflicts. The rules were as follows: (1) *Gongyuji* must remain as a commons, and members must share their space with other commoners when not using it themselves; (2) the communal areas must be kept clean, not occupied by space-keepers; (3) the commoners must respect each other and peacefully resolve matters, including discussions, to find ways to legalise their existence; and (4) maintenance fees are encouraged as much as one can afford. Yet, these rules were still not fixed ones but subject to modifications every three months through meetings or “value struggles” amongst all the space-keepers and activists.

Sang-cheol states that *Gongyuji* was configured as “an experiment or test” to see “how much we can appropriate or socialise space beyond the capitalist way of using it and thus challenge the dominant sensibility around property ownership”. Consequently, *Gongyuji* turned into a fundamentally political space in Rancière’s (1992; 1999; 2010) sense, promoting the process of subjectivations amongst participants or “changes of bodies”, as Seong-eun states (4 July 2018):

When Meerkat joined *Gongyuji* as a new activist, she wanted to solve troubles between space-keepers as quickly as possible. She thus made lots of suggestions. I realised that I was often telling her, “it seems a bit hasty to do that”. This experience made me realise how people, including myself, have changed over time. Most of the suggestions that Meerkat made were, to be honest, things I had tried before. Some of them did not work at all, while others were still being processed albeit slowly, with quarrels still taking place. I have realised that things were changing slowly here, as people absorbed various ways of *Gongyuji*, like bodily habits, without imposing rules. You would notice such changes in moments when they say things like, “This is the way we do things at *Gongyuji*”, or when they clean the communal space as if it is their own, setting the basic rhythm of *Gongyuji*. I think I have seen some moments in which people’s spontaneousness arose without any sort of teaching or persuasion given by the activists.

The experience of *Gongyuji* was, however, forcibly stopped in April 2020. KRNA filed a lawsuit against 11 people that included activists and urban refugees, in the amount of 36 hundred million KRW (approximately 3,040,000 USD).⁶⁰ The activists decided to voluntarily pull out of the occupation, asking the state to withdraw the lawsuit. The urban refugees had to move out. In the process, *Gongyuji* activists borrowed 15,000,000 KRW (approximately 13,000 USD) from the Commune Bank, Bin-Go, to support the moving expenses of the urban refugees as well as prepare legal fees while asking the public for sponsorship. Although the activists have kept building a network with radical scholars and activists in various sites of struggles to advance their endeavour to elaborate a theory and practice of *commons*, “it was impossible to approve the rights of *commons* under the current legal system”, as the activists of *Gongyuji* (2020) write in their statement.

So how is the urban precariat able to pursue *commons* against the enclosures of speculative urbanism? In this regard, Bin-Go provides an example in which people have tried to find a way of expanding *commons* through communising finances. I believe that Bin-Go shares a significant affinity with *Gongyuji* in terms of how they frame *commons* while also further developing it.

⁶⁰ The decision was made mainly not to impose such an enormous economic burden on the urban refugees. Leaving *Gongyuji*, CAGG turned into the secretariat of Commons Network, “a platform for a broad range of social activists and theorists who seek alternatives to both libertarian capitalism and state capitalism”.



Figure 6.14. The changes at Gongyuji between 2016 and 2020 (Source: CAGG).

(2) Financing commons to go beyond “capital=state=family”: The Commune Bank, Bin-Go

- Designing a mode of exchange to create *commons* beyond community

The Commune Bank, Bin-Go (2013 – present) is an alternative financial institution run under the slogan: “from each pooling according to their abilities, to each using according to their needs”. Bin-Go was founded in 2010 as a collective fund of Bin-Zib (see Chapter 5 for Bin-Zib). Those who

began Bin-Zib did not have any particular awareness about the need for alternative financing at first. However, precarious inhabitants of Bin-Zib faced various economic difficulties as they tried to pursue their collective living in the city—a way of life substantially different from that of mainstream capitalist society. In addressing these problems, the Bin-Zib residents came up with the idea of a commune bank. In their declaration, they proclaimed that their goal was to expand “common lands” (*gonggyuji*) beyond the boundary of Bin-Zib (see Han, 2015). In this light, we can place Bin-Go in the tradition of self-help, mutual cooperative economies developed in the “resident movement” to build communities of the urban poor (Chapter 4; see also J Kim, 2015). Some others view Bin-Go as an example of a “social economy” (Kang et al., 2012).⁶¹ The activists of Bin-Go, however, have thought of Bin-Go differently. They rejected models of mutual cooperative economy and social economy; in fact, these models turned out to be an integral part of the neoliberal governance spearheaded by the municipal government of Seoul during the 2010s.

The so-called “social economy” emerged in Korean society in the late 1990s. It was a response to the 1997 Asian financial crisis that devastated the national economy of Korea. What provided the newly imported concept of social economy with flesh was the vernacular experiments of self-help economies of urban poor communities, which were rooted in Korean social movements. Indeed, many of those who had engaged in or supported the “resident movement” in the 1970s and the 1980s took charge in the promotion of the “social economy” and “the Community Building Project” launched by the SMG (see Kim, 2010).⁶² Not before long, the social economy became just a synonym for an economy subsidised by the state (see Kang et al., 2012; Eom et al., 2011).

⁶¹ Kang and others point out that social economy was a buzzword in the late 1990s in Korea (see Kang et al., 2012). According to Defourny (1999), the term social economy was first used in France in the 19th century. While its meaning had been much broader and amorphous before, the concept has been much more precise in the last two decades. In general, social economy includes “all economic activities conducted by enterprises, primarily cooperatives, associations and mutual benefit societies, whose ethics convey the following principles: 1. placing service to its members or the community ahead of profits; 2. autonomous management; 3. a democratic decision-making process; 4. the primacy of people and work over capital in the distribution of revenues.

⁶² Pak Won-soon, the former mayor of the SMG, actively brought in and deployed grassroots experiments as municipal policies during his incumbency (2012–2020). The Community Building Project is a way of “recovering humanistic relationships destroyed by competition and urbanisation”. The government presented the blueprint of the project in May 2012 (Y. Kim, 2012). In addition, various other public programs were announced, to the point that words such as co-housing, cooperative, and village became social buzzwords. The SMG also launched the program entitled “the New Deal Job Program for Youth” in 2013 as a measure to address youth unemployment. Its purported aim was both job creation for young people and the promotion of village community culture in the city.

Many activists I met in Seoul considered the sudden return to “socials” as a new governmental tool to turn the realm of welfare into a part of the capitalist economy. They pointed out how, in the new government programs, social enterprises became welfare recipients in place of individuals in need. Furthermore, they astutely observed that their program pushed the poor to become a portfolio-making subjectivity to get temporary jobs given by the government, often with the title of “activists” (see Kim and Yi, 2020; Ryu, 2014). Many young activists in Seoul also worked as so-called “youth activists” or “village activists” paid by the SMG.⁶³ Ji’eum (7 June 2018) explains Bin-Zib’s experience with the New Deal jobs launched by the SMG and other similar funds as follows:⁶⁴

We knew that the fund would not be given forever, of course. We thought that it would not be harmful to get funds while it was available. Yet, when people began to get paid for the activities they previously used to do just because they wanted to, things began to change. Suddenly, the activities turned into something you would not do without being paid.

B. is an activist in his 20s who had joined Duriban as a teenager. He said (9 May 2019):

Sometimes I feel like I am a public servant. You know, both OOOO and OOOO (names of activist-oriented spaces in Seoul) applied for “the social enterprise” of Seoul to get money from the government as the official youth activists or artists of Seoul City (laugh). We are required to make endless portfolios to prove our qualities in this system. I hate this fucking selective welfare,⁶⁵ but there is no way to escape from doing it. There is nothing else.

The above quotes demonstrate how the programmes launched by the municipal government, regardless of their intentions, not only functioned as neoliberal welfarism but also deprived the movement of autonomy.

What was more serious for activists was that this new governmental strategy captured the legacies of the grassroots movements and values such as “community”, “mutual-aid”, “relationship”, and “care” in the capitalist value system, lending capitalism a “human face”, as Vrasti (2011) puts it. For example, in 2012, the SMG noticed Bin-Zib as they actively promoted the “social housing” project to solve the serious housing problem in the city, which I have discussed elsewhere (Han, 2015). Now,

⁶³ When I did my MA research in Bin-Zib, eight residents lived under the scheme (see Han, 2015).

⁶⁴ Since 2009, Bin-Zib residents tried to run café-like autonomous spaces to earn a living by doing what they could enjoy. Confronting economic difficulties, those who collectively ran the second café of Bin-Zib applied for public funds in 2012. Alongside this, Bin-Zib residents applied for New Deal jobs. However, their attempts failed in the end due to the increasing rent of the area. In February 2016, they closed their second co-op café.

⁶⁵ In selective welfare provision, welfare is given to recipients not universally but based on certain conditions and thus through a screening system. Here, B. does not use the term in an accurate way. However, what B. said shows that he considers the New Deal program of the SMG more as a selective welfare provision than a job. Regarding selective welfare, see Van Oorschot (2002).

there are many social housing enterprises in Seoul, addressing individuals' sharing practices to overcome precarious housing without touching the problems around real estate capitalism (Lee, 2018). Bin-Zib, the first co-housing experiment in Korea, inadvertently took on the function of inventing a new form of neoliberal welfare that is simultaneously a form of "social" business (Han, 2015; see also Pak, 2012). As Sang-cheol (Kim, 2012) keenly points out, the ideas and practices of community building propelled by the SMG were in keeping with the "Big Society".⁶⁶

What should the grassroots movement do to go beyond the state and capital when both the government and companies have begun mobilising ethical aspects of human relationships to create new entrepreneurial citizens? Against this backdrop, some residents of Bin-Zib turned Bin-Go from the fund of Bin-Zib into what they call "the commune bank", attending to finance (*geumyeung*) as a crucial juncture of struggle. Let me summarise their argument.

In the capitalist world, people work to earn a living (as "labourers") and consume to reproduce lives (as "consumers"). Radical scholars have focused on these subjectivities to overcome capitalism, suggesting people should "stop working" or "stop consuming".⁶⁷ However, it is impossible to stop working without having an autonomous space of production. Consumers' movements (like co-ops and credit unions) have become a part of the capitalist system. Bin-Go argues that finance becomes a space of subjectivation (*juchehwa*) because it is "where the labourer subjectivity and the consumer subjectivity are connected, planning the overall strategy to live" (Bin-Go, 2021):

We ideologically consider the labourer subjectivity and the consumer subjectivity to be the same one. However, in reality, it is difficult for these two subjectivities to be connected because they exist separately, both spatially and temporally. These subjectivities are connected in the space where individuals fill out household accounts and make financial plans about how to live, in silence.

What was behind this awareness was Bin-Zib's experience as an alternative co-housing experiment. When the residents of Bin-Zib tried to co-fund key-money to set up more Bin-Zibs, they became aware of how key-money functioned as capital in Korean society.⁶⁸ By depositing key-money, one does not have to pay monthly rent. This is because her key-money works as interest generating

⁶⁶ As a political ideology promoted by the conservative government of the UK, the Big Society aims at resolving social and financial crises by introducing social values but results in a deepening of capitalist logic in communities (see Dawling and Harvie, 2014).

⁶⁷ This refers to Gandhi (1997), Karatani (2014), and Negri (1991),

⁶⁸ As discussed in Chapter 4, the key-money system has not only functioned as the key factor of capital accumulation, but has also normalised the idea of money generating money in the society, facilitating the process of real estate speculation (Song, 2014).

capital for the owner of the property. Bin-Zib residents argued that “except for those who are extremely poor without having any deposit at all, everyone is acting as a capitalist to some degree” in Korean society where “renting a house by depositing a lump-sum money is an act of investment to generate 12% interest per year” (Bin-Zib, 2010).⁶⁹ How can we prevent our money from becoming capital when the key-money we deposit functions as capital? The residents of Bin-Zib founded Bin-Go to turn their deposit money “from the capital into commons” by sharing the generated interest with those who did not have any key-money when setting up Bin-Zib.

Then, another critical experience led them to transform Bin-Go from Bin-Zib’s co-fund into the “Commune Bank”. In 2012, Bin-Zib residents engaged in a year-long dispute about how to use the surplus generated through the collective life of Bin-Zib (see Han, 2015).⁷⁰ Some argued that the surplus should be shared among those who actually lived in the community. Others argued that any surplus should be shared with any alternative communities to expand *commons*. In the end, Bin-Go was separated into two different financial institutions. The former group set up a “Bin-Zib mutual aid fund” to protect Bin-Zib as a bounded community of mutual-aid amongst residents. The latter group launched the Commune Bank, Bin-Go. This is to say, for those who founded Bin-Go, “mutual-aid” or the “gift economy” within a community was something to be overcome from the beginning. They argue that gift exchange created a community that can exist in capitalism as a supplementing part. Ji’eum (7 June 2018) says, “We can see how inheritance, a gift within a family, functions perfectly in the capitalist society”:

Indeed, familism appears to be the biggest trap in any attempt to make an alternative economy. How to protect me, my family, and my community? This thought leads us to accumulate assets in the form of private property. As long as an institution or its members accept the most basic characteristics of capital, which is money generating money, it cannot help but become part of capital regardless of its intention. How the Korean credit co-op just became a bank shows this.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Let’s say that two friends, A and B, rent an apartment together. A has 10,000 USD for a deposit, while B does not have any lump-sum money. If they rent a place by contract, consisting of a 10,000 USD deposit and 300 USD monthly rent, B is supposed to be responsible for covering 200 USD monthly rent, although the 10,000 USD deposit would be given to A at the end of the contract.

⁷⁰ Living at Bin-Zib, residents paid “shared expenses” for rent and basic living costs. Deficits were paid off monthly. Surplus, if there was any, was accumulated.

⁷¹ The credit co-op was started in Korea in the 1960s as a mutual aid system amongst the poor. The movement was led by dedicated activists who worked tirelessly even without getting paid for their work. However, now it functions as just a part of the capitalist economy, losing its autonomy and competing with other banks, as many scholars and activists point out (see Choi, 2014; Song et al., 2013). Credit co-ops in Korea made significant growth, being ranked fourth globally in terms of their scale. This is not only a Korean phenomenon but an international one through which credit co-ops

Based on this recognition, Bin-Go activists have tried to design a system to abolish capital, i.e., money generating money, by sharing the generated interest with “all” (*man'in*) beyond a closed community.

As of 2021, the basic system of Bin-Go functions in the following way: Bin-Go consists of its members who are “poolers=users=those who are in solidarity=managers”. These names signify not identities but activities of a member who is supposed to take all four roles. As a pooler, you make an account with Bin-Go and pool your “surplus money” as much as you want. As a user, you can “use” (“borrow” in conventional terms) the pooled money to rent or buy space for making alternative communities no matter how much money you pool. Since key-money generates around 4-7.2% interest, in reality, the user delivers the generated interest to Bin-Go by making a “*contribution for using money*”. Then, Bin-Go distributes the surplus in the following four ways annually: (1) a pooler gets the “*share for pooling*” in her account, the same rate as that given by major banks; (2) 10 % of the surplus is collected for users as the “*share for communities*”; (3) 10% of the surplus is allocated to a “*share for the Earth*” with which members support various social movements they are involved in or concerned with; (4) 30% of the surplus is collected as the “*Bin-Go reserve*”, which is for the maintenance and expansion of *commons* as well as in consideration of all kinds of difficulties and issues that might arise from within and without.

Bin-Go has 464 individuals and 56 communities as its members. It has around 510,901,965 KRW (461,146 USD as of May 2021) of pooled assets, 310,920,000 KRW (280,640 USD) is used by 15 communities for renting their spaces, and individual members use 36,445,000 KRW (32,896 USD) for various purposes but primarily to pay for their cost of living. The communities that participate in the pool include those who run communal lands, co-housing projects, activist spaces, and community cafes.

Bin-Go is different from interest-free banks or low-interest banks that support precarious populations. Users (mostly urban precarious youth) of Bin-Go are not recipients of economic support in any sense. Even when it comes to the practices that make it look like an ordinary bank on the surface,⁷² Bin-Go tries to shift the viewpoint from capital to *commons*. Bouquins, an activist of

lost their identity as alternative financial institutions (see Davis, 2001; Goddard, McKillop & Wilson, 2002; Lang & Welzel, 1996). Here, Ji'eum's perspective resonates with Maurer's (2008, pp. 66-68) criticism regarding alternative currencies or financing practices such as Islamic banking, which just replicates “all the pieces of the hegemonic economy”.

⁷² For example, either “poolers” or “users” of Bin-Go may not see any difference between Bin-Go and any ordinary checking account if they think they get or pay “interest”. Also, Bin-Go provides its

Bin-Go, states that “the terms of Bin-Go show how Bin-Go overcomes what capitalism does to us”. He further elaborates (11 June 2018):

Look at the “*share for the Earth*”. It might look similar to corporations’ donations for social purposes. But it is not. Companies get profits first. It is their property, without a doubt. Then they donate a part of it. On the contrary, when we say “*share for the Earth*”, it is fundamentally different. The naming shows that the surplus belongs to the Earth from the beginning, and there is nothing we can call interest.

Thus, the Bin-Go activists try to build a worldview based on *commons* by shifting the terminology of banking.

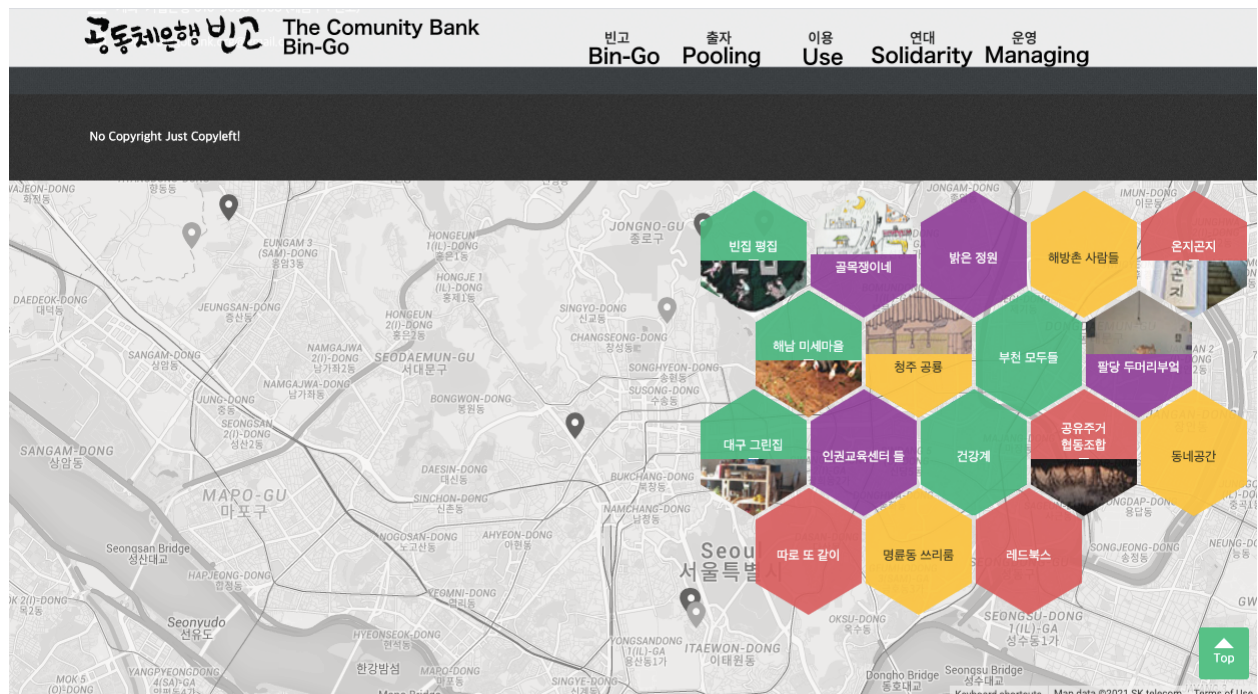


Figure 6.15. The main page of the Bin-Go website. Each unit of the hive indicates a community participating (Source: bingobank.org. The English translation is included by the author.)⁷³

Furthermore, they have provided a theoretical basis for their practice of *commons*. Adapting Karatani’s (2014) theory regarding modes of exchange, as of 2021 they have come up with a theory of Bin-Go, which they draw on as a developmental principle, albeit tentatively. In Bin-Go’s formulation, The alternative mode of exchange is postulated based on the following formulation – to create “*commons*”

members with almost every service that a checking account of an ordinary bank would provide. Poolers can withdraw the money or transfer it anytime they want.

⁷³ Bin-Go members have used the terms “commune bank”, “*commons* bank”, and “community bank” interchangeably. While the term “community bank” was adopted on their website to encourage more people and communities, members has also emphasised that Bin-Go aims to create “a community of communities”.

beyond “capital=state=family”.⁷⁴ They identify two types of action associated with exchange. One is to “take,” while the other is to “give”. They also see two kinds of actors: the one who initiates action to “take” or “give” and the other who reacts either by accepting or resisting (See the quadrant below). They name the former Gab and the latter Eul.⁷⁵ They then interpret four modes of exchange as follows (Bin-Go, 2021):

Mode A: Gab gives something to Eul. Eul accepts it. A gift is delivered, creating an obligation of reward.

Mode B: Gab takes something from Eul. Eul accepts it. Plunder takes place, creating a need for redistribution.

Mode C: Gab tries to take something from Eul. Eul resists it. This results in a competition to take in the form of commodity exchange.

Mode D: Gab tries to give something to Eul. Eul resists it. This results in a competition to give and resist taking. Since no one takes, the surplus is pooled as *commons*.

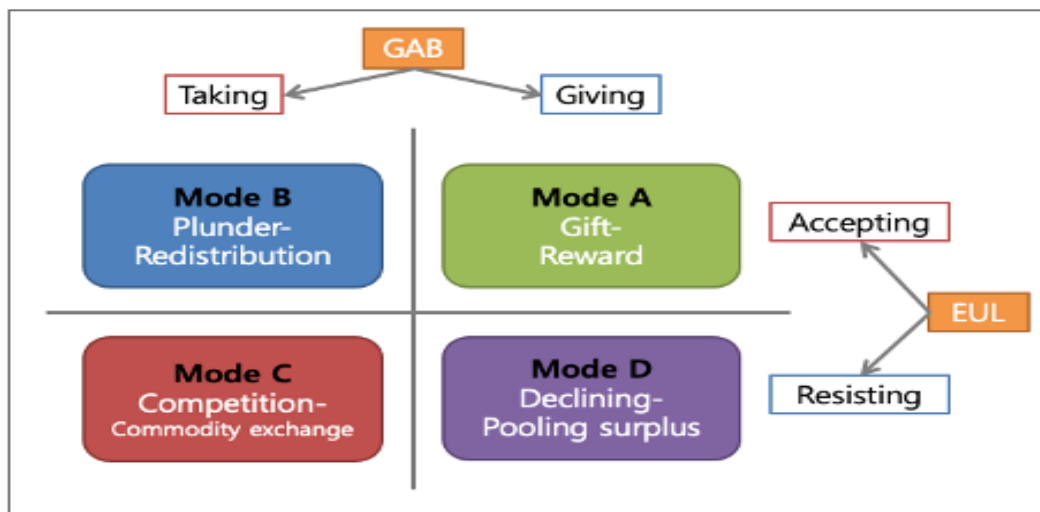


Figure 6.16. Bin-Go’s formulation of modes of exchanges (Source: Bin-Go; translated to English by the author).

⁷⁴ According to Karatani (2014), modern society is “the Borromean Knot” of “the Capital-Nation-State trinity” based on three existing modes of exchange. Karatani proposed “X” as a regulative idea to sublimate the three existing modes of exchange.

⁷⁵ Gab and Eul originate in the Chinese ordinal system, which is somewhat similar to how the first letters of the alphabet (i.e., ABCD) are used to designate superiority and inferiority. The standard format of a contractual document in Korea indexes the employer as Gab and the employee as Eul. In the neoliberal era, this way of referring to someone as Gab or Eul became a popular form of sarcasm to point out who the haves and have-nots are.

Mode D is a competition to give and resist taking. In Mode D, a gift is given, but no one takes it. Therefore, “surplus which belongs to nobody is created ... as the pure gift to the whole society and unspecified people in it” (Bin-Go, 2020). Mode D is based on autonomy, unlike the plunder and redistribution of the state (Mode B). It removes the dangers of monopoly and exploitation embedded in commodity exchange (Mode C). It inherits the spirit of the gift, which makes a community (Mode A) but avoids the danger of exclusion and discrimination because it does not specify its recipients.

Bin-Go is a system to actualise Mode D. As a member of Bin-Go, the poor (not only poolers but also users) compose *commons* by “declining (*sayang*)” the generated surplus. Bin-Go activists argue that “Bin-Go itself was a result of the act of “declining”:

Bin-Zib was a house mostly of the poor. Nevertheless, Bin-Zib had accumulated surplus money, which became the foundational stone of Bin-Go. We can say that what created Bin-Go was *surplus* which was declined to be taken as a property of Bin-Zib. (Bin-Go, 2020)

- **Bin-Go’s value struggle to invest in travellers’ communism**

Bouquins says that Bin-Go’s standard for letting users use the pooled money “almost looks like gambling from the perspective of the common sense of capitalism”. Another activist, Haru, also says that whenever they hold briefing sessions at alternative communities, people ask, “What makes you so confident to give loans to people without checking credit ratings?” To put it simply, Bin-Go shares with strangers what ordinary people would share only with family members or close friends:

Bin-Go makes a certain kind of relationship concretely. What can I call this relationship? Economic hospitality to strangers? I mean, the word anti-capitalism appears to be a concrete and embodied form in Bin-Go. Everything Bin-Go does is something anyone can do within a cooperative union or amongst family members and close friends. But we open this to strangers. That makes Bin-Go anti-capitalist, I would say. (Bouquins, 11 June 2018)

Obviously, Bin-Go’s practice is connected to Bin-Zib’s practice of sharing their home with strangers (see Chapter 5). Bin-Zib was a movement of the urban precariat determined to widen the security net by opening their home to strangers. Bin-Go continues this practice of opening a home, a family, and a community to strangers by sharing key-money, which is potential capital, with others.

The important thing is that this practice is, above all things, for the “freedom” of individuals. Bin-Go activists and active residents of Bin-Zib have emphasised how a house, the most valuable private property, becomes a shackle that binds a person on a linear and painful track of capitalist life (see Chapter 5). The founders of Bin-Zib did not want to form a community, as I have discussed. What inspired them was their experience of long bicycle travels. When meeting on the road, temporarily, travellers share time, food, information, and sleeping space as much as they want without forming

any hierarchy. In the same vein, Bin-Go activists pay attention to the historical practices of pooling resources found in nomadic bands and premodern clans. Regarding pooling, Bin-Go states the following:

The point here is that I do not possess things so that I maintain mobility – freedom – which enables me to leave anytime. Whom do I give it to? Do I get compensation? These are side issues. Showing that you are a part of a bigger society by the act of pooling would be wiser. (Bin-Go, 2021)

The above excerpts clearly resonate with what Graeber (2011, p. 108) explains about communism. In communistic relations, people are not dealing with reciprocity, but instead presume eternity because “[s]ociety will always exist”. If we weave the world of communism by pooling and using surplus, from each according to his/her ability and to each according to his/her need, individuals can come and go without concern about how much each possesses. At the same time, travellers tend not to build any kind of hierarchy, which, as Graeber (2011, p. 109) notes, “tends to work by a logic of precedent”. From this perspective, we can see Bin-Go tries to set a moral base which can be called “travellers’ communism” to weave a world as a pool of resources to which we, as travellers, contribute according to our ability and use according to our need.

For those who find Bin-Go’s perspective attractive, Bin-Go is creating “the most anarchist space where people freely share things and increase interesting space where we can go freely”, as Haru (9 June 2018) put it. However, for those who stick to the value of capitalism, Bin-Go is neither a bank they can trust with their money nor a bank that supports the poor with low interest or interest-free loans. Obviously, many people would consider putting their money in Bin-Go an extremely dangerous act. Miki (13 June 2018), a Bin-Go activist, says:

Whenever I talk about Bin-Zib and Bin-Go, my boyfriend expresses great concern. He says that he really cannot understand how I could live in such a space and put all my money there. It is so dangerous, he says. Do not trust people like that. He says that a lot. Do not trust human beings.

Inviting people to join Bin-Go and promoting the practice of pooling surplus, therefore, cannot help but become a value struggle against the capitalist value system, and thus our attitude around *surplus* and life.



Figure 6.17. Bin-Go's reading group to study alternative finance (Source: Bin-Go monthly newsletter, August 2018).

According to Bin-Go (2020), everybody is crazy about financial investments and tries to accumulate private property because “people feel insecure about the future”. In other words, what the rampant discourse of financial investments shows is the reality in which individuals have nothing to depend on but themselves (and their families), whether they succeed or not in the investments. To survive, individuals are willing to take risks. Miki (13 June 2018) also expresses her surprise at how “the ordinary people” around her “invest in the real estate market taking lots of risks”:

When my boyfriend told me he had a house, it sounded sweet. But it turned out that he bought it with lots of debts (...) Surprisingly many people around us, not the rich but just ordinary people, make such investments. From their perspective, the real estate price should go up.

Miki's boyfriend chose to be indebted to make a financial investment while advising his loved one to “not trust human beings”. These seemingly contradictory acts form a coherence in the capitalist value system. As an entrepreneurial self, one should be willing to invest one's time, money, work, relations,

and emotions for the best output, i.e., the biggest interest (see French and Kneale, 2009; Langley, 2006; Martin, 2002; McNay, 2009). However, you cannot trust another human being because all others are competitors in the game. In this value system, life appears to be the war of all against all in order to have more. One should be careful not to make a mistake because, as the youth in Korea often say, “life is the real war, dickhead (*jonman’a*)!”

Bin-Go activists reject the capitalist value system, which makes individuals (and their families) compete to gain more surplus. Bin-Go (2020) argues that the strategy of “each attempting to survive on their own (*gakja dosaeng*)” is not only “unethical” but also “unwise” because “we do not know when we win the game. And, on top of that, the odds are extremely low”. Moreover, it is “exhausting and painful”. We can end this “war-like world in which everybody divides mine against yours and engages in the war of all against all to have more” by changing the rules of the game. “Declining” and “pooling” surplus is suggested as an alternative rule which would turn surplus from something we should compete for into pooling resources anyone can access according to their needs.

Bin-Go invites people to invest (or take a risk) in “*commons* and friends” instead of capital. They argue that this is a much more deliverable and rational strategy. “We can build relations and *commons* to live to depend on without anxieties about the future” (Bin-Go, 2020).

6.2.3. Commons as the play of a world where we desire to live

Gongyuji and Bin-Go (as well as Bin-Zib) show how the urban precariat in Seoul has tried to overcome real estate capitalism, which has turned individuals and their families into investor subjectivities. In both cases, the activists tried to build homes among the urban precariat and contest the severe reality created by the capitalist value system based on private ownership. In doing so, however, they did not try to secure individual homes for the urban poor. Instead, the activists of *Gongyuji* and Bin-Go desired to devise what they call *commons* by creating a completely different way of financing land and housing and building relationships. This did not mean that they postulated *commons* as the absolute value or principle that members needed to accept in order to participate while pursuing a common vision, as the *Gongyuji* activist Sang-cheol expressed. Then how can we have a common vision without setting commons as the unifying value of a closed community? How can we engage in the value struggle against capital and state while maintaining openness toward all?

Activists of *Gongyuji* and Bin-Go/Bin-Zib sought the possibilities of commons by opening space to different bodies and working together. They put their most significant endeavours toward forming a “place/site” (*jang*), to borrow Sang-cheol’s words, on which “different people can take part across the

differences of their identities”. We can say that both *Gongyuji* and Bin-Go were invitations for various people to imagine and practice *commons* together. The most important thing for the activists was thus eliminating a possible hierarchy to promote what Chatterton (2006) calls “dialogue on uncommon ground” or “the process of making something together with different people”, as Ki-whang said in a meeting (June 28, 2018):

We are working together even though we don’t share any material purpose or visible values. It is incredible how we are working together ... I believe that what matters is the power that enables us to work together. We should discover and strengthen our power rather than seeking some sort of Platonic idea in the sky.

Obviously, working together across differences among people, they have tried to build a world they want to live in. For example, Bin-Go (2021) argues that “finance is the space of subjectivation” because “finance shows what kind of social relations we make; what kind of society we live in”. From this perspective, the various alternative financial practices that Bin-Go activists devised and tried to carry out are instances of the prefigurative making of social relations within and toward a world they want to live in. On the one hand, they needed to earn money to make a living. The precariat in Bin-Zib/Bin-Go lived on little income by working part-time jobs. Indeed, all the activists I met in Seoul took living based on significantly small income as a condition they should accept as activists while trying to utilise various sources, including personal relations, donations, and funds or government programs. Active members of Bin-Zib/Bin-Go and the activists of *Gongyuji* also utilised funds and government programs even though they had a critical view regarding how the government replaced welfare with various short-term projects, capturing the legacy of community movements. While Bin-Zib residents tried to create space for valorising their work by opening cooperative cafés, these attempts ended in failure as they could not produce enough profits to catch up with the rising rent of the area. On the other hand, they tried to share surplus. Bin-Zib residents put significant energy into creating alternative financing practices to share surplus amongst people based on the principle “from each according to their abilities to each according to their needs” to reduce labour as much as possible (see Han, 2015).⁷⁶

⁷⁶ There are many examples of such unique financial practices in Bin-Zib to actualise this principle, one of which I will mention here. In Bin-Zib, residents ran community cafes to earn a living through enjoyable work. While the surplus they made by running the cafes was not considerable, how they collectively ran the cafes and distributed the surplus was quite interesting. When they ran the first cafe, they held what they called a redistribution (*bunbae*) party at the end of each month. Each person who worked at the cafe stated whatever amount of money she wanted to be paid. Then they collectively tried to divide the surplus money according to each person’s needs as long as it was

At the same time, the fact that people did not envision alternative practices at *Gongyuji* and Bin-Go as something already complete and perfect should not be overlooked. Rather, all attempts made in *Gongyuji* and Bin-Go appeared as a part of experiments that were to be navigated and managed collectively through trial and error. The following excerpt shows this attitude well:

Let us enjoy and take it easy with what we are doing. This alternative money might fail in the end, as a matter of course. But, still, we can make it a novel failure. It would be enough if we can tell people what we tried to do and why we failed so that others can go further in the future... So, let us try to learn by seeing how this tool (alternative money) works and what kinds of relations it will produce. Hurray, Bin-Go! (A Bin-Go activist, October 25, 2014)⁷⁷

This attitude demonstrates a completely different perspective from those who view their lives as a “real war”. When you are in a war, you can neither try things nor do anything just for fun. You should follow the rules to survive. This is to say, rules dominate you. But, at *Gongyuji* and Bin-Go, rules are something made, unmade, and remade through numerous trials and errors you encounter with new people joining the game. More precisely, you try to keep rules tentative and thus keep the whole structure open by inserting *surplus* in various forms. The activists strived to (re)produce *Gongyuji* and Bin-Go sustainably. However, at the same time, they tried to keep a flexible attitude by accepting the possibility of failures. “Of course, there are possibilities of failure, and we cannot avoid this reality”, Bin-Go (2020) says. “However, even if we fail, we are not alone. We fail with many friends. Those who play the capitalist game remain completely alone”.⁷⁸

possible (see Pak, 2014, p. 77). In *Gongyuji*, where people had less consciousness about alternative financing, one can also find similar practices.

⁷⁷ The quote was from an email conversation amongst Bin-Go activists when they discussed the local alternative currency issued by Bin-Go and circulated in the area of *Haebangchon*.

⁷⁸ Bin-Go activists have sought to invent and innovate rules by experimenting with theoretical possibilities and exploiting every possible opportunity. For example, Mode D as “a competition of declining” was formulated based on “Bin-Go Game Theory” developed by playing three different games for years. These games were to see “how different people make different choices based on specific relations between people in various situations” (Bin-Go, 2020). It is not only by way of repeating thought experiments through which Bin-Go was devised and improvised. Lots of experiments were done in Bin-Zib and Bin-Go, such as issuing an alternative local currency and creating a health insurance system by themselves, to name just a few. The activists of Bin-Go have referred to various theories to make “changes, which might be small but lead us to a new stage by accumulating in a stable way”.



Figure 6.18. Bin-Go members are playing Bin-Go game (Source: Bin-Go)

In this regard, we can find that the word “work” or “working together” used by the activists of *Gongyuji* and Bin-Zib/Bin-Go resonates with Nietzsche’s (2014; 2020) concept of “play” or Arendt’s (2013) concept of “action”, as an act of making the world performatively (see also Siemens, 2005; Villa, 1992;).⁷⁹ As Villa (1992) points out, both Nietzsche and Arendt combat “the teleological model of action” carried out to obtain certain goals by emphasising a “performance” in which we cannot distinguish actor and act. Indeed, Bin-Go (2020) suggests that we can practice our lives as a play and, by doing so, perform a different world:

Let us play as if we are not living in the capitalist world. During the time you join in the play, you are living in a different world. Of course, the play would end soon. But it is fine. You might go back to ordinary life or begin a new play. Some plays can go really long, and some

⁷⁹ Nietzsche (2014) sees “play” as the most novel type of human activity through which players create as fully as possible their own world instead of being dominated by rules. Likewise, Arendt’s (2013) concept of “action” is something through which human beings interrupt natural processes and begin something new. While Arendt distinguishes action from economic activities and, by doing so, creates another dualist model, the activists of Bin-Go and *Gongyuji* did not make such a division and actively included the issue of livelihood in their work=play=action.

actors would be dead in the play, leaving a certain amount of capital or debt behind. She now really does not need any interest from her capital. Her capital becomes *commons* for the new actors to come. She played really well and completed the great play. What kind of world has she lived in? Was it capitalism or not? (Bin-Go, 2020)



Figure 6.19. *Gongyuji*, the “playground of citizens” (Source: CAGG).

Both in *Gongyuji* and Bin-Go, “work” appeared to be performative collective actions, and these actions disclose who they are, as Arendt (2013) states. They work together to create a world they desire to live in. At the same time, however, they tried not to turn what they are doing into Platonic, teleological action toward goals (such as labourers to obtain salaries or investment for profits). In doing so, they reclaim work to produce worlds of possibilities beyond labouring for salaries. In the world of capitalism, where the value system based on property ownership is considered natural, the activists of *Gongyuji* and Bin-Go invite us to play together to make the world something new, i.e., *commons*, by inserting ourselves into the world.

6.3. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have analysed the contemporary precariat movements in Tokyo and Seoul that contest the neoliberal ideology of self-reliance by tracing the enduring traits of social movements in each city. I draw three conclusions from the findings.

The first is that the precariat movements in Tokyo and Seoul have developed different strategies to counter the neoliberal ideology of self-reliance. The precariat movement in Tokyo developed a tradition of “autonomy” that enabled people to live a different life outside of the system. Identifying the roots of this tradition of autonomy in the day-labour movement in San’ya as well as the non-sectarian student movement, I describe the distinct qualities of the urban precariat’s movement regarding their position, action, and space production. The precariat movement in Seoul emerged from the legacy of the urban poor movement, which pursued the value and practice of community against the threat of eviction. However, the precariat in Seoul today tries to overcome the limitation associated with the traditional notion of community. They have worked on the notion of *commons* to counter the intense financialisation of real estate in the city as well as to sublate the limitations of closed communities.

Second, the precariat in Tokyo and Seoul, respectively, have imagined and practised urban commons differently according to distinct contexts. This shows that urban commons are not mere philosophical or economic notions, but practices situated in each socio-historical context. In Tokyo, the precariat has tried to produce an autonomous space to live outside of the system. They have not only developed what they call the “skills to survive”, such as recycling garbage and sleeping on the streets, but also produced discourses of the historical commons from rag picking to riots. By doing so, the precariat in Tokyo tried to remain – or become – *surplus*, which cannot be understood according to the common sense of the society. In Seoul, on the other hand, the precariat has confronted a more hostile urban environment, especially in terms of housing. This pushed the urban precariat to weave their endeavour in a more encompassing grammar of urban commons by developing economic/financial practices. At the same time, they tried to insert a sense of irreducible *surplus* and contingency into their practice, thus avoiding the danger of crafting a totalitarian system.

Finally, urban commons in Tokyo and Seoul resonate with each other in a significant manner in spite of these differences. First, urban commons produced by the precariat in Tokyo and Seoul are not only against capital and state but also beyond community. The precariat has pursued building an egalitarian and open relationship with strangers beyond their own group. They did so more by working together concretely in a shared space than by sharing an abstract notion or a political

ideology. Second, the precariat in Tokyo and Seoul produced urban commons beyond the dichotomy of work and home imposed by capital and state. In the precariat movement, work appears as a collective act of making the world (=home), which is ultimately relations of precarious beings sharing precariousness and care.

Chapter 7. Conclusion

Let us finally imagine, for a change, an association of free men, working with the means of production held in common, and expending their many different forms of labour-power in full self-awareness as one single social labour force (Marx, 1976, p. 171)

Of course, rough sleepers in San'ya and the youths in Koenji are totally different. But I guess neither of them considers themselves victims, which is quite an important point. (Mukai, an activist of Sōgidan, Japan, 11 November 2018)

I have had a couple of opportunities to present on Bin-Zib at international conferences and received questions as to whether Bin-Zib might be a sustainable solution or a meaningful reference for policymakers. The questions revealed people's doubts about whether Bin-Zib might be a reasonable solution for creating a better world by reducing poverty and inequalities. To be sure, what Bin-Zib residents tried to do might look unreasonable to most people (just like Dameren or the rough sleepers in San'ya). However, I differ on the notion of reasonability, as this notion would find the precariat's value struggle nonsensical, because the concept itself is embedded in and reflects capitalist value. Moreover, we all are living in an unsustainable world in the most negative sense, while barely questioning its sustainability or reasonability.

The precariat I have described in this thesis is not trying to find a reasonable solution or a plan, if there is such a thing, to build a better world. On the contrary, most of the precarious people I met during my fieldwork did not trust the attitude that defines something as the correct answer – they rejected the system simply because they did not like it. They are dropouts, or “rebels, non-conformists, misfits, [and] dreamers” to borrow the Zapatistas' words (Zapatistas, cited in Holloway, 2010, part 1, para 7).

While I refer to all the protagonists in this research as the precariat, there is a clear distinction between the day labourers in Tokyo and the urban poor housewives in Seoul in the 1970s on the one hand, and those who began the prefigurative experiments in the 1990s in Tokyo and the 2000s in Seoul on the other. The former consisted of collective bodies that created commons to survive at the bottom of society. The latter composed a political subjectivity that emerged at the time, reflecting the shifts in political and ideological terrains: the capitalist mode of accumulation began to change as neoliberal restructuring and the normalisation of precarisation took root in each respective society. Faced with the fall of the socialist states, many leftists lost their faith in the notion of progress. Although the new precariat rejected any form of political ideology, their experiments clearly reflected a specific historical and ideological juncture, and, both theoretically and practically, they sought new possibilities.

In spite of their differences, the precariat I explored throughout this thesis has something in common. Above all things, their focus was not directed toward the government but toward each other and toward living collectively as they pleased. In this regard, the precariat in my study is different from what Negri (in Curcio, 2010, p. 315) calls the “citizen”, the subjectivity “historically integrated in the biopolitical order of welfare”. They stopped participating in the system voluntarily, which treated them as objects and ordered them to do things. Even when they were completely

abandoned, they were not victims because they also diverged from oppressive social norms. As Holloway (2010, part 1, para. 8) puts it, “they are rebels, not victims; subjects, not objects”.

Also, in their endeavours to invent their ways of life, they were neither guided by a revolutionary ideology guaranteeing the way of the future nor the orders and norms of political organisations. In this sense, they have taken a “*salto mortale*” (fatal leap) without any guarantee of success or a sense of where they would land and, by doing so, embraced the uncertainty, restlessness, and precariousness of life. As they stop serving the system, what is left is to live life as a series of experiments and trials. This precariat has tried to create alternatives as much as possible while using (or playing with) the system to survive within it. This is to say, their doing/living itself appears as a prefiguration of another world, which is essentially a process of value struggle.

This thesis has explored how precarity has been historically produced and un/governed in Tokyo and Seoul. It has also investigated how the urban precariat has produced the urban commons by looking at the urban precariat movements in Tokyo and Seoul as the forefront of a battle over value. Below, I summarise the key findings and arguments presented in empirical chapters along with theoretical considerations based on the results. These considerations are then followed by an overview of the main contributions of this thesis. I conclude with a discussion of the limitations of this study as well as agendas for future investigation.

7.1. Spatiality of precarity, precarisation, and the precariat movement

One of the conclusions I have drawn based on the findings is that the mode of governing precarity has shifted, entailing a rearrangement of urban space, which is essentially related to subjectivity production or what Foucault (1977, p. 221) calls “the accumulation of men and the accumulation of capital”.

During rapid industrialisation, the precarious population was utilised as pools of disposable labour-power. At the same time, the authorities of both cities tried to control precarity by spatially isolating “the underclass” (Tokyo) and “the urban poor” (Seoul), labelling their way of life immoral. This process essentially reflects how the modern state articulated a specific form of citizenry and society by excluding the ungovernable (see Sakai, 2001; Balibar & Wallerstein, 1991).¹

¹ Sakai (2001, pp. 87-91) observes how the most urgent task of the bourgeoisie was to separate the proletariat from the lumpenproletariat in 19th century Europe (see also Hobsbaum, 2010; Foucault, 2013).

The way in which precarity was produced and governed has changed significantly since the late 1980s in Japan and the middle of the 1990s in Korea. As Lorey (2015) notes, in the neoliberal regime, precarisation functions as an instrument of governance by generating a pervasive feeling of insecurity. The findings of this thesis show that what Lorey (ibid.) calls “the normalisation of precarization” entails an accelerated process of the homogenisation of urban space. As I discussed in Chapter 2, capitalism emerged along with the invention of a new temporality/spatiality in which time and space appear secular, abstract, and homogeneous. The process became even more intensive through the financialisation of urban space. In the case of Seoul, financialisation occurred much earlier than in Anglophone countries, through informal private financial markets and rental housing (Song, 2014). Since the 1960s, a constant process of redevelopment took place, removing shantytowns and replacing them with apartment complexes for the middle class (Park, 2014; 2015; Gelézeau, 2007). In Tokyo, on the other hand, it was in the late 1980s that *yosebas* began to be dismantled and have undergone processes of gentrification. In both cities, the official arrival of globalised financial capital accelerated the rearrangement of urban space, as the stark changes to university space that have occurred since the 1980s in Tokyo and the 1990s in Seoul demonstrate.

From the perspective of the movement, this homogenisation of urban space has meant the loss of space for political subjectivations. For example, in the Japanese context, scholars and activists often state: “the whole of Japanese society has turned into *yosebas* while *yosebas* were dismantled” (see Amamiya, 2017; Mōri, 2013; Yuasa cited in Yi, 2012). However, the activists of San’ya strongly contest the statement as, in this sentence, the word *yosebas* only signifies the precarious labour market. *Yosebas* were not only labour markets formed and dismantled by the state and capital, but also a place for the collective subjectivation for the urban precariat – *yosebas* have been a heterogeneous site par excellence. In the same way, before the 1990s, shantytowns in Seoul were not only extremely vulnerable residential spaces but provided the poor local communities with the possibility to build social relations and experience moments of subjectivation. The precarious subjects in contemporary Tokyo and Seoul, however, reproduce themselves as precarious individuals in isolated space.

The precariat movements emerging in the 1990s in Tokyo and the 2000s in Seoul have resisted neoliberal tendencies by producing heterogeneous time-space. It is noteworthy that many initiators had experiences of autonomous space on campus in their twenties. In an interview, for example, Pepe (Dameren) (2021, p. 95) explains about the “weird and interesting space” of the “underground student society rooms” in the 1980s. He says, “it would be impossible to imagine such a space for the contemporary youth; it would be something beyond what they can imagine”. Yet, the youth who came across Dameren expressed their amazement at the abnormality of space that produced in Dameren’s activities as I discussed. Likewise, first visitors to Bin-Zib commonly expressed their

feeling about the space, using words such as “weird”, “wonderland”, and “strange” (Han, 2015). In other words, the urban precariat created heterogeneous, autonomous time-space, demonstrating that space production is essentially related to alternative subjectivity formation and the production of different modes of life, as discussed in detail in the following section.

7.2. Value struggle as an act of prefiguration of an unknown world

7.2.1. Developing different values in the precariat movement in Tokyo and Seoul

In their endeavour to live as they wanted, the precariat in Tokyo and Seoul developed disparate values, which reflect different socio-economic and geographic contexts.

The infrastructure of Tokyo had to be rebuilt after the war, but the capitalist city was soon put back together when the economy boomed and industry demanded a population flow into the city in the wake of the Korean War in the 1950s. During the subsequent period of high growth, precarious labour-power began to aggregate in *yoseba* enclaves while the majority of the population became middle class (Chiavacci, 2008; Kennett & Iwata, 2003), at least ideologically. Under such a circumstance, the urban precariat’s struggle was mainly facilitated by their will for autonomy and their opposition to a homogeneous civil society, which embodied the strong community ethos of Japan that encompassed the whole nation as a modern nation-state.

Japan in the 1980s was often characterised by the absence of social movements (Cassegård, 2013; Karatani, 1997; Kohso, 2006). However, the legacy of the non-sectarian, or anarchist movement remained in existence on university campuses as well as in *yosebas*. Since the late 1980s, a new kind of movement emerged on the street among non-sectarian student activists and freeters. The urban precariat broke away from civil society and the traditional leftist social movements that oppressed individuals’ freedom. Refusing to become a part of the majoritarian society or the authoritarian political movement, the precariat in Tokyo pursued an existence as dropouts – as the undefined *surplus*/excess of the society. Their value struggle thus evolved around the revaluation of the meaning of “dropouts” as autonomous selves in pursuit of forms of survival.

Seoul’s precariat movement emerged under considerably different circumstances. In Seoul, where the majority of people has been forced to be in a state of precarity, the immediate goal of the social movement has been to provide a means of survival. Under such a circumstance, the precariat movement in Seoul strongly relied on the sentiment of togetherness and developed discourses around community and *commons*. Starting in the late 1960s, religious activists had tried to organise social movements for the urban poor by creating communities. While the term “community” was

often used without a critical consideration of its oppressive aspects, the urban poor housewives pursued a (sense of) community, which differed from the patriarchal community prevalent in the society at large, in order to share their precariousness.

During the social upheaval of the 1980s, radical social movements in Korea largely pursued not only the democratisation of the society but also the ideas of a socialist revolution to overthrow the dictatorship. Their ideological project, which aimed to abolish the precariousness of the working class and/or the Korean people in general once for all, came to a halt for various reasons, including the collapse of the existing socialist states and the end of the Cold War. Subsequent generations of activists began a new kind of precariat movement, which reflected a shift in collective sensibilities among the urban youth. The urban precariat desired to live a life diverging not only from the cut-throat competition of capitalist society but also from an ideological leftist movement that sought to form the community based on patriarchal roles. In order to do so, they needed to come up with a way to resist capitalist property relations and share limited resources in a severely financialised city. In this endeavour, they adopted the notion of *commons* as a key to their value struggle. They not only contested the existing land and housing system but also radically appropriated the informal financial system, or what Song (2012, p. 174) calls “the sedimented history of finance”.

7.1.2. Value struggle to prefigure alternative mode of *subjectivity* production

While the urban precariat in Tokyo and Seoul developed respectively distinct values that have conflicted with the values imposed by the dominant society in each context, their value struggles demonstrate considerable commonalities, especially because of their prefigurative characteristics.

The precariat’s value struggle necessarily takes the form of direct action through which they produce an alternative time-space. In this regard, value struggle resonates with what Holloway (2010) calls a “crack”, which is “the perfectly ordinary creation of a space or moment in which we assert a different type of doing”. Also, the urban precariat’s collective act of prefiguration marks a flight from the dualist grammar of the capitalist value system which divides work and home; labour and play; production and reproduction; life and economy; and so on.

(1) Producing heterogeneity, disturbing time-space

Both in Tokyo and Seoul, the precariat’s value struggles took the form of collective direct action to produce/practice a different time-space, or what De Angelis (2007, p. 3) calls “phase time”, which is “the time of emergence, of ‘excess’, of tangents, ‘exodus’ and ‘lines of flight’, the rupture of linearity and circularity redefining and repositing goals and telos, as well as norms and values”.

Here, I would like to share what D., a member of Yaseen, an artist-activist theatre group, said. This was at a time when Yaseen and Sōgidan prepared for the performance at San'ya-bori Park. In the middle of the meeting, D. said to Sōgidan members:

Both of us (Yaseen and Sōgidan) are doing what we do, strongly distrusting the society, yet in different rhythms. We, as artists, build a site of irregular time and space in a condensed and intensive manner. You (Sōgidan) build a site more slowly while watching the overall flow. But, when we do that, we both build a communal rhythm to escape from the law of inertia built into the society. (18 March 2018)

This excerpt pithily captures how the urban precariat's value struggles, which I have explored in this thesis, took forms of prefiguring alternative time-spaces, as I summarise below.

San'ya in Tokyo and shacktowns in Seoul existed as what Foucault calls "heterotopia", which can be described as "disturbing, intense, incompatible, contradictory and transforming", as Johnson (2013, p. 790) puts it. The authorities of these capital cities want them to be hidden from the perception of the cityscape, if not physically destroy their existence. Instead of demanding welfare or a means of security from society, which had been taken away from them, the urban precariat in both cities produced *yosebas*/shacktowns as sites to live together amidst precariousness.

The precariat movement of the new generation emerged in the 1990s in Tokyo and the 2000s in Seoul among those who desired to flee from capitalist wage-labour relations. The initiators of Dameren and Bin-Zib refused to enter the capitalist value system, which would capture their activities and turn them into valorised (waged) labour. In their value struggle to reclaim incommensurable and irreducible *surplus* (*dame/ingyeo*), i.e., uncaptured/unvalorised life (time and activities), Dameren and Bin-Zib contested the dominant time-space as well as the sensibilities embedded within it. While Dameren and Bin-Zib's value struggle focused on different terrains, namely work (and homogenous and linear time) and home (and speculative, private space), both experiments produced divergent time-spaces which were perceived as outside, and thus either disturbing and/or exciting to anyone who experienced them for the first time.

The urban precariat's value struggles essentially appeared as configurations of divergent time-space which disturb dominant sensory orders. This disturbance occurs in two directions. On one hand, the precariat configures an alternative time-space, either temporarily, by causing "riots", "events" or "commotions", as the Japanese precariat did, or in steadier ways, by building commons. What they demonstrated was, above all, completely different desires which had been systematically oppressed in capitalist society. They ask members of society to see and hear those who do not have a part in the society, such as "workers, women, people of colour, or others" (Rancière, 1992, p. 59).

On the other hand, the divergent time-space disturbs participants' own sensibilities. It asks those who experience them to alter their sensibilities according to the time-space, or to change their bodies, which are ultimately social practices articulated in and through specific rhythms, divisions, and proxemics of time-space. Moreover, this process of altering is repeated because of the openness of the movement. As I discussed in Chapter 5, Dameren and Bin-Zib experienced demographic changes and happened to have difficulties due to conflicting sensibilities amongst participants. One can also observe the same kind of tension that has constantly occurred at *Gongyuji*, *Shirōtono-ran*, and *San'ya*. While there have been attempts to screen newcomers or rules to reduce troubles or protect the community as an enclave secured from the influx of different sensibilities, there have always been those who tried to keep the movement open to the outside as much as possible.

As we often witness, what had once been divergent begins to be considered normal, or even become commodified. The precariat activists I met in Tokyo and Seoul were clearly aware of this fact. For example, Sang-cheol (*Gongyuji*) told me about a dispute between a group of artists and *Gongyuji* activists. While the artists wanted to make *Gongyuji* as “a beautiful space which people would desire to protect”, activists opposed the idea and tried to keep *Gongyuji* as an “ambiguous and disturbing space”. In the same vein, Pepe (Dameren) and Mukai (Sōgidan) expressed their regrets about how many autonomous spaces turned into hipster cafes demonstrating the same kind of aesthetics/artistic tastes amongst members. This is to say, the urban precariat's time-space production is different from a community-making practice marked by insular homogeneity. They put themselves into a process of a “constant redefinition of what is considered as commons”, to borrow the expression of Stavrides (2016, p. 32). How bell hooks, a Black feminist and scholar, has criticised liberal feminists' concept of “safe space” strongly resonates with the urban precariat's practices of space-building as a movement to develop a way of living together with Others:

Safety and support have been redefined to mean hanging out in groups where the participants are alike and share similar values. While no woman wants to enter a situation in which she will be psychically annihilated, women can face one another in hostile confrontation and struggle and move beyond the hostility to understanding. (...) In feminist movement, there is need for diversity, disagreement, and difference if we are to grow.
(hooks, 1984, p.63)

(2) Working together to produce different homes and bodies

As home and family have become the most effective governing tools to coerce people to live as wage labourers and family members (Federici, 2012, Hardt & Negri, 2009), rejecting wage labour is inevitably accompanied by changes in norms and practices in relation to the home. The precariat in the two cities produced different ideas and practices around work and home, which were

indistinguishable from relationships in which precarious people share and collaborate together through their precariousness and care. In spite of these differences, there is also a commonality: members of the urban precariat I met in my fieldwork tended to break the division between work and home by engaging in activities of using/building a world in which people collectively (re)produce their everyday lives, relations, and themselves. To be more precise, the precariat's value struggle, which reclaims the incommensurable values of various activities that reproduce their daily lives and relations, necessarily engages in shaking the dualist grammar of the capitalist value system by blurring the division of work and home, labour and play, and production and reproduction.

The earlier generation of the urban precariat engaged in the most precarious form of waged work in cities to earn a living, but also created lines of exodus. For day labourers in Tokyo, their act of work (day labouring) expressed a form of life that diverged from the social order and affirmed a sense of sovereignty over their lives. Based on their collective experience of day labouring, day labourers experienced a unique class consciousness, treating each other with a deep sense of camaraderie and rebelling against hierarchy and abuse at worksites. At the same time, they continued reproducing *yosebas* as homes where day labourers cared for each other during the harshest times. In the case of the urban poor housewives in Seoul, they engaged in both precarious waged work and unwaged domestic work to survive as families. In doing so, they not only tended to perceive work as an act of reproducing their livelihoods beyond the dichotomy of wage labour and other activities but also felt a sense of pride about the fact that they fed and educated their children. This attitude resonates with what Angela Davis (1981, p. 7) states about how black slave women consider domestic work “the only meaningful labour for the slave community as a whole”, despite the gendered hierarchy in the community. It seems that the urban poor housewives intuitively knew that “the reproduction of human beings is the foundation of every economic and political system” (Federici, 2012, p. 2). Based on this sensibility, they communised reproductive labour beyond the unit of the family. The case of the Nangok housewives vividly shows how the urban poor housewives created commons through autonomous activities to weave an expanding network of care.

The generation of the urban precariat in Tokyo and Seoul that confronted the introduction of neoliberalism avoided wage-labour and rejected a life defined by one's work. To be sure, this attempt to escape from the capitalist labour process was not so simple, as they did need to earn a living. This situation pushed them to develop and improve ways of earning livelihoods by creating spaces of self-valorisation and sharing resources in order to live as they wanted. Although their endeavour to create self-valorising space failed to raise enough money to keep up with rising rent over the years, especially in Seoul, they created new modes of care for each other beyond the boundary of the

family, offering a valuable insight in terms of how work and home might be reorganised to create commons.

First, based on the different values that they pursued, the precariat in Tokyo and Seoul took different strategies, which I would respectively call “becoming-family” (Seoul) and “dissolving-family” (Tokyo), in order to create alternative modes of care and relations. The precariat in Tokyo put more emphasis on what disability studies calls “strategic autonomy and independence” (see Care Collective) while trying to build a loose and open network of care. On the other hand, the precariat in Seoul, who had to deal with a harsher socio-economic situation, put great efforts into creating material bases for collectivity by devising different ways of accounting and financing in relation to land and housing.²

Second, in spite of the differences in the socio-economic and cultural contexts between Tokyo and Seoul, all the experiments have shown that what enables the urban precariat to build a network of care beyond the family is their work outside of wage-labour relations. In the precariat’s value struggle, their work – including domestic work, various collective activities, and intellectual work – appeared as an act of creating time-space to reproduce and renew relations and commonalities, i.e., commons. Outside of the capitalist value system, the precariats’ work appeared to be fundamentally formative and affective action which (re)vitalised their relations and livelihoods (see also Hansen & Zechnner, 2019). In doing so, the precariat reclaimed the corporeality of work. Making something (communal kitchens, demonstrations, events, childcare, or a home) together, people confronted unexpected situations which they had to share, dispute, and solve together and – by doing so – weave themselves into relations of mutual dependency. In other words, producing something together with various people meant that they had to adjust their bodies into a collective rhythm, creating commonality with others in the most concrete sense.

Here, what makes the relations is not their conscious will. On the contrary, it is they themselves who happen to become something else in the site of commons.³ It is the “*surplus*” of their collective work that produces communal relations and communistic bodies. Material and emotional *surplus* is constantly produced through collective activities and shared without mediation, either creating connections and commons or breaking up relations. It is pure affection (joy and pain essentially

² Ahn (2014) discusses how *gye* and the practice of pooling resources had become a significant factor for creating communities in Korea in places where the enclosure of land and woods (commons) proceeded quickly and extensively.

³ In this regard, an article by Dion, the former Bin-Zib resident, is noteworthy. She describes how her body changed by co-living with a baby in one of the Bin-Zibs (see Han, 2015).

coming from engagement and communication with others) which people can never exactly calculate or fairly exchange, but directly produce and share amongst bodies and sensibilities. A short essay, read by Bin-Zib residents collectively and repeatedly, captures this aspect well. The author (Han, n.d.) argues that what Marx (1964) calls the “*chemical* power of society” (p.167) is “forming a commune, or communicating”. He points out that love and labour are two aspects of the same act of forming communes. Love is an act of giving the time of one’s life to someone. Work is an active expression and an actualisation of love. In other words, love and work (as an expression of love) “ultimately go toward others” (ibid.). From this perspective, the author suggests that we should revitalise our ability of work/love as an act of giving/receiving one’s life to/from others as a form of “pure surplus”, without calculations or mediations.

Finally, the precariat in Tokyo and Seoul, and especially its new generation, tried to create sites of commons in an extraordinarily open form. This, on the one hand, resonates with what Care Collective (2020, chapter 2, part 3) calls “promiscuous care”, the ethics that “proliferates outwards to redefine caring relations from the most intimate to the most distant”. On the other hand, their pursuit of openness inevitably conflicts with the desire to secure oneself and a community from various sources that provoke fear and anxiety in urban life. Yet, the precariat in Tokyo and Seoul tended not to do “risk assessment ... before taking the decision” but became “an actor together with others with whom [each one] socially constitutes ‘risk’”, to borrow De Angelis’ (p. 22) words. In other words, they did not adopt a political framework in which activists should protect minorities. Rather than that, in the precariat’s value struggle, all the unpredictable situations and disturbances appeared to be the subject of “self-ruling” through constant discussions and disputes amongst differences. At the same time, the precariat tried to devise ways to reduce the fundamental burden of care through creating a loose network of care in which people attended to others based on their own abilities and needs.⁴ To sum up, the precariat pursued creating open relations in which they were “working with and through ambivalence and contradictory emotions” (Care Collective, 2020, chapter 1, part 2). They tried to create commons in the middle of the precariousness of being with others instead of building an immunised, safe community ruled by shared communal sensibilities. Commoning appears to be essentially a process of engaging participants in the collective experience of direct democracy and learning to increase their capacities to care for one another across differences.

⁴ According to Care Collective (2020, chapter 1, part 2), the origin of the word care in English is “*caru*, meaning care, concern, anxiety, sorrow, grief, trouble”. These double meanings reflect “a reality where attending fully to the needs and vulnerabilities of any living thing, and thus confronting frailty, can be both challenging and exhausting”.

7.3. Urban commons towards travellers' communism

The precariat in Tokyo and Seoul pursued different values, producing commons (through their value struggles to proliferate an irreducible *surplus*) in dissimilar ways in specific contexts. At the same time, one can see commons produced in Tokyo and Seoul in the genealogy of the urban movements in each city. This demonstrates that the urban precariat's value struggle to create commons is affected not only by social, cultural, and geographical realities but also existing practices and legacies of commons. More specifically, the precariat's value struggle is inscribed in the city, affecting the spatiality of the movement.

In Tokyo, the precariat reclaimed, above all things, what Agamben (2014) calls "a form-of-life", which is a life that has escaped capture from the social order. Two of the most significant ways through which the precariat in Tokyo preserves their forms of life outside of the capitalist value system consist of a "use" of their surroundings and a strategy of "inoperativity". The concept of "inoperativity" does not mean "the cessation of all activity" but "an activity that consists in making human works and productions inoperative, opening them to a new possible use" beyond work as a goal-oriented action (Agamben, 2014, p. 69). As I discussed in Chapter 6, rough sleepers in San'ya rejected social protection and lived outside of the system. In doing so, they used public parks, streets, riversides, and waste discharged from the capitalist circuit as commons to continue their way of living. This is true not only for the case of rough sleepers. The books written by Dameren and Shirōtono-ran, which promoted living without working, listed various survival skills put into practice through using one's surroundings and social relations. Running recycling shops, in the narrative of Matsumoto (2009; 2021), clearly appeared as a method of rejecting capitalism and using various forms of commons to live as one wants without entering wage-labour relations.

In Seoul, where the precariat had to create material bases, commons have been created in a more constituent way by inventing systems which ranged from medical cooperatives to *Gongyuji* and Bin-Zib/Bin-Go. While this tendency inherits the legacy of the resident movement which aimed to bring into being alternative material/financial infrastructures to create self-sustained urban poor communities, the urban precariat of the neoliberal era tried to prevent their practices from becoming mutual aid within a bounded group of people. In doing so, they utilised the concept of *commons*. The urban precariat, on the one hand, tried to invent a different form of accounting/financing surplus from that of capitalism while producing strategic discourses and languages related to *commons*. On the other hand, they paid close attention to not establishing *commons* as a totalising system by inserting contingency and *surplus* into their system of autonomy.

The findings also show significant commonalities between the ways in which the precariat in Tokyo and Seoul respectively produce the urban as commons. First, in both cities, the urban precariat tended to carry out their experiments in open forms without making them into communities bounded by a certain set of values or intimacies. Of course, communities were created constantly in people's everyday lives in these experiments, as is the case everywhere where people physically get together, making and unmaking intimate relations. However, the specificity of urban commons lies in how communities-in-the-making were constantly deterritorialised by erasing boundaries, rules, and hierarchies.

This was particularly evident in *Gongyuji* and Bin-Zib, as their experiments entailed the practice of sharing limited space with strangers. For example, during my stay in *Gongyuji*, a homeless man began to live in *Gongyuji*, occupying an abandoned, makeshift structure. A few days after, he even started to sell various miscellaneous articles, putting a banner that read "Dokkaebi House" on the structure (Dokkaebi is a goblin-like trickster in Korean folklore). While activists observed him with interest, space-keepers did not like the change. Not only the former members of Neuljang, but also urban refugees expressed their concerns, if not discomfort, by saying things like: "It is bad for *Gongyuji* as he makes the space similar to a slum"; "I was planning to use the space as a warehouse"; "I cannot say anything as I am also using the space for free, but you should be careful as you are staying here even at night". This is to say, the existing participants tried to maintain the existing rhythm as much as possible or maintain certain regularities, if not tacit stalemates, in order to co-exist. But a balance was soon perturbed by either newcomers or changing situations. The result was a kind of dynamic equilibrium involving the communal norm and relations originating from the outside. These characteristics are also found in the Japanese cases, albeit on diverse levels. People who belong to different classes, genders, and generations encountered each other at movement sites. As they tried to keep the site of movement open, participants had to learn how to work together with others through constantly (re)making communal rhythms by changing their own bodies and sensibilities and renewing commons.

Second, what would make a person a part of the movement was neither membership nor identity but the precariat's performative act of producing and sharing *surplus* together with others. In other words, the subject of the movement emerges only when people change their sensibilities and desires prescribed by the dominant society right in the moment of engagement in the movement's relations. In this context, what Dame (good-for-nothings), Shirōto (amateurs), Bin (Guests), Citizens of *Gongyuji*, and Sōgidan (disputers) all refer to is the name of subjectivity-in-transition, i.e., commoners. Urban commons is produced through the process of becoming, i.e., the subjectivation, of individuals and collectives. From this perspective, urban commons of the precariat movement is not captured by

the grammar of commons based on the dichotomy of subject (commoners) and object (resources). Rather, urban commons appears to be similar to what Agamben (2014, p. 68) calls a middle voice verb in which “the subject does not stand above the action, but is itself the place of its occurrence”:

The process does not travel from an active subject toward the separate object of its action, but implicates in itself the subject, in the same measure in which it is itself implied in the object and ‘is given’ to it. (...) *[I]t expresses the relation that one has with oneself, the affection that one receives in as much as one is in relation with a specific being.* (Agamben, 2014, p. 68)

In urban commons, subjects appear to be both objects affected by their own actions as well as site of these actions.

Finally, the urban, for the precariat, is something created only by way of spontaneous encounter. The following excerpt captures the precariat’s perspective on the urban well:

The public baths in Tokyo have notes for customers written in various languages, from English and Chinese to Persian. What excites us is that such notes were not prepared from above. Neither owners of the baths nor administrators prepared such a thing. Lots of migrant workers came to Tokyo and began to use public baths. This situation made the ‘push’ to write the notes. In other words, the notes are relational. We feel the urban emerging in these kinds of relations. (...) The urban, for us, does not mean any pre-designed/planned space but a space spontaneously created in a relational manner. (Caracalla, 1997, pp. 98-9)⁵

I believe that this sensibility is closely connected to the urban precariat’s endeavour to grasp for the possibilities and limits of what their bodies can become through experimentation instead of predetermining limits based on moral judgements. Instead of restraining and controlling expressions of difference to maintain communal harmony, they accepted disputes as a process of communication while trying to develop a new technology of self and collective by using their own bodies amongst other bodies as tools. In doing so, they accepted what Butler (2004, p. xii) calls “the fundamental dependency on anonymous others”.

When we think of the economic aspect of the precariat movement, it is obvious that the precariat in both cities experienced significant difficulties in valorising their activities in a monetary form. Although they wanted to depart from wage labour relations as much as possible, many of them actually relied on someone else’s income given in the form of a gift or donation (San’ya, *Gongyūji*,

⁵ Caracalla is the name of the zine published by “the *Sento-teki* (“*sento*” is a homonym with meanings of “Public bathhouses” and “Militant”) Workers’ League”. Holding the slogan, “the city should support public bathhouses so the fees does not go up!”, the group was a part of the freeters’ activism in the 1990s (see Kohso, 2006).

Bin-Zib) or different forms of state redistribution (San'ya, Bin-Zib, *Gongyuji*, Dameren). As I discussed, the people engaged in Bin-Zib and Shirotono-ran tried to create valorising spaces to earn a living. Bin-Zib's endeavours of creating such a valorising space, however, did not succeed in the highly financialised rent-seeking city of Seoul. While Shirotono-ran was able to generate a source of income by running shops thanks to the legal protections offered to tenants, their practices relied on individuals' acumen, demonstrating the tricky path between alternative spaces and individual entrepreneurship. In the case of Bin-Zib, a good number of earlier residents moved to the countryside where they could avoid high rent and produce what they eat (I did not have the space to discuss this afterlife in this thesis). This ironically demonstrates the fundamental difficulty of creating a collective form of life while engaged in valorising work within the capitalist city.

Nevertheless, I understand the experiments that I looked at throughout my thesis as urban commons as a different mode of production. Three things are crucial to note. First, when we define a mode of production from a sheer economic perspective and assume that these experiments did not produce (economic) value, we return to the grammar of capitalist value that divides production and reproduction. Also, this view directly conflicts with the fact that domestic work which had long been unwaged has now turned into a realm captured by capital to make profits. As Graeber (2013, p. 223) points out, production "always means the production of material goods and social relations – and therefore, by extension, human beings, who recreate themselves and each other in the very process of acting on the world". The precariat in each site of movement put significant time and effort into the realm of care and reproduction, which essentially (re)produces people's relations, daily lives, and bodies. In other words, they tried to create a different mode of production especially through inventing different forms of reproduction. Second, Bin-Go's attempt to turn capital into commons by communising the monetary interest generated from key-money corresponds to the way in which surplus produced as commons is captured by rent in the contemporary city. Last but not least, in their practices of the urban commons, they tried to directly socialise (taking part and sharing) various affective and material *surplus*, produced collectively in their daily lives rather than pooling and redistributing surplus equally among the members in the manner of a miniature welfare state or basic income. To summarise, what the precariat produced in their practice of urban commons is new kinds of relations and subjectivities creating *surplus* and sharing it with others in a totally different manner from that of capitalism.

To sum up, the urban precariat in Tokyo and Seoul tried to develop a new way in which individuals and collectives are divided and connected, in contrast to capitalism. In their efforts to create commons, the precariat did not strengthen community or intimate relations. Rather, they tried to create a new social relationship of interdependency and intimacy beyond the status quo dependencies

on family and nation-state by weaving a loose network of commons in which they produced and shared resources and affections, i.e., *surplus*, with Others directly. This cosmopolitan attitude resonates with what Care Collective (2020) calls “promiscuous care on a global scale”. As Care Collective (ibid.) points out, such “everyday cosmopolitanism emerges quite spontaneously in the lives of cities” where people intermingle with each other, creating what Gilroy (2004) calls “convivial culture”. If Dameren and Shirōtono-ran tried to proliferate such cultural forms, the precariat in Seoul also tried to expand such relations to the realm of the economy. Indeed, we can find the same types of relations that Bin-Zib/Bin-Go has tried to create and expand in the ways that drifting day labourers in the Meiji period were offered “a meal and bed for a night” in any worksites they visited. I would call this relation that enables individuals to be a part of commons beyond bounded community “travellers’ communism”.

7.4. Key contributions and agendas for future research

This thesis contributes to existing discussions around commons and the precariat that challenge the capitalist production of *subjectivity*. I am greatly indebted to scholars who have conceptualised commons and communism as existing relations and movements to both imagine and practice forms of collective life beyond capitalism (Caffentzis and Federici, 2014; De Angelis, 2007; 2017; Endnotes Collective, 2010; Graeber, 2011a; Karatani, 2014; Linebaugh, 2008; Lorey, 2010; Midnight Notes Collective, 1990; Negri and Hardt, 2009; Yi, 2010). This thesis is also deeply indebted to scholars who have de-centred knowledge production, theoretically and empirically, by offering rich narratives from outside of the binary of Global North and South and thus radically positioning Asia (Shin, 2021; Song, 2012; Song & Hae, 2019). While adopting the notion of commons as “both a political imaginary and vocabulary, and also as a material aspiration and organising tool” in seeking a radical change in the capitalist mode of production (Chatterton, 2010, p. 626), this thesis offers nuanced insights by adding histories about how commons and communities have been practiced in capitalist cities in Japan and Korea. The thesis also proposes a theory of urban commons as a middle voice based on empirical studies involving fieldwork in Tokyo and Seoul – the precariat practice of creating commons in the city cannot be understood using the existing frame that compartmentalises subject, object, and action.

This thesis contributes to the geography of the precariat movement by producing an unprecedented genealogical cartography of precariat movements in Tokyo and Seoul. While a considerable number of investigations have paid attention to horizontality and the autonomous characteristics and cultural aspects of the newly-emerged precariat movements in Japan and Korea (Brown, 2018; Cassegård,

2013; Fukui, 2012; Kim, 2013b; Kingang, 2011; Kohso, 2006; Lee, 2017; Mōri, 2005), they did not extend their discussion to how these precariat movements have expressed distinctive values, reflecting different socio-economic and cultural contexts as well as expressing certain historical traits of social movements in each city. Through its comparative and relational approach, the thesis has explored the situated value struggles of the precariat in and against changing modes of capitalist accumulation and spatiality. By empirically unpacking the situated value struggles of the urban precariat in these two cities, the study demonstrated how the urban precariat created urban commons through using/financing/investing material and affective *surplus* differently in relation to the norms and practices embedded in the dominant value system in each society.

A final contribution of this thesis lies in its methodological approach, as it explores sites of movements from a relational comparative perspective (McFarlane, 2010; Peck, 2015; Robinson, 2015; Roy, 2003; Ward, 2010). The relational comparative approach enabled me to grasp the singularities of the urban precariat movement in each city, which would have otherwise been difficult to understand. At the same time, I tried to generate common notions amongst various, situated commons by inviting members of the precariat (including myself) to in-depth dialogues. This methodological approach provides militant co-research with concrete, methodological implications for facilitating and catalysing the process of becoming amongst the bodies involved (scholars, activists, or anyone with a certain identity/singularity) in movements/research.

Some limitations of my study do exist, however, and present opportunities for developing a future research agenda.

To begin with, the precariat movements that I explored in this thesis were formed during a specific historical-cultural juncture. As I conclude this thesis in 2021, the heyday of the current movements seems to have passed. All the protagonists of the research have shared such observations with me, although they are still trying to revitalise respective movements and are seeking new possibilities at each site of the urban movements. While this thesis has explored the way in which precarity has been produced and un/governed in Tokyo and Seoul, as well as the value struggle of the precariat movement to produce urban commons, it falls short of giving an account of the shifting dynamics of the activist scene that have started to take place in recent years. Both in Tokyo and Seoul, the internal dynamics of the precariat movements have largely and very noticeably shifted, developing a strengthened tendency toward identity politics based on what Brown (2001) calls “righteous moralism” and victimhood. While many scholars have discussed how this tendency has been strengthened in various societies from diverse perspectives (see Brown, 2020; Campbell & Manning, 2014; Haider, 2018; Kwon et al, 2018; Lukianoff & Haidt, 2018; Pfaller, 2021), they point out a

common tendency – the inhibition of political processes on the ground through an immunisation of political space to protect those who appeal to insecurity and anxiety.⁶ While Hardt and Negri (2017, p. 275) consider such a tendency as an inherent shortcoming of prefigurative politics, I beg to differ. This trend clearly collides with the politics of openness the urban precariat pursued. I intend to investigate the development of these new dynamics in my future research.

Also, this thesis was not able to comprehensively examine the way in which the urban precariat movements make connections beyond national borders. As discussed, the people involved in the precariat movement in Tokyo and Seoul have formed a loose network together with activists of other countries in East Asia. The Nolimit festival is one of the examples that demonstrates how the precariat has tried to build international solidarity by networking among autonomous spaces in the region. But what does solidarity mean across borders? How do they actualise the idea of transnational solidarity beyond various barriers, including different languages, cultures, and sensibilities?

Finally, looking at the precariat movement in Tokyo and Seoul, I became deeply interested in how autonomous spaces in academic institutions, such as universities, were produced and experienced in each city; how such spaces created specific subjectivities; how they were eliminated by university authorities connected to capital and the state; and finally, how students tried to maintain such spaces in opposition to neoliberal reforms.

7.5. Coda

The precariat movements have been, first and foremost, about collective becoming. Each person participated in the movements not just as a part of an organisation but as “an individual who decides

⁶ For example, Lukianoff and Haidt (2018) discuss the pervasive culture of US university students in which students ask for the school administrators to remove “triggering” material from courses, or disinvite speakers whose ideas the students find offensive. Indeed, during the course of my fieldwork, I happened to be swallowed up by these dynamics in the most corporeal sense. At the end of 2019, I was asked to leave a public film screening organised by activist groups in Tokyo. This was because a participant who had boycotted Nolimit Seoul expressed that she felt unsafe because of my presence as she claimed that I had hosted an event (which was a discussion event) at Nolimit Seoul, an event characterised by “rape culture” (Regarding Nolimit Seoul, see Chapter 3 and 6). Since then, I tried to engage in a dialogue with the Japanese group who hosted the screening but did not succeed. They seem to have a strong conviction that a movement must protect anybody who appeals out of fear or anxiety by creating a “safer space”. The Japanese group also requested that I not join another public event held in Tokyo in 2020, in order to create a safer space for the Korean activist mentioned above. The same pattern of incidents repeatedly occurred in Tokyo during my stay in Tokyo. In sum, the way the group maintained the “safe space” made me unable to engage in a productive exchange of viewpoints or thoughts on what happened. Even sharing the understanding of mutual differences seemed impossible.

to struggle over what and why”, to borrow Kashima’s (Toyama & Kato, 1997, p. 119) words. They created forms of heterogeneous time-space according to what they valued, while trying to form commonalities amongst differences without subordinating singularities to any general, representative identity. Their movements were not for demanding that Others change, but for focusing on increasing their own abilities to practice autonomy collectively. In this regard, the movements resonate with the movement of 1968, which was “a site of experiment in which we could freely try possibilities of how our lives could be, what our bodies could be” (Sakai, 2001, p. 23).

Moreover, they offer concrete examples of new ways of accounting/financing livelihoods by transforming the way in which individuals and collectivities are divided in capitalism. Commons imagined and practiced by the precariat are, above all, things that allow for new ways of living together with Others. Here, “Others” also designates a potential danger. As Butler (2004, p. xii) puts it, “we can be injured, ... others can be injured, ... we are subject to death at the whim of another”. Nevertheless, the precariat pursued neither security nor control. Instead, they accepted a fundamental precariousness and, thus, an “inevitable interdependency” (ibid.)

The urban precariat’s experiments of proliferating values and their vital collective energy have noticeably diminished, while the ideology of self-reliance, the reinforcement of security both in terms of discourse and practice in civil society, and the overwhelming sentiment of anxiety and insecurity as well as the heightened tendency to uphold a moral protocol have grown. Yet, their experiments are still ongoing, attempting to expand the terrains of commons beyond the strengthened segregations of genders, nations, and many other identities in the era of globalised economic, political, and ecological precarisation.

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Appendix 1. List of interviewees

Groups	Identification	Gender	Age	Interview date
Day Labourers	D1	Male	80s	2 November 2018
	D2	Male	80s	3 November 2018
	D3	Male	70s	3 November 2018
	D4	Male	70s	13 September 2018
	D5	Male	70s	13 September 2018
	D6	Male	60s	30 October 2018
	D7	Male	60s	1 November 2018
Activists and volunteers of San'ya Sōgidan	S1	Female	70s	12 September 2018
	S2	Male	60s	29 October 2018
	S3	Male	60s	13 September 2018
	S4	Male	60s	1 October 2018
	S5	Male	60s	15 December 2019
	S6	Male	40s	17 September 2018
	S7	Female	40s	15 September 2018
	S8	Female	30s	12 October 2018
	S9	Male	30s	17 October 2018
	S10	Male	20s	10 September 2018
	S11	Male	20s	14 September 2018
Akino-Arashi	A1	Male	50s	29 September 2019
Dameren	D1	Male	40s	13 October 2018
	D2	Male	40s	12 December 2018
	D3	Male	20s	16 December 2019
Nantoka Network	N1	Female	40s	17 October 2018
	N2	Male	40s	14 December 2018
	N3	Male	40s	19 September 2018
	N4	Male	40s	10 December 2018
	N5	Male	40s	11 December 2018
	N6	Female	30s	9 December 2018
	N7	Male	30s	7 December 2018
	N8	Male	20s	14 December 2018
General Freeter Union	F1	Male	40s	6 December 2018
	F2	Male	30s	5 December 2018
	F3	Female	30s	17 October 2018
	F4	Female	20s	15 October 2018
The urban poor/anti-eviction movement in Seoul in the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s.	P1	Female	70s	12 July 2018
	P2	Female	70s	10 July 2018
	P3	Male	60s	13 July 2018
	P4	Female	60s	2 July 2018
	P5	Male	50s	15 July 2018
	P6	Male	50s	11 July 2018
	P7	Male	40s	11 July 2018

Bin-Zib	B1	Female	40s	8 June 2018
	B2	Female	40s	6 June 2018
	B3	Male	40s	7 June 2018
	B4	Female	30s	11 June 2018
	B5	Female	30s	12 June 2018
	B6	Female	30s	13 June 2018
	B7	Female	30s	7 July 2018
	B8	Male	30s	14 June 2018
	B9	Male	30s	5 June 2018
	B10	Female	20s	4 June 2018
	B11	Female	20s	10 June 2018
	B12	Female	20s	9 June 2018
	B13	Male	20s	4 June 2018
Gongyuji	G1=P2	Female	70s	10 July 2018
	G2=P4	Female	50s	2 July 2018
	G2	Male	40s	3 July 2018
	G3	Male	40s	5 July 2018
	G4	Male	40s	6 July 2018
	G5	Male	40s	14 July 2018
	G6	Female	30s	4 July 2018
	G7	Male	30s	1 July 2018
	G8	Male	30s	8 July 2018
	G9=B8	Male	30s	14 June 2018
	G10	Female	20s	9 July 2018
	G11	Male	20s	7 July 2018
Bin-Go	BG1=B3	Male	40s	7 June 2018
	BG2	Male	40s	11 June 2018
	BG3=B1	Female	40s	8 June 2018
	BG3=B6	Female	30s	13 June 2018
	BG4=B7	Female	30s	7 July 2018
	BG5=B9	Male	30s	5 June 2018
	BG5=B12	Female	20s	9 June 2018
Precariat movement scene in the 2010s/2020s in Seoul	BG6=B=10	Female	20s	4 June 2018
	PR1	Female	40s	7 July 2018
	PR2	Male	40s	20 December 2019
	PR3	Female	30s	4 July 2018
	PR4	Male	30s	16 July 2018
	PR5	Male	30s	16 July 2018
	PR6=G10	Female	20s	9 July 2018
	PR7	Male	20s	9 May 2019

Note: When people were interviewed multiple times, the first interview date is listed in the table.