

**“Overcoming Privatized Housing in South Korea:
Practices and Discourses of Presenting Housing as the Common”**

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This paper examines an urban housing movement called *Bin-Zib* [an empty/ guests' house]. Opposed to the idea of private property associated with housing, residents of *Bin-Zib* have tried to take back the right to the city by turning housing from property into “the common” (Hardt and Negri, 2009). *Bin-Zib*'s experiment over seven years has shown the possibility of creating a “common housing system” in a radically autonomous manner. First, without explicitly stated ideologies, rules or a chain of command, *Bin-Zib* has cultivated what Graeber (2011) calls “baseline communism” (p. 98). Second, while the community cannot avoid confrontations with neoliberal society and conflicts within itself, residents have developed their discourses about housing as the common and expanded the scope of communing gradually through what Osterweil (2013) calls “experimental, reflexive, critical knowledge-practices” (p. 600). Third, residents of *Bin-Zib* not only reclaim housing as a right. They also try to realize the right by turning housing into the common, creating “the relationships we desire immediately, in the world in which we find ourselves actually living” (Day, 2005, p. 12). Last but not least, producing and reproducing the common at *Bin-Zib* has been essentially an issue of creating new relations. Residents have been engaged in the process of subjectivations as being forced to be “between self and an other” (Rancière, 1992) in their everyday life.¹

Introduction

Bin-Zib is a network of collective house in the capital city of South Korea. While each house is named after certain attributes, every house is considered as a *Bin-Zib* [an empty/guests' house]. In other words, *Bin-Zib* refers not only each house but also the whole network of the houses. Although residents started to use the term *Bin maeul* [*Bin* village] after establishing the third house, the term *Bin-Zib* is still used most often to refer to the whole community. Since there are no rules for membership in *Bin-Zib*, people can come and leave any time they want. The residents of each house as well as the number of houses included in the community have been continuously changing. Starting with a rented apartment, more than twenty *Bin-Zibs* have been developed and disbanded over the past seven years. Now the experiment of *Bin-Zib* has grown into a kind of village with approximately 50 people distributed through seven houses with two communal sub-entities, a communal bank and a co-operative café.

This paper investigates *Bin-Zib*, or how people produce and expand “the common” that is “both the form of production and the source of new social relations” (Hardt and Negri, 2009) in the middle of a city. I first introduce the socio-economical background of South Korea in and against which *Bin-Zib* formed and the foundational idea of the community. Then I examine how *Bin-Zib*'s residents have expanded their experiment of communing by promoting a unique

¹ This paper is based on Didi K. Han's MA thesis, “Communicating Communes; A Case Study of Urban

culture of sharing in their everyday life as well as by devising and improvising the communing system. Finally, I focus on how subjectivations take place through the everyday politics of *Bin-Zib*, and discuss its significance, which distinguishes *Bin-Zib* from public or commercialized co-housing projects.

Forming a House as Space of Communism in a Neoliberal City

With a population of twenty-five million, the greater metropolitan area surrounding Seoul is home to fifty percent of the entire population of the country.² According to the Seoul City Government (2013), more than 120,000 people in Seoul live in insecure and inadequate housing arrangements as they are unable to afford the rent required for standard housing. This situation is mainly a result of the fact that home ownership is primarily a means of investment rather than a place of residence in Korea.

The project of urbanization in the country was first brought about by the military dictatorship in the 1960s. The military government “provided various incentives for export industries” under an aggressive policy of export growth (Ihm, 1988). While the influx of migrant rural populations supplied cheap labour force, creating expansive shantytowns in Seoul,³ the *chaebol* driven economy “gave birth to two monsters of South Korean society, namely the astronomical price of land and the consumer price index”, according to an economist Jeong-u Yi (2011).⁴ Backed up by the government, *chaebols* had raised funds using land as a guarantee for their loans, meaning that the Korean economy “was risk-free economy as long as land price was secured” (Pak and Jho, 2002). Analyzing how land speculation was connected with the collusive links between business and politics in South Korean society, J. Yi argues, “the miraculous and acclaimed economic growth during the dictatorship period was actually the very hotbed of a bubble economy”.⁵

This real estate speculation continued in the 1980s, fuelled by a redevelopment project known as the Joint Redevelopment Program (hereafter JRP). Introduced by the South Korean government in 1984, the JRP essentially allowed private developers to lead urban

Communing Movement in South Korea” (Simon Fraser University, forthcoming).

² The capital region of South Korea consists of Seoul city, Incheon city and Kyunggi do.

³ According to Dong-gi Kwak (2010, September 20), the city’s population grew from 3,250,000 in 1963 to more than ten million in 1998.

⁴ *Chaebol* refers a family-controlled large conglomerate in South Korea. The South Korean economy was led by a handful of large *chaebol*’s during this economic period, including Samsung, Hyundai, SK and others.

⁵ According to Junman Kang (2006), from 1974 to 1987 on average businesses that invested in land gained 1,004 percent profits, while businesses that invested in production gained 331 percent of profits. Conglomerates tended to invest in land rather than production. “It was like cheating in gambling”, says Seokgi Kim, a researcher of the *chaebol*. “Once the government made a plan for building infrastructure such as highways, the price went up more than tenfold overnight” (cited in J. Yi, 2011).

redevelopment.⁶ While large-scale apartment projects provided housing to the emerging middle class, the bulldozing of the slums that made this construction possible exposed the brutal realities of South Korea society. With demolition and redevelopment as its main methods, the project privatized most state-owned land. By doing so, according to Hyun Bang Shin (2009), the JRP provided “material conditions for implementing property-based redevelopment”, closing the rent gap between dilapidated neighborhoods and other areas (p. 916). In this way, as far as development of the city was concerned, working class and proletarian neighborhoods were eliminated, providing modern housing for an emerging middle class population.

Neoliberalism then has taken root in South Korea in the years following the IMF-mandated restructuring of South Korean economy in 1997.⁷ As Sangyeong Lee (2011) put it, “the view of real estate has been changed from a tangible asset to a financial asset since the IMF foreign-currency crisis at the end of the 1990s”. What followed was a phase that can be described as one of re-gentrification. If apartment buildings in the 1980s were typically built on razed shantytowns, providing desirable middle-class modern housing for the protagonist of the Fordist economy, the massive re-gentrification project of the 1990s and 2000s that constructed more luxurious apartment buildings were more bluntly concerned with whether these dwellings could become assets for further investment (C. Byun, 2009; I. Hong, 2009).⁸ International capital received the baton of domestic capitalist development, catalyzing the process of the financialization of land and housing, and pushing forward the full-scale neoliberal urbanism Seoul is marked by today. According to Nakgu Sohn (2008), the author of *The Real Estate Class Society*, from 1963 to 2007 land prices in Seoul rose by a factor of 1176, while the rate of inflation rose by a factor of 43, and the average worker’s income increased only by a factor of 15 (p. 25). A house became the most luxurious financial commodity both in name and practice in the city. Without doubt, this process has entailed the “dispossession of the urban masses of any right to the city” (Harvey, 2012, p. 22).

⁶ H. Shin (2009) characterizes JRP as a process of gentrification, in which “external property-based interests have played a significant role” (p. 907). The project transformed “low-rise substandard neighborhoods into high-rise commercial housing estates, built to the maximum density permitted by planning regulation” (p. 906). As a large share of JRP land slated for redevelopment was state-owned, “dwelling-owners without *de jure* property-ownership were required to purchase land title as a mandate”. Having neither property titles nor the ability to purchase the land title, around 80 percent of dwellers was evicted from their homes during this time (p. 908-916).

⁷ In everyday speech of Koreans, the acronym “IMF” primarily indexes the traumatic period of late 1990s rather than the world financial organization itself.

⁸ According to Seokman Hong (2009), between 1999 and 2009 the contribution made by real estate development to South Korea’s GNP was 19.2%, the highest of any OECD country (p. 15). This reality was mainly due to the “Project-Financing (PF)” policy adopted in South Korea in 2000. This policy enabled financial institutions to participate more directly in the process of redevelopment, issuing various derivative securities.

It was against this backdrop that three former student activists in their early thirties started a communal living experiment in 2008 with a rented three-bedroom apartment. They collected 40,000,000 *won* (approximately € 33,000) out of their pockets and took out a loan for the remaining 80,000,000 *won* (€ 66,000) to raise 120,000,000 *won* (€ 99,000) to rent the place based on *jeonse* contract. Then, the founders proclaimed that the house had no owner. All residents including initiators themselves, regardless of their length of stay, were regarded as ‘guests’.

Jeonse is a rental contract, which is unique in South Korea. A tenant rent a house for a year or two, making a lump sum deposit of key money, which is typically from 40% to 70% of the property value (J. Kim, 2013, p. 338). While the tenant does not pay any monthly rent, the key money deposit is fully returned to the tenant when she moves out. Conventionally, the deposited key money has been calculated at 12% interest per year in lieu of a monthly payment.⁹ Tenants favor this system over other rental systems, but the one who gets the biggest profit from the *jeonse* system are landlords. As the financial suppression controls interest rate in favor of the industrial sector, “housing has been regarded as a superior investment compared to financial savings” (J. Kim, 2013, p. 339).¹⁰ While the key money is “usually invested by landlords in formal and informal financial market... the tenants relinquish the opportunity to make any interest on the income” (H. Shin, 2008, p. 413). And, living conditions for those who did not have key money were extremely degraded.

In this context, residents of *Bin-Zib* intended to communize the key money and, by doing so, turn a house, certainly the most valued form of property in a city, into the common resources.

Bin-Zib is a guests’ house. Like a ‘guest house’, it’s a place you can come by, eat, drink, hang out, rest and sleep in. Unlike a ‘guest house’, there is no *juin* [owner/hosts] who will serve you.¹¹ Alternately, we would say, there are lots of *juins* in this house of guests. All of the people who passed through, the people who are here at present, and the people who will come in the future are the *juins*. You are also one of the *juins*. So, help yourself and enjoy the place as much as you like. (...) This guests’ house is an empty place. Since it is empty, anyone can come anytime. Regardless how many people live here, *Bin-Zib* should have room for the others to come. Therefore, living in *Bin-Zib* means to expand it. The house can be filled with anything. Even the name of the place

⁹ For example, a €200,000 of full *jeonse* can be transferred into a €100,000 *jeonse* and €1,000 monthly rent.

¹⁰ D. Kwak (2012, September 20) points out, “While the people who do not have houses deposit their key money that they collect laboriously, house owners invest the key money into real estate market and get an enormous amount of profit”.

¹¹ In Korean, the word *juin* not only refers to the owner of something but also to the host of a certain place. In many posts or articles written by *Bin-Zib* residents, they used the word in a paradoxical way. In English, *juin* can be translated in the one of two meanings in a given context.

is *Bin* [empty]. You can give a name to this place as you want. It's so nice of you to come. (Bin-Zib, 2008)¹²

Three more *Bin-Zib*'s were set up within a year in the same manner. People contributed as much money as they could or wanted in order to rent new houses, and lived in *Bin-Zib* together, paying the same *bundamgeum* [shared expenses] equally, regardless of how much or whether they had contributed to funding the initial deposit for the house.¹³ Of course the declaration that “*Bin-Zib* has no owner” was neither binding nor effective in the legal sense. However, based on the above-cited declaration, residents of *Bin-Zib* have formed a culture that reminds us of the Marx’s famous description of communism, “from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs” (Marx, 1875).

Bin-Zib residents have endeavored to recover communistic relations and expand them by living together with others. In doing so, the founders of *Bin-Zib* have sought in particular to create a different meaning for housing. In an article introducing the idea of *Bin-Zib*, Jium one of founders wrote that, “a house seems like the most valuable property for a person in the capitalist society, but a house is a space of sharing in its *ab initio* meaning” (Jium, 2010).

Family members connected by blood do not quibble over the ownership of stuffs in their house. Regardless of the legal ownership, all members call the place ‘my house’. Even when a member puts more money into buying or renting the place, they would not require that others pay them back. While each member owns specific things, they would let other members use them when they need it. These facts reveal the intrinsic characteristic of a house and its very reason for existence. It is the space of sharing (Jium, 2010).

In this article Jium posited the notion of house as a place where people share things without calculation. However, he argued that “this relationship of sharing has been destroyed in capitalist society” because people began to consider homes as property rather than a space for living (Jium, 2010). Pointing out how this perception has even destroyed families in the society, he suggested that, “we can change the negative reality by acting conversely”. He asserted that “[b]y sharing a house, we can live with anyone and become-family even we have just met each other” (Jium, 2010).¹⁴ What Jium called “becoming-family” can be understood as “making

¹² This is from a short guide on *Bin-Zib*'s website.

¹³ *Bundamgeum* means “shared expenses”. Residents of *Bin-Zib* have paid the same amount of *bundamgeum* for the monthly interest of the loan, utility bills, basic foods and daily necessities. In 2008, the amount of *bundamgeum* was “more than 2000 *won* [€1.6] per a day”. Now it is around 4-5000 *won* [€3-4]. It is a very small amount of money even compared to dosshouse accommodations for the extreme poor in Seoul. Jium (2013) writes how it was possible for them to live relatively well in a decent residential environment with such a small amount of money. It is “because *Bin-Zib* was not a commercial accommodation for profit, but one where residents share key money and resources”.

¹⁴ In the article, Jium coins the term “becoming-family”, presumably being partly inspired by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s discussion of “becoming”. From 90s, student activists who were critical of

communistic relations” in David Graeber (2010)’s sense.¹⁵ With the aim of expanding communistic relations, residents of *Bin-Zib* have attempted to turn a house into a freely available and collectively administered resource.

Examining *Bin-Zib* and how its residents have expanded the communistic relations, two things should be noted. First, while the idea of *Bin-Zib* emphasizes communistic relations, *Bin-Zib*, as a house, faces inevitable spatial limitations. The community professed, “[r]egardless how many people live here, *Bin-Zib* should have room for the others to come”, but it is physically impossible to allow an unlimited number of people to stay there. Then, in practice, how do *Bin-Zib* people make the original idea of *Bin-Zib* [an empty/ guests house] available for newcomers? The answer appears to be multiplication of houses and the residents’ engagement in that process. In other words, the name of the community requires one to become engaged in the movement for *expanding communism* of the house.

On the other hand, by calling every resident in *Bin-Zib* a ‘guest’, the community has pursued a spirit of egalitarianism and strived to preserve openness to heterogeneity.¹⁶ Not only letting people in without common ground, residents also have tried to avoid setting any totalizing rule. For example, while all residents reside at *Bin-Zib*, courtesy of the co-funded money (now through the communal bank *Bin-Go*), the practice of co-funding (or joining *Bin-Go*) is up to each resident’s inclination. In other words, there is no guarantee that a new guest of *Bin-Zib* will enter into a communistic relation, no matter how much effort existing members put. What if there is someone who enjoys all the things she is offered but gives nothing back?

In *Bin-Zib* any kind of resources has never been given beforehand. Not only money or houses, but also works and affections, the resources of *Bin-Zib* have been offered by residents to

the traditions of labour activism in South Korea read Deleuze and Guattari and utilized their theory. The term “becoming” refers to “the very dynamism of change, situated between heterogeneous terms and tending towards no particular goal or end-state” (Parr, 2010, p. 26). By describing it as “becoming-family”, Jium tries to deconstruct the conventional meaning of family based on blood ties and to create new relationships through living with others. This term “becoming” was used regularly in the community, often combined with other words such as “guest” and “host”.

¹⁵ Defining communism, I particularly draw on David Graeber (2010)’s discussion. According to Graeber (2010) there have always been three different moral principles at the basis of human economies; exchange, hierarchy, and communism. Exchange is what people do in a market based on the premise of equivalence. Exchange requires two equal sides so that a back-and-forth process can be achieved. Each side tries to get the most they can out of the process. Meanwhile, relations of hierarchy do not operate through reciprocity but according to the logic of precedent. When each side of the exchange belongs to different classes, the things given by each side are not only different but also incommensurable (p. 12). Communism, on the other hand, is constituted out of a set of relations in which people do not calculate gains and losses but help and collaborate with one another. Arguing that communism is neither state control of the economy nor a utopian dream, he defines it as “human relationship that operates on the principle of from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs” (p. 4).

¹⁶ This manner sets it apart from the majority of social movements in South Korean society, oriented toward the seizure of hegemony preserving the unity and identity.

be shared with others. Beyond a question, the practice of multiplying *Bin-Zib* has required residents to put in considerable time and effort as well as a considerable portion of their collective funds. But, the residents of *Bin-Zib* have expanded their scope of communing, gradually for the last seven years while establishing new *Bin-Zibs*. It might be said that residents have expanded their ability of being together while producing themselves as the common through the collective living.

Devising and Improvising Strategic Practices and Discourses

Bin-Zib's history has been a process of trial and error. The community has changed through solving specific problems residents have encountered, and the ways of solving problems were, in many cases, spontaneous. At the same time, the experiment has always been guided by a will or a hope for living in differently than the ways that are prescribed under the highly conformist yet neoliberal social norms of South Korea. They possessed a desire that has vaguely guided this spontaneous experiment. Whenever residents have confronted specific difficulties, they have strived to devise and improvise the system through which they could overcome the issues while engaging more people in the process of urban communing.

The first communing system the residents devised was *Bin-Zib* [an empty/guest house] itself. The founders of *Bin-Zib* reclaimed the right to the city and turned private property into the common simply by opening their living place to others. But how many people could reside in a three-bedroom apartment? When residents confronted the obvious physical limitations of their experiment, they endeavored to overcome the dominant notions of housing and family. In practice, these contemplations were reflected in the special structure of the first *Bin-Zib*, where there was no private room but common guests' rooms, and all the rooms were used in multiple ways.

As the number of residents increased, so did the number of *Bin-Zibs*. People who could and wanted to co-fund the key money rented a place and invited others to live together. Under the circumstances, however, each *Bin-Zib* depended on a few people who co-funded a relatively large amount of key money. *Bin-Zib* residents hoped to solve this situation by establishing a collective fund/bank. After over a year of extensive discussion, in 2010, they set up the collective fund/bank *Bin-Go*, through which everyone holds the same rights regardless of the amount of funding they are able to contribute.¹⁷

¹⁷ The basic system of *Bin-Go* functioned in the following way: *Bin-Go* got funds from individuals, no matter whether they lived in *Bin-Zib* or not, and granted a loan to each *Bin-Zib* that needed key money for space. Communities could get a loan from *Bin-Go* (with a 6% interest rate) to open a *Bin-Zib*. Since the key money generated 12% interest, the communities shared 6% interest with *Bin-Go*. The surplus is distributed in three ways. First, a person who put her money in *Bin-Go* got a 3% of "shares for co-funds" in her account—the same rate as that given by the major banks. Second, a portion of the surplus was

Having put significant collective effort into setting up *Bin-Go*, residents also tried to find an alternative way to deal with capital. For example, the article “*Bin-Zib* and Anti-Capitalism (*Bin-Zib*, 2010)” paid attention to the meaning of *jeonse* [key money] in the South Korean real estate rental contract. Residents argued that key money functioned as capital when houses were a means of investment.

Even though a person doesn't have any desire to generate profit or any idea they are participating in an investment, what she is doing is investment in the real estate market. By renting houses with her key money, she is making money into capital and getting profit from that. In so doing, she becomes a participant in the movement of capital in the capitalist system without recognizing what she is doing. (*Bin-Zib*, 2010)

Based on this awareness, *Bin-Go* suggested that the way of excluding capital was by sharing the profit with others.

If a person shares the 12% profit generated from her key money with all people in the world, the profit will become infinitely closer to zero. The praxis will turn key money from the capital into the common. *Bin-Go* aims to share each member's profit with people in the world by multiplying *Bin-Zib*. (...) All profits will be used for expanding the common and networking different flows of money. Investors cannot get any interest from their co-fund, at least in money-form, but it can be said that our interest from the investment/praxis will be the common and friends. (*Bin-Go*, 2013)

From this perspective, the purpose of investment in *Bin-Go* was resistance to the capitalist system. In other words, if a person invests her money in *Bin-Go*, she does it not to generate profit, but in order to contribute to the composition of the common. Her investment becomes a form of practice to eliminate capital by sharing the profit generated from that capital with others.

Members of *Bin-Go* widened the sphere of sharing in 2013 by raising the interest rate from 6% to 12% for using a *Bin-Go* loan as *jeonse* [key money] for renting space. By doing so, each community using *Bin-Go* gave up any interest generated by the *jeonse*, thereby sharing it with others.¹⁸ Members also turned *Bin-Go* into the “communal bank as a networked body of the funds of communities” through which all members share all the profits generated from key money with other communities beyond *Bin-Zib*.

collected for maintenance and expansion of the common, as “*Bin-Zib* collected money”. The final portion of the surplus was allocated to a “shares for the earth” through which members supported various social movements (*Bin-Go*, 2011).

¹⁸ On the other hand, *Bin-Go* re-adjusted its method of distribution. Besides “shares for co-funds”, “*Bin-Zib* collected money” and “shares for the earth”, the members set up a new “fund for communities”. Those four funds each take 3% out of the 12% surplus money (*Bin-Go*, 2013).

I would like to note two things regarding the way *Bin-Zib* has expanded its experiment over the years. First, practices and systems were devised and improvised along with new discourses and languages. *Bin-Zib* residents have tried to analyze their own situations reflexively to deal with problems while at the same time striving to produce strategic discourse. Collective studies thus have been a significant part of community life, and the themes of these inquiries have reflected what they have been trying to deal with at the time. Trying out what they read in their studies, applying a spirit of *bricolage* in a constant process of trial and error, residents produced and published articles, both individually and collectively, on the *Bin-Zib* website, personal blogs, or alternative media, through what Osterweil (2013) calls “experimental, reflexive, critical knowledge-practices” (p. 600).

Second, while *Bin-Zib* residents have tried to devise and improvise a system of communing, they do not attempt to establish a totalizing system. On the contrary, they have tried to inscribe an aspect of contingency as well as an irreducible surplus in the system. For example, when residents discussed the question of how to issue an alternative currency in the community to valorize communal works and activities, their biggest concern was “how to deal with the danger of reciprocity” (Anonymous, 2009, March 23). This concern has also been reflected in the way participants have treated money or communal work in their community life. Instead of making a clear rule, they have tried to rely on spontaneity and voluntary motivation as much as possible.¹⁹ Even when residents established the rule of *bundamgeum* [shared expenses], which looks most normal from the standpoint of reciprocity, residents inserted a certain ambiguity in it, by stipulating it as “more than” 2000 *won* (€1.6). They have also tried to insert some contingent, or game-like elements whenever the community encountered serious difficulties or were faced with big decisions. By inserting ambiguity, they tried to prevent the community from reverting to relations based on the capitalist logics of reciprocity or hierarchy caused by each resident’s different contribution.

In this context, it is crucial to note that the name of the community “*Bin-Zib* [an empty/guests’ house]” was itself a system that residents devised.²⁰ The first guests of the

¹⁹ Recently, Sin Yang Kim (2014), who has researched cooperative and social economy, published a research on *Bin-Go* as a chapter of the book titled “Case studies on various types of social enterprise”. Examining *Bin-Go* as an example of “social enterprise for alternative economy”, she pays attention to the fact that “*Bin-Go* has no official articles of association, maintaining a flexible structure in which everything can be decided through discussion”.

²⁰ I believe that Foucauldian notion *dispositif* might be a very useful concept through which to explain what I call system. The notion of a *dispositif* refers to a “thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble” as well as “the system of relations between” elements such as “discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions” (Foucault, 1977, p. 194). Foucault uses this term to capture the strategic relations between power and subjects in a given historical moment. The *dispositif* is essentially strategic as it is “a set of strategies of the relations of forces supporting, and supported by, certain types of

community who came to the house warming party chose the name through a contest. The name reflected their hopes of a communal experiment grounded on unconditional openness and absolute hospitality.

It was not that the name had any power that prevented the community from becoming a closed community, or residents from having hierarchical relations. On the contrary, as the community grew, more people wanted to develop a screening system for newcomers because the openness of the community caused increasingly complicated problems. Also, many residents wanted forms of mutual aid to circulate exclusively or predominantly among those who actually were living at *Bin-Zib*, and aimed to set up an official qualification on standard for using the collected fund of *Bin-Zib*. In such circumstances the name *Bin-Zib* became a potential obstacle or an irreducible surplus that limited those who wanted to keep the community closed off from the exterior. Although it is impossible to fully actualize the idea of *Bin-Zib*, the name has functioned as a regulative idea, repelling desires of reciprocity and hierarchy.

In one article, Jium attempted to theorize *Bin-Zib*, by employing the concept of “association” proposed by the Japanese critic Kojin Karatani (2007). The concept of association is described as a regulative topos, which sublates existing “exchanges”.²¹ It is based on the principle of mutual aid but open to difference (unlike the closed community, the family, and the nation), egalitarian yet not organized by bureaucracy (unlike the state), freedom but not free-for-all competition (unlike capitalism).

Bin-Zib looks like a community but residents of *Bin-Zib* are constantly changing due to its complete openness and lack of rules for membership. It also can be seen as a co-housing space. Yet the way *Bin-Zib* residents share money and work distinguishes it from other public co-housing projects. One can see it as accommodation for extremely poor people, but *Bin-Zib* residents are independent and enjoy the richness of life. (...) Recently we laid out the characteristics of *Bin-Zib*, using the Karatani’s concept of association. *Bin-Zib* is a practice that sublates the three exchanges of 1) family/nation, 2) state/welfare system, and 3) capital/commercial housing. Depending on each house and their members at each time period, one of the three characteristics appears more

knowledge” (Foucault, 1977, p. 196). Interpreting *Bin-Zib* through the lens of the *dispositif* might be an interesting topic to pursue in the future, but is beyond the scope of this project.

²¹ While Graeber uses the term “exchange” to refer reciprocal economy, Karatani (2014) uses the term in a broader sense. According to Karatani, there have been three types of exchange in human history, always actualized as a mixed form under one dominant form amongst these three exchanges in a society. The first form of the exchange is mutual aid, which corresponds with closed communities such as a family, community, and nation (as an imagined community). Robbery and redistribution is another form of exchange that corresponds with the state. The third type indicates reciprocal/monetary exchange, which is the exchange form of capitalism. Association is suggested as a regulative idea, which is a different from a political blue print. Karatani (2003) argues that “[i]n Marx’s idea, association has something like the transcendental apperception X-that which should not be considered as a substantial center, like state or party” (p. 180) By considering association as not a constitutive idea but a regulative idea, the practice of association becomes endless process of seeking ethical-political position rather than a teleological program.

prominently. However, if *Bin-Zib* takes on any particular form and gets stuck in it, it will not be *Bin-Zib* anymore. All in all, we call *Bin-Zib* spaces where not only all three exchanges co-exist, but also where practices for transgressing those three types of exchanges happen. (Jium, 2013)

As Jium theorizes, *Bin-Zib* has been oscillating between a closed community for the poor, a bureaucratic welfare system and a form of cheap accommodation, and in reality it contains characteristics of all three. At the same time, the idea of *Bin-Zib* has also prevented the community from having a fixed identity. While the name has created a dynamic space where different moral economies and sensibilities collide against each other, residents could not help but constantly reconsider the meaning of *Bin-Zib*, being engaged in the process of subjectivations.

Subjectivations through Everyday Politics of (Re)forming the Community

As noted, the very sources and products of communing at *Bin-Zib* have been residents and their social relations itself. If subjectivations do not take place, *Bin-Zib* cannot be sustained. Newcomers should be engaged in communistic relations to reproduce *Bin-Zib* as an empty/guests' house. However, how has the community engaged new comers to the practice of communing with neither forcing rules nor ideologies? How do such processes of subjectivations take place in *Bin-Zib*? Through a four months' field research as well as an archival study on their digital sphere, I found that the answer lay in conflict as well as convivial socialization.

Before 2010, many of residents and visitors of *Bin-Zib* were activists or *de facto* activists.²² They not only attempted to form “a life that is independent of capitalism” (Personal conversation with Jay, 29 November 2014, online chatting), but also paid the greatest care to avoid any kind of hierarchy. This attitude formed a unique atmosphere in *Arae-Zib* (the first *Bin-Zib*) making the space Temporary Autonomous Zone (TAZ), described by Day (2005) as “a place where the revolution *has actually happened*, if only for a few, if only for a short time” (p. 163). While residents clearly sought to escape from the consumer and worker lifestyle imposed by capitalist society, they simply started to live in a way they wanted to live instead of pursuing a sweeping change in the society.²³

²² Many of them happened to know the community through the blog sphere, which was used by leftists, or independent media, which had relatively progressive viewpoints. These limited channels functioned as pathways through which people reached *Bin-Zib*.

²³ Residents produced food and daily necessities by themselves as much as possible, trying to turn work into a form of play. From shooting documentary film to broadcasting community radio, residents sought to be producers of cultural activities rather than remaining consumers. Most importantly, they cultivated a unique culture of sharing in their everyday life. In other words, they tried to “establish or enhance their ability to determine the conditions of *their own* existence, while allowing and encouraging others to do the same” (Day, 2005, p. 14).

However, in the process of not only being recognized by others, but also actively opening itself up to others, *Bin-Zib* could not help but become a fundamentally contentious space. The idea of *Bin-Zib* has forced its residents to occupy an ethical position where they accept newcomers on the same ontological status, i.e., guests. This made the community as paradoxical space where different ethics and sensibilities on how to share/exchange space, labour, and resources collided against each other. (See the table 1.) Conflicts inevitably arose not between different interests but between what Rancière (2004) calls the different “partitions of the sensible”.²⁴ Being exposed in the sharp gap of the sensibles, one is compelled to be in the process of subjectivation; becoming other than herself, constantly putting herself in a position of being in between.²⁵

Subjectivations first take place in a house. While not every resident voluntarily becomes part of community life, all residents cannot help but face confrontations and conflicts because they share a house with a variety of people instead of living by themselves or with their own family or close friends. They encounter a gap between different perceptions of how to share/exchange space, labour, and ideas in her immediate surroundings. Being forced to see what they could not see before in the position of in between guest and host, residents cannot help but embody a certain form of openness, and reshape their personal boundaries through interactions and collisions with other bodies.

²⁴ Rancière’s notion “partage du sensible” is translated as “distribution/ division/ partition of the sensible/ perceptible”. However, in French, ‘partage’ not only means ‘distribution’ or ‘division’ but also ‘sharing’, and Rancière emphasizes the “double sense of the term: as community and as separation”. saying “[i]t is the relationship between these that defines a distribution of the sensible” (1999, p. 26). Considering that “partage du sensible” is what forms the commonality of a community in Rancière discussion, the double meaning of the word is crucial. I thus use the word “partition” which is most similar in the double meaning of the original language.

²⁵ Chambers (2013) points out that the difficulty and confusion over translation of the concept of "subjectivation". Although it has been variously translated as subjectification, subjectivization, and subjectivation, following Chambers' suggestion, I will use the word "subjectivation" to denote the transformation the people at *Bin-Zib* experience in their subjectivity. It is particularly to make a distinction from the Foucault’s notion ‘subjectification which is ‘*assujettissement*’ in French. As scholars point out, subejectification emphasizes the “stratified or captured position” while subjectivation implies “subjective operations which, although operating within social machines, use the processes of these social machines to form lines of escape from them” (Murphie, 2001, p. 1315). According to Milchman and Rosenberg (2007), “[w]hile *assujettissement* pertains to how one is produced as a subject through the exercise of power/knowledge... *subjectivation* pertains to the relation of the individual him/herself; to multiple ways in which a self can be constructed on the basis of what one takes to be the truth (as cited in Chambers, 2013, p. 99). On the other hand, Hamann (2009) suggests that “subjectivation can take either the form of self-objectification in accord with processes of subjectification or it can take the form of a subjectivation of a true discourse produced through practices of freedom in resistance to prevailing apparatuses of power/knowledge” (p. 39).

Table 1. The main conflicts and issues in *Bin-Zib*²⁶

Conflicting Values Category of the Common	Moral base for sharing physical resources (Communism; hierarchy; capitalism)	How to communicate ideas (Egalitarianism; Authoritarianism)	Openness (Open community; Closed community)
Money	-How to share money? -How to create different flows of money? -How to earn money by autonomous activities?	-How to set fiscal principles? -Should all residents join <i>Bin-Go</i> ? -How to encourage residents to join the sharing culture of <i>Bin-Zib</i> ?	-To what extent should <i>Bin-Zib</i> share its monetary resources?
Activities	-How to share house chores? -Who should do the common work for the community? -How to valorize the community works?	-How to share house chores without instituting authoritarian rules? -Are residents obliged to join community activities? -How to promote autonomous activities?	-Is any qualification needed for accepting new residents?
Space	-How to make room for new comers? -Do long-term residents have a right to occupy space without making a space for new comers?	-How to establish rights or ethics, around space? -How to negotiate between different desires over using space? -How to deal with the problems that arise with old residents' privileges?	-How to negotiate between different desires regarding making boundaries of the community?
What is <i>Bin-Zib</i> , as a core question	-What is the role of juin [owner/host] in <i>Bin-Zib</i> ? What is the role of guests in <i>Bin-Zib</i> ? -What is the meaning of <i>Bin-Zib</i> ? Should it be open to new members?		

Subjectivations also happen at the edge of *Bin-Zib*, placing residents in the sharp gap between two different ways of (ac)counting part of the community. The idea of *Bin-Zib* includes not only the future guests of the community, but also those who cultivate alternative communities wherever they are. Facing not only future but also outside of the community, residents have been compelled to ask questions such as: “What is *Bin-Zib*?”; “To what level should we share the accumulated resource of *Bin-Zib* and *Bin-Go* with others?” While some residents believe unconditionally that “*Bin-Go* was set up in order to help the expansion of the common” (personal conversation with Salgu, 22 December 2013, Haksuk), others consider *Bin-Zib* as a bounded community, if not a cheap accommodation. For those who see *Bin-Zib* as a bounded community, there is not any good reason to share the accumulated resources with other communities or even new comers. Inevitable tensions have accumulated between these positions and often spilled over into open and extended conflicts. Although these conflicts have

²⁶ All these issues lie in the everyday life in *Bin-Zib*. The intensity of tensions might vary in terms of existing residents' characteristics and given circumstances. However, when existing houses become too congested to receive newcomers, residents cannot help but confront the strain on the matter of if and how they establish a new *Bin-Zib*.

posed a serious challenge to the community, they also have fostered constant and ever imperfect process of subjectivations by locating residents in between two different worlds.²⁷

Equally significant have been frequent parties and collective events. Shared conviviality and pleasure have been what feature the significant part of the community life, promoting what Graeber (2011) calls “baseline communism” (p. 98).²⁸ For example, making food and sharing it has been an essential part of community life. While basic food was bought with communal money, there were almost always “more than” the basic ingredients brought by some people to share with all. Although there might be individual differences, new residents sooner or later get used to the atmosphere, occasionally taking on the role of host. These convivial occasions have also played a significant role in overcoming the moments of crisis that arose in the community. When conflicts persisted and in some cases plagued the entire community to the extent that meetings stopped taking place, residents would slowly turn away from the difficulties and hold events dedicated purely to conviviality (i.e. drinking parties) to remind themselves of the expanding potentials of shared life. These cycles of shifting sensibilities, moving between collision and fusion, have taken place throughout the history of *Bin-Zib*.

In addition, what has held sway more often than not has been the recurring awareness and reflection that previous residents’ generosity has made *Bin-Zib* available to the conflicted residents in the first place. A meeting transcript reveals one resident posing a poignant question: “Are you pleased with what you received? If so, why don’t we do the same thing to strangers? We do not want the flow of gift to be stopped by us” (Jigak, 2009, October 5). As many of them originally had this experience of being accepted by the community, as guests, this is a life condition rather than any sort of shared ideology that continuously pushed residents to keep opening the community to others, changing one’s way of life.

While the idea of *Bin-Zib* forced to the residents to act, what should be noted is the fact that *Bin-Zib* is a place for living. In other words, no matter how serious some of the issues are, the everyday lives of the residents take priority. Sometimes issues are neglected for a long period, until someone raises them again. In any case, sooner or later residents encounter a certain issue again and are forced to reflect on it. Regarding this paradoxical situation, a former resident, Dion, made an astute observation. She wrote on a web post:

²⁷ As Graeber (2011) points out, communistic relations are based on “a presumption of eternity. Society will always exist” (p. 100). That is why people make communistic relationships with only close friends and family members. While *Bin-Zib* pursues to expand communism amongst strangers, there is no guarantee that “society will always exist” and “others would do the same for you”.

²⁸ Regarding this, I agree with Graeber’s (2010) discussion of “a communism of the senses”. He suggests that, “[t]his shared conviviality could be seen as a kind of communistic base, on which everything else is built. Sharing is not just about morality—it’s also about pleasure. Solitary pleasures will always exist, but the most pleasurable activities usually involve sharing something: music, food, drugs, gossip, drama, beds. There is a communism of the senses at the root of most things we consider fun” (p. 7).

I heard a *Bin-Zib* person saying, living at the pace of movement is too fast while acting at the speed of life is too slow (...) I thought that maybe we are inventing a different trajectory or a totally new kind of speed, in all of these ambiguous and wearying moments. A peculiar speed created by the fact that we cannot divide acting and living any more. (Dion, 2010, May 8)

As the community is open to others, residents of *Bin-Zib* struggle to constantly re-make new political compositions in relations with newcomers in their everyday life. For example, whatever consensus existing residents have reached, it might become subject to dispute when newcomers arrive. In this light, the issue of *Bin-Zib* is not how to govern a given community but how to (re)configure common space “between self and an other” (Rancière, 1992). As not only a space between self and other, but also as a space between acting and living, *Bin-Zib* is political. Residents happen to be engaged in the process of forming a new community as well as creating a new speed of living/acting in their everyday life.

Creating Communes in and against State and Capital

Currently, *Bin-Go* with a net asset of \$240,000, collected from more than two hundred members, supports seven *Bin-Zibs* with approximately 50 residents, the co-op café, and five other communities outside of Seoul with similar orientations toward sharing a house as the common. The members of *Bin-Go* also have developed informal yet vibrant relationships with members of other co-housing communities, holding public lectures or other communal events together. Thus, not only has *Bin-Zib* been able to thrive in the neighborhood, they have also expanded to include networks with communities and movements in other cities and regions without the centralizing effects of an overt political ideology, program or bureaucratic structure.

When we think of the enormous power of capital and state, what *Bin-Zib* has done might seem feeble. What if the area of *Haebangchon* gets involved in the vortex of gentrification? Can *Bin-Zib* still sustain a community in the area? Does *Bin-Go* make any real difference when they still pay rent to the owner of the houses? In what sense does the whole experiment find its meaning as a movement of forming a different life within and against the state and capital?

Around 2012 the Seoul City government took notice of *Bin-Zib* as they explored the public co-housing model as a way to solve the serious housing problem in the city. This situation paradoxically points to the fact that *Bin-Zib* was in some sense taking on the functions of the welfare system or even innovating new forms of neoliberal welfare system.²⁹ On the

²⁹ E. Park (2012) argues that *Bin-Zib* is “an autonomous housing experience which supplements the lack of welfare” (p. 115).

other hand, capital tried to capture *Bin-Zib* as a new business model, particularly targeting youth in the society. “The social enterprise *Woozoo*”, one of the leading commercialized “social housing” companies is a case in point. Subsidized by the government as “a social enterprise”, it rents places based on *joense* [key money] contract and remodels the places with various concepts such as “a house for baseball fans” or “a house of future finance specialists”.³⁰

To be sure, we need to recognize that these dangers are real. On the one hand, the economy of reciprocal exchange and the affects of a closed community may resurface within *Bin-Zib*. *Bin-Zib* also has tried to find its own place in relation to the society, while the mainstream discourse of “*Maeul Mandeulgi* [Village Community Development]” is turning out to be another excuse for maintaining the capitalist status quo.³¹ However, when we compare these newly formed communities by capital and the state with *Bin-Zib*, there are several glaring differences in how residents arrange their communal life.

First of all, the state could not capture *Bin-Zib* as it failed to understand how *Bin-Zib* has been run. When the Seoul City government visited *Bin-Zib* and another autonomous co-housing project *Sohaengju* (formed in *Sungmisan* village) to gather information,³² the government chose *Sohaengju* as the model for public co-housing. Basically, *Sohaengju* was run based on a clear logic of reciprocity, private property, and division of labour. Each family paid according to the private area they lived in. Also, there was a clear line between private and public space in *Sohaengju*. While each family kept their private space, residents hired professional housekeepers to manage the public space “because each resident has different

³⁰ When I read articles about the company whose name is coincidentally same to the official name of *Bin-Go*, I cannot help but suspect the company referred to what *Bin-Zib* has done in many ways, although they have said their business was referring the Japanese co-housing model. While convincing investors “that the investment is secure as money is used as key money”, the company provides housing for university students at a relatively cheap price. The company is a clear example of how the terms such as “sharing economy” and “ecological life” are captured by capital. While the company puts up the banner of “sharing”, they not only sell the place of living, but also sell various services such as “food catering, housekeeping service, moving services, and even tutoring” (Woozoo, 2014).

³¹ The “*Maeul Mandeulgi* [Village Community Development]” project has been one of main pledges of Pak Wonsoon who is the mayor of the Seoul Metropolitan Government from 2012 to present. Having a thirty-year history as a social justice and human rights activist, he has carried forward relatively progressive policies. Pak Wonsoon government is zealously pushing forward the “*Maeul Mandeulgi* [Village Community Development] project”. Promoting the Village Community Development project as a way of “recovering humanistic relationships destroyed by competitions and urbanization”, the government presented the blueprint of the project on May 2, 2012. The government announced that \$87,703,430 would put in the project in stages (Y. Kim, 2012, May 2). Various public promotions and support funds were released to the point that the words such as co-housing, co-operative, and village became trends in the society.

³² *Sohaengju* is the abbreviation of happy housing with communication. As co-housing it consists of 8-9 housing units and common space such as a community room, a common garage, etc. in a 3-4 stories building. Considering the parcel price per a household for the second *Sohaengju* was around \$212,500, it can be said that the model is for well-to-do middle class who desired to form a community life. Combined with another existing co-housing project *Sohaengju*, the government officially started the official public co-housing project.

standards regarding cleanness and it can be a source of conflict” (W. Jo, 2013, March 28). There was no ambiguity of the sort that *Bin-Zib* entailed. In other words, this example suggests it is impossible for the state to reproduce the common because the common is created where the line between private and public starts to become ephemeral.

Secondly, *Bin-Zib* promotes the production of different desires from those produced by capital. A community is never given in advance at *Bin-Zib*. It is formed only ex-post facto through the ‘work and love’ of residents. Unless residents put “more than” *bundamgum* [shared expenses] into the community life, *Bin-Zib* cannot exist. This collective surplus is what has produced *Bin-Zib*. The community encourages its residents to be “full time *Binzibites*”, while contemplating how to live outside of wage labour relations. On the other hand, the commercialized co-housing depends on a completely different logic. The final aim of the private co-housing companies is that of making profit. For the purpose, they produce “various concepts of community life” as a fancy form of commodity. Paying money, customers can buy a designed community life specially designed and tailored for their preference. They might expect not only customized living space, but also ideal housemates. This is why the company *Woozoo* carries out a “two-level interview in recruiting residents” (*Woozoo*, 2014, January). To reduce potential conflicts, more options such as housekeeping, food catering, and even mentoring are offered. In doing so, the companies turn ‘love and work’ into something exchangeable/reciprocal, by extracting ‘surplus’ out of them. While consuming the idea of romanticized community life, residents pursue individual success in the society for the future.

In contrast, *Bin-Zib* residents declare “we look for another way to live together ... by opening a house to everyone, by sharing money with others.” In this light, *Bin-Zib* is ultimately an attempt to devise “new uses for the city” (Kohso, 2013, p. 8), creating different values and relations to live together with others. However, it would be impossible to turn house(s) and capital into the common unless people change their attitude towards money, establishing different kind of relations with others. In other words, the main resources and the very results of *Bin-Zib*’s practice of communing are people’s relations, in which a house is not a commodity but the common. Instead of aiming to change the whole of society, *Bin-Zib*’s residents have pursued “slow expansions of voluntary associations” through changing “microrelations as well as microstructures” borrowing the words of Day (2005, p. 103).

They, as the urban poor, have weaved a unique kind of security net, neither modeled after the closed community (the welfare state, incidentally, can be considered as a large scale bureaucratized community) nor the neoliberalist model. After all, the gated community with private security guards has become the neoliberal (sub)urban housing per excellence. Instead of closing the house to secure it as a private property or financial means of investment, the people

of *Bin-Zib* open it to anyone. Instead of closing the community to be secured inside, they choose to widen the security net by weaving themselves into the net. By opening their home to the world and inviting more people to be part of network, they have strived to turn the world itself into home for all; the common. Rather than making the community bigger, they have diversified the community itself while expanding the network of linked communities where people try to practice autonomy, hospitality and sharing.

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