Communicating Communes: A Case Study of Urban Communing Movement in South Korea

by
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B.A. (Literature), Sungkyunkwan University, 1998

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts

in the School of Communication
Faculty of Communication, Art and Technology

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# Approval

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Ethics Statement

The author, whose name appears on the title page of this work, has obtained, for the research described in this work, either:

a. human research ethics approval from the Simon Fraser University Office of Research Ethics,

or

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Abstract

*Bin-Zib* [in Korean, empty/guests’ house] is an urban housing movement in Seoul, South Korea. In a society where, like many others, home ownership has increasingly become a matter of financial speculation rather than residency, the founders of Bin-Zib attempted to overturn the idea of private property associated with housing by turning housing from a form of property to what this thesis theorizes as *the common*. Starting out with one rented apartment in 2008, Bin-Zib members have expanded the scope of their communing experiment to include a network of homes, a café, and a cooperative bank, by inventing an array of strategies founded on the primacy of radical politics in everyday life. Based on an extended period of participant observation, analysis of online and print texts, and in-depth interviews with 32 residents, this thesis explores how Bin-Zib’s residents have struggled to create different practices of housing in a thoroughly neoliberalized urban setting. The community’s emphasis on heterogeneity, egalitarianism and openness has both departed from traditional left politics and propelled them to create an experimental and highly successful commune within and against capitalism. Drawing on Jacques Rancière’s theory of subjectivation, this thesis investigates the politics of everyday life and expanding communism.

Keywords: Bin-Zib; housing movements; the common; communism; subjectivation; neoliberalism
Dedication

This work is dedicated to those who have passed through Bin-Zib, who are involved there currently, and those who will become future participants, as well as all those who have struggled to live together with others on the earth.
Acknowledgements

Although this thesis is published under my name within the academic system, I should make certain that this paper is the result of collaboration with so many people. I am truly grateful to my amazing supervisors, Professor Enda Brophy and Robert Anderson. Without the work and love they have been willingly to put into this thesis, I could not have finished it. I also offer my deepest thanks to Hajime Imamasa who contributed many ideas and constructive critics. Through the whole process, I realized how learning, studying, writing, and (hopefully) inventing are, essentially, collective endeavours.
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# Glossary of terms for Bin-Zib community

**Bingage**
Bin-Zib’s first co-operative café, opened in 2010. *Gage* means a *store* or a *small shop* in Korean. The official name was Haebangchon Il-norito [work-playground] Bingage [an empty/guests’ café/store].

**Bin-Go**
An alternative financial institution established by Bin-Zib residents. Launched as the collective fund/bank for Bin-Zib in 2010, it was turned into the Bin-Go Communal Bank in 2013. The official name was Woozoo Salim Co-operative Bin-Go.

**Binmaeul**
Binmaeul means an *empty/guests’ village*. Residents started to use the term to refer the community when the third house was opened in 2009.

**Binmaeul Activity Fund**
A fund set by Bin-Zib residents for the purpose of supporting/encouraging communal activities in 2011.

**Bin-Zib**
An alternative co-housing community in Seoul, South Korea. Meaning *an empty/guests’ house* in Korean, the name of the community indicates the community’s desire to form a community based on the principles of hospitality and openness.

**Bin-Zib Reserve Fund**
Since the start of the community, Bin-Zib residents have collected surplus money, if any, for maintenance and expansion of Bin-Zib, calling it the Bin-Zib Reserve Fund. The fund was transferred to Bin-Go later.

**Binzibin**
In means *human* in Korean. Residents called themselves *Binzibin*, which might be translated as *Bin-Zibites*. Those who devote themselves to community life without having job were called *fulltime Binzibin*.

**Bin-Zib Mutual Aid Fund**
A fund set up by Bin-Zib residents for the purpose of preventing against any internal fiscal crisis in 2012.

**Bundamgeum**
The expenses shared among Bin-Zib residents. The bundamgeum covers the monthly interest of the loan, utilities, food and daily necessities.

**Café Haebangchon**
The second co-op café established by Bin-Zib residents. The full name is Café Haebangchon★Bingage.

**Dalgori**
Bin-Zib residents’ village meeting, held once a month. *Dalgori* is a compound word of *dal* [moon/month] and *gori* [thing(s)], referring to *menstruation* in Korean.

**Dantu**
Refers to Bin-Zib residents who stay for less then a month. *Dantu* is an abbreviation of *dangitusugaek*, which means *short-term guest*.

**Geumsan foundation**
The source of the initial loan taken out by Bin-Zib’s founders in order to rent the first home.

**Haebangchon**
A residential neighbourhood on the southern slope of Namsan mountain, which is a landmark of Seoul. Initially populated by populations who escaped from North Korea after its liberation from Japanese colonialism, Habanchon means a *Liberation Village*. 
Haebangchon Salamdeul

A community group aiming to revitalize the local culture and economy in the Haebangchon neighbourhood. Meaning *People of Haebangchon*, the group was formed by Bin-Zib residents with local residents in the neighbourhood, including religious groups and small retailers.

Haebanghwpaye

An alternative local currency in Haebangchon, issued by Bin-Go. Seven local residents and Bin-Go activists formed a committee to oversee Haebanghwpaye, which means Liberation Money. Currently, 33 local shops have become affiliate members and accept the alternative currency.

Haebangmungeo

A series of DIY books published by Bin-Zib residents under the name of Hebangmungeo [Liberation Book] Series.

Jangtu

The abbreviation of *janggitusugaek*, which means *long-term guest*.

Jinbo

A [progressive] blog that was a part of an independent Internet service developed and organized by activists from the Jinbo Network Center. The Jinbo blog sphere is where the idea of Bin-Zib was originally posted, circulated and discussed.

Maeullo hwaldongga

A social program launched in 2013 by the Seoul City Government as part of the New Deal Job Program for Youth. Eight Bin-Zib residents worked for the Maeullo hwaldongga [Activists to the village] and were paid minimum wage by the city of Seoul in 2013.

Master

A term used by residents who work in the co-op café to refer to themselves. Making reference to Japanese subculture, a master indicates a person who performs her work in a holistic manner, and thus unlike an employee who is hired and controlled.

Noneunsalam

A monthly zine of the published by the Bin-Zib community beginning in June 2014. Noneunsalam is a tongue-in-cheek transliteration of Homo Ludens. The zine is available in DIY printed form as well as digitally.

Zibsa

Zibsa means *butler* in Korean. From 2010 the dalgori (the regular village meeting—see above) was divided into a village party held once a month and what residents jokingly named a zibsa meeting. At least one resident of each Bin-Zib was supposed to participate in the meeting.
The Bin-Zib Chronicle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Year 2008</th>
<th>Year 2009</th>
<th>Year 2010</th>
<th>Year 2011</th>
<th>Year 2012</th>
<th>Year 2013</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Arae-Zib [The house bellow]</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Wis-Zib [The house above]</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Yeop-Zib / Nangman-Zib [Romantic house]</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Binnong-Zib [House of farming]</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>Haneul-Zib [House of sky]</td>
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<td>8.</td>
<td>Haebangchae [House of liberation]</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>Gyedan-Zib [House of stairway]</td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td>Jaggun-Zib [Small house]</td>
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<td>11.</td>
<td>Salim-Zib [House of living]</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Yeonguso / Haksuk / Sarangchae</td>
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<td>13.</td>
<td>Gureum-Zib [House of cloud]</td>
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<td>14.</td>
<td>Masil-Zib [House of picnic]</td>
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The number 1-15 indicates Bin-Zibs formed and disbanded in the Haebangchon area throughout the time from 2008 to 2013, chronologically.

F indicates Bin-Zibs, which were outside of Seoul.
C indicates co-op cafes.
Map of Binmaeul [Bin village]

House7, 9-14, Cafe2 are currently existing.
## Interview participants cited in the thesis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Duration of staying at Bin-Zib</th>
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<tr>
<td>Dandi</td>
<td>October 2013 to present (June 2015)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gom</td>
<td>September 2011 to September 2012</td>
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<td>Hani</td>
<td>January 2010 to present</td>
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<td>Hong</td>
<td>July 2013 to December 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jay</td>
<td>February 2009 to April 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jium</td>
<td>February 2008 to March 2014 (Currently participating in Bin-Go and working on a community house project)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ken</td>
<td>June 2008 to August 2014 (Currently living in Haebangchon and working as a master of the co-op café)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kong</td>
<td>December 2012 to present</td>
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<tr>
<td>Len</td>
<td>January 2012 to March 2015 (Currently living in Haebangchon)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malya</td>
<td>June 2008 to December 2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>Min</td>
<td>May 2013 to October 2014 (Currently living in Haebangchon, and working as Bin-Go activist)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mong</td>
<td>January 2011 to present</td>
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<td>Naru</td>
<td>July 2013</td>
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<td>Norang</td>
<td>February 2012 to present</td>
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<td>Salgu</td>
<td>February 2008 to March, 2014</td>
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<td>Soo</td>
<td>February 2012 to present</td>
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<td>Sun</td>
<td>October 2009 To present</td>
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<td>Tei</td>
<td>January 2011 to present</td>
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<td>Toto</td>
<td>February 2014 to October 2014</td>
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<td>Vero</td>
<td>February 2013 to present</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yunong</td>
<td>March 2012 to January 2015</td>
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Note

In this paper, I follow the Revised Romanization of Korean (2000) in transcribing Korean into Roman writing system, unless the original citations follow different transcription systems or there is already a widely accepted spelling. This thesis also follows APA style except when more than one person has published with the same last name.
Chapter 1.

Introduction: Rethinking Communism through “Discovering New Uses for the City”

Discovering new uses for the city, where a multiplicity of relationships among people are made possible, is the only way to resist the ‘purgatory of the here and now’ and forge happiness. Happiness which is never to be equated with what we have become accustomed to, that is, the pursuit of success on the basis of individualism, is none other than living with Other(s). This new definition of happiness seems rather simple, but requires a wholly new subjectivation. (Kohso, 2013, p. 8-9)

1.1. Prologue

Bin-Zib, the subject of my thesis, is a network of collective houses in the Haebangchon neighbourhood of Seoul, South Korea. While the experiment started with an apartment, it has grown into a kind of village, with a co-operative café, a communal bank, and seven houses inhabited by approximately 50 residents. Each house is named after certain attributes, but every house is considered to be a part of Bin-Zib. In other words, Bin-Zib refers not only to each house but also to the whole network of houses. Although residents started to use the term Binmaeul [an empty/guests’ village] after establishing the third house, the term Bin-Zib is still the one that is used most often to

---

1 When they opened the second Bin-Zib, residents started naming each Bin-Zib according to certain characteristics. For example, the second house, Wis-Zib, or the house above, indicated its location relative to the first Bin-Zib (which they started to call Arae-Zib, meaning the house bellow). During my field research I stayed at Haksuk, or the house of learning, a name which indicates residents’ desire for collective study.
refer to the community. In Korean, Bin-Zib means empty house, guests’ house, and/or house for the poor. The name reflects the community’s unconditional hospitality and radical opposition to private property.

This thesis explores how Bin-Zib’s residents have struggled to create different practices of housing in a thoroughly neoliberalized urban setting. In examining this movement within the cultural, social, economic context of South Korean society, I try to explore how residents of Bin-Zib have struggled to expand their experiment, networking spaces that promote autonomy, hospitality, and sharing. I pay particular attention to the process of subjectivation promoted through the everyday politics of the community.

Before introducing this community that aims to surpass a capitalist way of life, I describe the surrounding neighbourhood of Haebangchon, which means a Liberation Village.

Figure 1.1. A panoramic picture of Haebangchon
Photo from History and present of Haebangchon (Jeongmin, 2013), one of the Haebangmungo series.

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2 *Jip* means a house in Korean. Although the standard alphabetization would be Bin-Jip, their website shows the name Bin-Zib. *Maeul* means a town/village. Although they eventually started to refer to their whole community as Binmaeul since its growth, when they are talking about neighbourhood matters they mostly still retain the original name, possibly for the broader reference it makes.

3 Referring to Rancière (1992; 1999; 2010), I understand *subjectivation* as the process of disidentification or the transformation of subjectivity. Chambers (2013) points out the difficulty and confusion that has arisen over translation of the concept of subjectivation. Although it has also been translated as subjectification and subjectivization, following Chambers’ suggestion, I will use the word subjectivation to denote the transformation Bin-Zib residents experience in their subjectivity. It is particularly here to make a distinction between subjectivation and Foucault’s notion *subjectification* (which is *assujettissement* in French). As scholars point out, subjectification 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).
Haebangchon is a hillside district on the slope of Namsan Mountain in the heart of Seoul. This neighbourhood’s history, as we shall see, is somewhat ironic when one considers the political experiment carried out by Bin-Zib residents in recent years. Haebangchon was founded in the 1940s by refugees fleeing the establishment of a socialist regime after the liberation of North Korea from Japanese colonialism. Having had their assets confiscated by the North Korean government, refugees came to South Korea and formed a shantytown on the foothills of Namsan Mountain, where previously there had been nothing but trees. It was a town of poor, displaced people, and filled by shacks with roofs secured by old tires. Since many residents did not even have a bathroom at home, a number of public restrooms were interspersed throughout the neighbourhood.

The rapid industrialization of South Korea of the 1960s coincided with explosive population growth in Seoul. More and more people migrated to the city from the countryside, some of them settling and building houses in Haebangchon. Since many of the resulting shantytowns were constructed on hilly areas above traditional residential areas, people commonly referred to those slums as daldongne [moon neighbourhoods]. Daldongnes have always been areas where the displaced and marginalized were concentrated. In the collective imaginary of South Korea, daldongne residents—often typified by the figure of the day labourer barely eking out a living—at least had the consolation of a closer view of the moon when they went back to their humble home on the steep hill slope.4

Even though the people of Haebangchon came from many different areas during the 1960s and the 1970s, most of its residents shared a common political orientation as anti-communists. The Seobuk Youth Union (an extreme right-wing group organized by the landowning class), the conservative Christian community, and pro-Japanese groups who defected from North Korea after its liberation were the primary communities at the

4 According to the folklorist Seung Hoon Yoo (2009), there were similar terms for slums around the city, such as sandongne [mountain neighbourhood], or haneuldongne [sky neighbourhood], but when the TV drama Daldongne became a big hit in the 1980s, the word daldongne became the symbol of the slums (p. 35).
heart of this anti-communist ideology in the neighbourhood. A senior citizen who has lived in Haebangchon since 1947 recalls, “Here the Seobuk Youth Union was well-organized, so Haebangchon was famous for young people catching commies and beating them… Commies kept out of this area” (Anonymous, interview by Jeongmin, 2013), according to a book, published by Bin-Zib residents.

The Haebang Church, a Presbyterian church established in 1947, has played a pivotal role in Haebangchon. People who came from North Korea built this church with next to no resources at their disposal. With the church at the center of their community, they tried to educate children and help those who had lost their families during the war. The church also promoted strongly anti-communist sentiments. Seungha Lee, the former Haebang church minister whose hometown is Sinwiju in North Korea, illustrates the congregation’s political orientation in an interview:

This church will evangelize to the end of the world. Where is the very end of the world, you ask? It’s North Korea, right? Our aim is to evangelize North Korea, the homeland of the members of this church. The mission of this church is to liberate North Korean people from communism! (S. Lee, interview by Jeongmin, 2013).

In the 1970s the South Korean government launched a full-scale redevelopment project in the country, enacting the Housing Improvement Promotion Act in 1973 and the Urban Redevelopment Act in 1976. The municipal government of Seoul pursued an aggressive redevelopment project in the capital city based on the Acts, and this move

5 The Seobuk Youth Union was an extreme right-wing organization supported by the American military government and the right-wing ruling power (J. Jung, 2007; P. Kim, 2010). Dongailbo, one of the influential right wing daily papers in South Korea, praised the Seobuk Youth Union in spite of their extremely violent actions in an article: “Members of the Seobuk Youth Union have always been at the very front line of the battle against commies. Even though there was a lot of criticism regarding Seobuk Youth Union’s acts of violence against commies, they have always been brave. Evicting commies was the only way to return to their hometown” (G. Lee, 1975, August 19).

6 In 2013, five Bin-Zib residents researched the micro-history of Haebangchon and interviewed local seniors in a project funded by the Seoul City Government. This research produced five DIY books as part of Hebangmungo [Liberation Book] series. I discuss this project further in Chapter 3.

7 According to an anti-gentrification activist Gyeongseok Seo (2010, May 4), this project not only aimed to re-organize the chaotic space of the city. The military regime had to placate the public by providing basic infrastructure such as water supply and drainage.
affected Haebangchon (S. Seo and S. Lee, 2010, p. 114). Roads and other public facilities were constructed while the Seoul City Government compelled residents to improve their dilapidated makeshift houses. These re-development projects continued up until the 1990s and eventually combined with unchecked real estate speculation in the country to create some of the market dynamics Bin-Zib was launched to resist against.

Through this development process, chaotic blocks of housing resembling fractal geometry became more orderly. Although the web of winding alleys remains, many were widened to meet regulatory standards determined by the city. At the same time, Haebangchon’s location on Namsan Mountain, with its physical and symbolic presence, has kept the area from being fully re-developed. While most of the slums in Seoul were razed and replaced with massive apartment complexes in the years leading up to the 1988 Seoul Olympics, Haebangchon’s low skyline was kept intact due to height regulations intended to preserve the panoramic view of Namsan Mountain.

![Figure 1.2. Heabangchon in the 1960s and now](image)

Photo from *History and present of Haebangchon* (Jeongmin, 2013), one of the Haebangmungeo series.

Because of these factors, a neighbourhood atmosphere that was lost in many parts of Seoul is still present in Haebangchon. Walking through the neighbourhood you can see old ladies sitting on street corners, chatting and basking in the sun. There are
many small shops selling vegetables, meat, and miscellaneous goods. The streets are animated by people who have known each other for a long time. After sunset, middle-aged men close their shops and get together at local restaurants, chatting and drinking. Such sights and scenes are mostly lost in other, more “developed” areas of Seoul, which are full of apartment complexes and vast supermarket chains. An artist nicknamed Mill who came to the area in 2013 recollected her encounter with the neighbourhood:

I remember the first day I got here. I still have a clear recollection of the streets, which looked like an old outdoor market, the old men and women who were sitting out on the streets, and the view. When I took a sweeping look around, I could see the unhampered view of the blue sky with Namsan Mountain. It made me feel like I wasn't in Seoul. (Mill, 2013, p. 26)

The liveliest part of this neighbourhood is clustered around the eponymous five-way intersection, Haebangchon Ogeori. When you turn the corner and walk south toward Haebang church, on the left hand side you can see a sign, written in green and brown letters, that reads Café Haebangchon★Bingage. In front of the café you can see all kinds of posters announcing events ranging from painting workshops to dongne [neighbourhood] exhibitions of pictures drawn by neighbourhood children, from concerts and performances to public lectures with titles like A Loneliness that is Ultimately Political.

On an ordinary evening in Haebangchon, you can see people chatting in front of the café while a concert is going on inside, with eating, drinking, and laughing in the warm atmosphere of the café. When you are on your way home, after midnight, you might see people sitting in the dark café, watching an old horror movie or a film of Le Mariage de Figaro. These scenes have become a part of ordinary life in the neighbourhood. Anyone can suggest and host any kind of event they want in the café, which is collectively run by neighbourhood residents. And many of these residents live in Bin-Zib. But what is Bin-Zib? Who are the people that animate it?
The people of Bin-Zib are not original residents of Haebangchon. A community member who did the construction work for the café described the background of those taking part in the collective housing experiment in this way:

As a matter of fact, the original residents of Haebangchon, at first, well... I would say it seemed like they felt uneasy about us... We were not only newcomers to this area but also a bunch of weirdos from their point of view. It generally takes one month to renovate the interior of a café like this. It took us more than three months because we did it all by ourselves.
'What the hell are they doing? Don't they have jobs? How do they spend such a long time on these projects when they still have to pay rent?' the locals must have thought. Not being able to contain their curiosity, some of them actually asked us questions like this. Well, as time went by local residents have become more comfortable with us. Now at least the people of Haebangchon think we are not such bad folks. It seems that they still have no clue what we are doing, though. (Personal conversation with Malya, 17 September 2013, Haebangchon)

To this I gave a slight nod of agreement. It is hard to understand what they are doing at Bin-Zib when you first hear about it.

In 2008 three people started Bin-Zib as a communal housing experiment, opening their home to others so that anyone could live there together. Within a year, three more houses were organized along these lines in the neighbourhood. People who had the money co-funded renting a house and declared the house communalized. People who did not have the money could still reside there. Strange as it might sound, this is the way Bin-Zib began. This kind of organization at Bin-Zib reminded me of the famous principle of communism, "from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs" (Marx, 1938, p. 10). This idea is of course quite different from how the original settlers of Haebangchon imagined communism. There are now seven Bin-Zibs, or collective houses, in the neighbourhood, where you still can see an anti-communist banner slung between two trees on the roadside.

1.2. Study Purpose and Research Questions

This thesis investigates Bin-Zib, or how people produce and expand "the common" (Hardt and Negri, 2009) in the middle of a city by ingenerating relations different from those dominant under capitalism in neoliberal urban spaces. 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, are changing continuously. While it started with just one house, more than 20 Bin-Zibs have since been developed (and some disbanded) over the past seven years. At the time of writing, the Bin-Zib experiment has grown into a small village, with approximately fifty people distributed across seven houses with two communal sub-entities, a communal bank and a co-operative café. Bin-Zib not only has thrived in the
neighbourhood, but also has inspired other co-housing experiments in South Korea, offering people a reference point as well as financial support through the communal bank, Bin-Go.⁸

Although its scale is limited, the Bin-Zib experiment is worth examining for several reasons. First, Bin-Zib offers a concrete and relatively successful attempt to take back the "right to the city" (Harvey, 2012). In a situation created first by military dictatorship and later by neoliberal urban policies, the price of land and housing in Seoul has skyrocketed since the 1960s.⁹ The ensuing process of gentrification has destroyed many urban neighbourhoods, depriving the urban poor of their right to the city. In this context, Bin-Zib residents have declared that “[w]e look for another way to live together … by opening a house to everyone, by sharing money with others" (Bin-Go, 2010), and have tried to devise different housing practices through constant experimentation, failure, re-contemplation and modification.

As David Harvey (2012) asserts, we need a “rich mix of instrumentalities” to find ways to “organize production, distribution, exchange, and consumption in order to meet human wants and needs on an anti-capitalist basis” (p. 87). This rich mix is something we cannot construct without numerous experiences and mistakes, at diverse levels. From this viewpoint, Bin-Zib provides a detailed example of an autonomous effort to produce and govern the common locally, in a horizontal and open manner. This study

⁸ Bin-Zib is the first co-housing experiment in South Korea. At the time of writing, to my knowledge there are at least seven autonomous co-housing communities in Seoul and other big cities. The Seoul City Government has also started to pay attention to co-housing projects as an alternative model that might confront the serious housing problem in the city. I discuss this interest by the municipal government in the final chapter.

⁹ I use the term neoliberalism as defined by David Harvey. According to Harvey (2005), neoliberalism is a system of “accumulation by dispossession”, which has four main characteristics: 1) privatization and commodification; 2) financialization; 3) the management and manipulation of crises; and 4) state redistribution, in which the state becomes an agent of redistribution of wealth for the rich (p. 160-165). In using the term financialization, I understand it as “the increasing role of financial motives, financial markets, financial actors and financial institutions in the operation of the domestic and international economies” (Epstein, 2005, p. 3). Financialization is not only an economic process but also a cultural process in which people begin to see activities in their everyday life, as well as basic rights, including housing, as a means of investment. I discuss how the process of financialization in South Korea has manifested culturally in Chapter 2.
aims to provide an anthropological account of the attempt to devise a new set of practices around housing, ones constituted without public or state intervention.

Secondly, Bin-Zib offers a clear and compelling example of the central concept investigated in this thesis: *the common*. The notion of the common, developed by autonomist theorists, refers to the fact that not only physical or geographic resources but also ideas, knowledge, affection, communication and social relations are the common wealth of humanity (Hardt and Negri, 2009; Dyer-Witherford, 2009; Hardt, 2010; Roggero, 2010; Fuchs, 2010). As “both the form of production and the source of new social relations” (Hardt and Negri, 2009), the common is neither private nor public. In Bin-Zib, any kind of common resources including not only money and housing, but also work, culture and affection are offered by residents to share with others. In other words, at Bin-Zib the very sources and products of communing practices have been residents and the social relations among them. By opening their living place to others, residents have formed a unique culture that recalls the famous dictum of communism, each should contribute according to their abilities, and take according to their needs.

In this context, Bin-Zib’s practice is inevitably intertwined with the process of *subjectivation*. The community’s opposition to home ownership, as well as its attempts to reorganize urban housing as part of the common, has been well documented by Bin-Zib residents (Bin-Zib 2008; Jium 2010, 2013; Dion 2010; Moya 2010; Bin-Go 2011, 2012, 2013). However, how has the community engaged newcomers and furthered the practice of communing while, as this thesis argues, forcing neither rules nor ideologies? How does such a seemingly unlikely process of subjectivation take place in Bin-Zib? This thesis asks how such projects are possible in an era when, as Maurizio Lazzarato

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10 The fact that expropriation through commodification is now proceeding into some of the most intimate areas of human relationships and communication, from knowledge to biometric information, clearly shows that the common is produced by people within social processes and expropriated by capital for free (Fuchs, 2010).

11 While declaring that “Bin-Zib has no owner” in the collectively written Bin-Zib guide from 2008, each house in the community has been launched in rented houses and residents have paid money to the legal owner of the property. From a legal perspective, one might wonder how significant Bin-Zib is as a movement against neoliberal capitalism. However, based on the declaration that “Bin-Zib has no owner”, residents have formed the culture of sharing and expanded the scale of the experiment. I discuss this aspect in Chapters 4 and 5.
(2012) suggests, “neoliberal policies produce human capital and ‘entrepreneurs of the self’ who calculate every single gain and loss” (p.94). To answer these questions, and to explore the affective dynamics of the Bin-Zib experiment, I illuminate its everyday politics through an ethnographic investigation of the community.¹²

Last but not least, this thesis offers a case study of a new current that has emerged among the social movements in contemporary South Korea. The moral principles of mainstream Korean society are strongly infused with a Confucian age-based hierarchy, and this has also been true of political and social movements in the country. Political and social movements have traditionally been formed around an ideological unity and a struggle for hegemony in South Korean society. In this context, Bin-Zib is unique. Bin-Zib’s residents have demanded a spirit of egalitarianism and strived to preserve openness to heterogeneity, which both sets them against traditional social movements and often proves a source of conflict between residents.

In his research on the genealogy of affinity in new social movements, Richard Day (2005) suggests that molecular movements which aim to build spaces, places or topias in the most literal sense of the term (p. 216), should keep “ethico-political positions” based on affinity, not identity (p. 172). Bin-Zib has an obvious resonance with what Day (2005) calls a movement of “affinity for affinity” (p. 9). Weaving in a generational perspective, my study explores how and what social, political, and cultural factors have led the Bin-Zib movement to be set on the level of everyday life, by welcoming others and trying to form different relationships in South Korean society.

In looking at Bin-Zib, including its potentialities and limitations as a movement aiming to produce different lifestyles and social relations from those instantiated by capitalism, my research addresses two sets of research questions:

1. How have Bin-Zib residents sought to devise and improvise a communing system through which more people can be engaged?

¹² In using the term/s affects/affective, I refer to Hardt’s (1999) discussion of affective labour as “the constitution of communities and collective subjectivities” (p. 89). Whether in the form of domestic work or in service labour, affective work is the act of production and reproduction of life.
What have been the main obstacles and conflicts Bin-Zib residents have confronted? How have residents dealt with the conflicts?

2. How have Bin-Zib residents involved the process of subjectivation in their collective life? What were the main factors involved in the changes produced through this process, if any?

In answering these questions, the central theoretical concepts adopted and elaborated upon in this thesis are those of the common and communism (Negri and Casarino, 2008; Hardt and Negri, 2009; Graeber, 2001; 2008; 2010; 2011). I apply the concept of the common and communism to look at social relations and subjectivities that are produced in Bin-Zib’s everyday life. Rancière’s (1992; 1999; 2010) discussion of politics and subjectivation and Day’s (2005) contribution to the analysis of new currents within contemporary social movements is also woven into my theoretical analysis.

1.3. Theoretical Frames

1.3.1. Communism and the common

When considering the crisis of neo-liberalism and the numerous uprisings around the world in recent years, a growing number of scholars have recently suggested the importance not only of criticizing capitalism, but also of rethinking the category and practice of communism (Badiou, 2010; Hardt, 2010; Žižek, 2010; Bosteels, 2011; Dean, 2012). Communism, according to one definition by Marx and Engels (1965), can be summed up “in the single phrase: Abolition of private property” (p. 82). This initial definition of communism, however, may bring to mind totalitarian societies controlled by the state.\(^\text{13}\)

Contrary to popular belief, however, rather than being opposed, the state and market “were born together and have always been intertwined” (Graeber, 2011, p. 26).

\(^\text{13}\) As David Graeber (2011) points out, in common sense understandings of political economy, “the State and the Market tower above all else as diametrically opposed principles”. Based on this idea, people believe that only states can control the reckless force of capitalist markets (p. 26).
Geoff Mann (2013) also points out that capitalism is premised upon two types of power which “exist side by side” market and state (p. 48). Indeed periods of what Marx (1990) called “primitive accumulation” (p. 873), which gave birth to capitalism in different settings, would have not been possible without state intervention. Moreover, the process of enclosure originally described by Marx is now being renewed much more aggressively, as neoliberal governments sell off public services such as railways and electricity utilities while protecting the property of the privileged class with police and law enforcement (Harvey, 2005; Klein, 2007; Roberts, 2008; Brown, 2013). This reality, alongside the historical failure of socialist systems, suggests an impasse for radical social movements. Along with many of these movements, my thesis begins from the assumption that the reconstruction of the liberal public sphere through the state apparatus cannot be an adequate remedy for the current crisis. Yet if so, how is the abolition of private property possible today? What should the word communism mean in this context?

Recent theories engaging with anthropology provide some insights. Criticizing mainstream economists who define humans as economic animals and human history as the history of exchange, Graeber (2010) states that “communism is not some magical utopia but something that exists right now—that exists, to some degree, in any human society” (p. 103). According to Graeber (2008), “communism really just means any situation where people act according to the principle of ‘from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs’” (p. 4) There have always been relations in which people do not calculate gain and loss in human history, in the way that a mother does not take account of what she has done for her child. Calling these relations “baseline communism” (2011, p. 98), Graeber argues it is the very principle upon which families or good friendships are based. Taken in this way, as Graeber suggests, “communism is the foundation of all human sociability” (p. 5). “One shares certain things or makes them freely available within the group”, and there is “an infinite variety of commons, the collective administration of common resources” (p. 7).

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14 For example, the bailout of seven trillion dollars by U.S. government to rescue the financial sector in 2008 (Mcguire, 2011, November 28) brought the state’s imperative to support capital into clear focus.
In an analysis that overlaps significantly with Graeber’s discussion of communism, Day (2005) reviews theoretical and practical attempts that seek to form different sets of relations through small-scale experiments in and against the state. Describing this tendency as one of movements of affinity, he tries to show how anarchist practices can be compatible with a communist perspective while maintaining a profoundly different attitude toward the state from that of the (neo)Marxist perspective. Considering capitalism, communism, and the state as “a set of relations between human individuals and groups” (P. 125), the anarchist-communist view breaks with the Hegelian desire to establish universality while trying to rediscover and recover communistic relations which have “always existed, and still exist” here as various forms of mutual aid (p. 121).

In this thesis, I adopt Graeber’s definition of communism as a theoretical lens in order to better understand what Bin-Zib residents have been doing, how they have been living in and multiplying Bin-Zib as an alternative form of social relationship developed around housing. I also interpret Bin-Zib as an attempt to create “the relationships we desire immediately, in the world in which we find ourselves actually living” from an angle Day (2005) suggests (p. 12). Since the foundation of this experiment, residents have made housing freely available and have collectively administered their resources. They have let others live in Bin-Zib and managed to set up new houses whenever existing houses became too crowded to receive newcomers. At the same time, participants in the housing experiment have not imposed any compulsory rules nor defined each participant’s share or responsibility clearly. By defining communism not as a political system but as a form of social relations that have always existed in human societies, Graeber and Day’s discussions provide a theoretical framework through which to understand Bin-Zib as an attempt to cultivate communistic relations without establishing an authoritarian system.

On the other hand, as Day (2005) points out, affinity-based movements cannot help but be based in the communities that form them. If this is true, then how can these communities “break with the Hegelian legacy of state-based conceptions of group identity” (p. 18)? Day asserts that affinity-based movements should seek ethico-political positions where they must remain open to difference and to the Other (Derrida, 2001, as
In this respect, the way Bin-Zib residents open their community to others, to the point of causing constant internal conflicts, is especially noteworthy. The notion of the common provides a theoretical frame through which Bin-Zib’s practice can be further interpreted.

According to Graeber (2008), communism is the way “pretty much everyone always act[s] if they are working together to get something done” (p. 4). And, it is “obviously” the most efficient way, one that the so-called most innovative companies have tried to adopt (Graeber, 2011, p. 96). In the same manner, Antonio Negri (2008) points out that the common is constituted in and through collective activities of different people, producing creativity. The common is “the activity that builds things together” (p. 83). It can be said that the common is what communistic relations produce and reproduce in an innate way. What should be noted is that the common is formed based on singularity, which is understood by these scholars as a form of irreducible difference.

Differentiating itself from identical self-repetition, singularity refers “externally to a multiplicity of others; is internally divided or multiple; and constitutes a multiplicity over time – that is, a process of becoming” (Harvey, Hardt and Negri, 2009). While “singularity, after all, indexes absolute and primary difference”, the common not only includes but also is constituted by singularities (Casarino, 2008, p. 82-124). In this context, heterogeneity is crucial in producing the common. Producing the common and governing it is thus not a matter of how we organize our surrounding resources. It is, more profoundly, a matter of how we produce and reproduce ourselves in relation to others.

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15 Regarding this Day (2005) suggests a politics of groundless solidarity and infinite responsibility. The politics of affinity, for Day, is about “abandoning the fantasy that fixed, stable identities are possible” (p. 18). Groundless solidarity, which Diane Elam suggests for making links across various different struggles, thus can be the object of conflict and need not mean consensus (Elam, as cited in Day, p. 188-189). On the other hand, the concept of infinite responsibility which comes from Derridean deconstruction means “always being open to the invitation and challenge of another Other” (p. 18).

16 Casarino (2008) states, “While the individual contains only the same and more of the same, that is, that which is self—identical” the common includes and is constituted by singularities (p. 82).
From this viewpoint, what my research examines is how Bin-Zib residents have strived to produce the common, understood as “the cellular form of communism” produced and shared in association (Dyer-Witherford, 2009). While opening the community to anyone regardless of their political orientation, Bin-Zib’s principles, ones that flow from its name, have compelled residents to change their way of life. Without explicitly stated ideologies, rules or a chain of command, residents rely on an ongoing process of the (re)construction of consensus in their everyday practice, cultivating an atmosphere of sharing and hospitality. One of the key contributions made by this thesis is to look at how these everyday politics have played a crucial role in promoting what Graeber (2011) calls baseline communism. Examining the everyday politics of Bin-Zib, through which residents produce different relations with other, I next refer to Rancière’s discussion of politics.

1.3.2. Politics as the work of construction of the common in between

Renewing the concept of communism and recuperating it from its contemporary association with the authoritarian state, Michael Hardt (2010) argues that “the positive content of communism, which corresponds to the abolition of private property, is the autonomous human production of subjectivity, the human production of humanity—a new seeing, a new hearing, a new thinking, a new loving” (p. 353). In other words, producing the common cannot be separated from the micropolitics of how we can change our bodies and sensibilities through persistent struggles of everyday life. In this regard, as Hardt (2009) points out, Jacques Rancière’s definition of politics gives us an

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17 Arguing that communism is essentially about “the autonomous human production of subjectivity” (p. 353), Hardt (2010) points out that Marx’s own definition of communism in his early work is also deeply sensitive to the biopolitical dimension. According to Marx, (cited in Hardt, 2010) “We have seen how, assuming the positive supersession of private property, man produces man, himself and other men; how the object, which is the direct activity of his individuality, is at the same time his existence for other men, their existence and their existence for him”. 
important perspective, demonstrating how politics is essentially a process of producing new subjectivities.¹⁸

Rancière (1999; 2010) distinguishes politics from the police. According to him, police is the art of governing a bounded community. It is “essentially, the law, generally implicit, that defined a party’s share or lack of it” (p. 29). To establish the law, however, a proper order must first be defined so as to allocate ways of doing, being, and saying in a given community.¹⁹ This order is first and foremost sensory. A community is formed based on a specific “partition of the sensible” (Rancière, 2004), which decides whose voice is discursive while others’ are mere noise.²⁰ Based on this sensory order, we can only see or hear what is visible or audible in the society. There is however always surplus, or a part that has not been taken account of, such as “workers, women, people of color, or others” (Rancière, 1992, p. 59). The police eliminate the nameless who cannot speak (Rancière, 2010, p. 36). On the other hand, politics recalls what the police have eliminated, demonstrating a sharp gap between two different partitions of the sensible. Politics is, in this context, the act of disturbing the sensory order. It requires one to see and hear what was previously invisible or what was mere noise. As an act of recalling what was exiled, politics is “the process of emancipation” (1992, p. 59).

¹⁸ Hardt (2009) criticizes Rancière’s notion of politics, suggesting that while it shows both politics and aesthetics are oriented towards the common, it also treats the common as if it were a given element (p. 26). However, I would argue that Rancière’s notion of politics is especially resonant with Hardt (2009)’s discussion of the production of the common as “the production and reproduction of social relations and forms of life” (p. 26). Rancière’s politics is profoundly a process of subjectivation/disidentification.

¹⁹ For example, in ancient Rome, “there is no place for discussion with plebs for the simple reason that plebs do not speak” (Rancière, 1999, p. 23).

²⁰ Rancière’s notion of the partage du sensible is translated as distribution/division/partition of the sensible/perceptable. 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”, noting that “[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 according to the double meaning it has in the original. The partition of the sensible refers to the taken-for-granted configuration of perception and meaning that allows a community to recognize itself and defines the conditions in which arguments can be made, recognized and engaged (Deranty, 2003; Panagia, 2010).
Politics is therefore fundamentally a process of difference; a process of disidentification; a process of subjectivation (Rancière, 1992, p. 60-62; 1999, p. 36). One can never see what she could not see before unless she is involved in a process of subjectivation/disidentification. And, according to Rancière, this subjectivation takes place 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 thus the configuration of “a common place where the existing sensory order is disturbed” (Rancière, 1992, p. 62). Politics is the work of “construction of the paradoxical world that puts together two separate worlds”, demonstrating “a clash between two partitions of the sensible” (Rancière, 2010, p. 39).

This perspective provides a useful theoretical lens in the analysis of Bin-Zib. The founders of Bin-Zib were clearly opposed to a dominant economic logic and its way of counting parts/shares of the community (Rancière, 2010, p. 35), yet they did not screen the membership of the community. Consequently, Bin-Zib becomes an extremely argumentative place where different partitions of the sensible collided with each other. Bin-Zib’s residents cannot help but constantly be in the realm of politics in Rancière’s sense. I will analyze Bin-Zib’s paradoxical principles inscribed in its name and discuss how these have led to regular conflicts over the terrain of partition of, or the process of participation in, production and distribution of the common. By looking at the process, this study aims to examine how the micropolitics of everyday life in Bin-Zib manages to form new political subjects and communistic relationships.

1.4. Relevant Literature Review

The growth of Bin-Zib as an alternative community with open membership, and its goal of producing and governing housing as the common, has drawn attention from the media and academia in South Korea. Part of the reason for this attention arises from

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21 Y. Yoon (2014) points out that, “making the invisible visible is not that we just find out something that has always been there by casting light upon it” (p. 300). X exists as X in a specific partition of the sensible. It means X is designated as the very identity of X in the given community. Thus, “re-partition of the sensible” means that X does not exist as X any more. The work of politics is that of changing a specific partition of the sensible, and it inevitably involves a process of disidentification (p. 301).
the fact that Bin-Zib is probably the first example of a co-housing experiment in the country, in spite of the very serious housing issue that has developed. Most of the news articles, however, have tended to romanticize Bin-Zib from an outsider’s view, as an alternative community tackling the problem of urban residence in Seoul.

To date, four pieces of scholarship on Bin-Zib, including two MA theses, have been published in South Korea. Naeyeong Kang (2012) analyses Bin-Zib as “an experimental living community without any traditional family life based on blood ties” (p. 8), from a cultural studies perspective. This research focuses on horizontality and fluidity as the main characteristics of Bin-Zib. The author argues that Bin-Zib, unlike other alternative communities that have emerged in the capitalist context, does not have “a specific value”. All decisions and activities are made through residents’ discussions and each resident’s participation, therefore the characteristics of Bin-Zib change as they have new residents and/or as their thinking changes. Referring to this characteristic of fluidity as “Bin-Zibness”, Kang argues “life in Bin-Zib allows the residents to seek different life styles and various possibilities beyond the society, in which everything gets reterritorialized by capital” (p. 8).

Another researcher, Eunjin Pak (2012), characterizes Bin-Zib as “co-housing, in which youth in their twenties and thirties in an unstable labour market come together to face their housing problems” (p. 121). While N. Kang relies on information from the Bin-Zib webpage and its literature, E. Pak traces residents’ experiences and the changes in Bin-Zib through six months of participant observations and in-depth interviews. She finds that Bin-Zib is unique because it has no private space. She argues that giving up most private space and opening the whole of their space to others requires changes in the body as well as sensibility. While E. Pak recognizes the importance of the microphysical changes required by life in Bin-Zib, she does not push the analysis much further. Instead she seems to rely on the status quo of mainstream capitalistic society, seeing life in Bin-Zib as a potential obstacle toward the development of one’s career. E.

Pak concludes that Bin-Zib is playing a role as “a complement to the state’s welfare system” (p. 115).23

Contrariwise, Soojong Yoon (2013) takes Bin-Zib as an example of the burgeoning autonomist movement in South Korea.24 In his book Autonomist Movements and Housing Communities, he examines various autonomist movements in Europe, and “tries to find examples which provide supports for autonomist movements in Korean society” (p. 17).25 S. Yoon examines how Bin-Zib began from an opposition to the normative form of housing and has since expanded its experiment in various directions. He especially focuses on the fact that Bin-Zib does not generalize the community’s values, accepting individuals’ singularities. He points out that the experiment of Bin-Zib is distinct from existing social movements in South Korean society. “Instead of drawing a front line to confront, Bin-Zib residents try to produce a new autonomous space out of the totalitarian mechanism through which various differences are discriminated and eliminated” (p. 491).

In a collectively written book, Finding the Interface of Social Economy and Local Movements, N. Kang et al. (2012) examine Bin-Zib from the perspective of the social economy.26 Defining the social economy as “an attempt to develop a self-sufficient economic ecology within a local society” (p. 16), the authors criticize Korean Society for the way in which the social economy is degenerated into a subsidized economy by the state. The authors then inquire into the possibility of establishing an interface between the social economy and local social movements through a series of case studies. Bin-Zib

23 E. Pak (2012) argues that “Bin-Zib might not be a perfect model but a possibility to fill the vacuum left by the state welfare system and serves as a place for mutual aids outside the system (p. 115)”.
24 S. Yoon examines three cases in his book. The first case is “Neongma [rags] community”, which was formed by homeless people, ex-convicts, and war orphans in 1986 for self-supporting economy (p. 312-375). Another case is “Deobuleo saneun jib [House of living together]”. Homeless people formed this space in 2004 when they squatted an apartment scheduled to be torn down, running “a soup kitchen for the homeless by the homeless” (p. 376-426).
25 According to S. Yoon (2013), Autonomist movements in western society have secured their autonomous space in cities, establishing social bonds based on space (p. 17).
26 Along with Bin-Zib, this study examines two other cases of local grassroots movements, the Pumasi [exchange labour amongst neighbors] coop, a cooperative that supports local food, and Hamkkesaneun uri [We, living together], a local community dedicated to autonomous education.
is analyzed as “a new form of local movement which aims to share houses and money temporally in a nomadic city, where traditional communities were dismantled” (p. 75). Pointing out that the significance of Bin-Zib is its practice of sharing (p. 77), the authors however warn that Bin-Zib will come up against limitations unless the community dedicates more effort toward engaging local issues and widening public spheres, expanding local jobs and securing economic resources (p. 65).

These studies have offered valuable views of the housing experiment, pointing out its horizontality, fluidity, and autonomous characteristics, as well as the microphysical changes required for the experiment to function. However, while they have emphasized cultural aspects of the housing experiment, these studies have paid less attention to the way residents of Bin-Zib have dealt with property ownership. This is surprising given the very distinct manner in which Bin-Zib’s residents have managed property with respect to traditional modes of capitalistic property ownership. Even when researchers use the word sharing, a term used frequently by Bin-Zib residents, studies tend to focus on how residents share the space. In this regard, articles written by Bin-Zib residents have provided valuable perspectives through which to understand the economic aspects of the Bin-Zib experiment.

The introduction to Bin-Zib on its website clarifies the fact that that the community aims to create a different set of social and cultural relationships by generating a different form of economic sharing/exchange. Two articles (written collectively under the name of Bin-Go) and a booklet clearly demonstrate residents’ collective contemplation of the project to create economic flows alternative to those of capitalism. The article “Networking Communities for Sharing, Autonomy, and Hospitality” written by Jium (2013), one of the founders of Bin-Zib, shows how the community has undergone changes as they try to solve the problems they face. In this article, Jium also attempts to theorize Bin-Zib using the theoretical frame of association proposed by the Japanese

27 From around 2012, Bin-Zib started to actively engage the local community in various ways, with their second cooperative café as a focal point for this activity. The activists have established a network with local shops, and participated in many activities with local people, including issuing and circulating an alternative currency, as well as holding local festivals geared toward revitalizing a local street market. I discuss this relationship with the local community in Chapter 3.
thinker Karatani (2006) to overcome existing exchanges.\textsuperscript{28} But how can this radical economic project actually be adopted and practiced in the everyday life of the community?

This thesis aims to offer a different approach to the Bin-Zib experiment, moving beyond existing scholarship by looking at the way in which the practice of sharing space and money has been possible. Much of the minutes of meetings kept by participants in the housing experiment reveal how the practice of sharing in Bin-Zib cannot be separated from the arduous process of subjectivation. In addition, although researchers have pointed out that Bin-Zib is clearly distinct from existing Korean social movements, previous studies have not examined how the experiment has been formed in and against the socio cultural context. By situating Bin-Zib in the socio-political context of South Korea, this study aims to integrate both micro and macro perspectives.

1.5. Data, Confidentiality and Participants

For this study, I conducted extensive ethnographic field study work, combined with archival research, in order to understand and analyze Bin-Zib from the inside, by following the trajectory and dynamics of the community rather than imposing outside values upon it. I lived in the community from the end of August 2013 to the 4\textsuperscript{th} of January 2014 and thus gained a unique perspective on the political project. During the period of my field research, there were 42 jangtu [long-term guests] living in seven houses.

I conducted in-depth interviews with 28 residents who were deeply involved in community activities, as well as four former residents. I began conducting interviews with community residents starting in mid-November. Interviews with six residents and one former resident were conducted by online chatting after I left the community. I conducted more than two interviews with each person, and each interview typically took more than two hours. If a person had more experience and thus more relevant information, I occasionally conducted more interviews. For example, in one case I interviewed one person seven times.

\textsuperscript{28} I shall discuss this in the final chapter.
Data was also collected in the form of field notes, transcripts of meeting records, and transcripts of audio recordings of conversations from various events, spontaneous gatherings and everyday conversations. Table 1.1 only includes events, formally announced through digital channels of the community during my field research. There were small unofficial gatherings in the community almost every day. This table does not include meetings, except for the village meetings of the whole community, which restarted on 28th December 2013 after more than a one-year break. Besides the village meeting, I regularly joined the meetings of Haksuk, a specific Bin-Zib where I stayed (once a week), Bin-Go activists' meetings (twice a month), and Bin-Go information classes for new members (once a month). I also joined the café masters’ meetings and Haebangchon people’s meetings whenever I could.

**Table 1.1. Events held in the community during my field research**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Events and activities in the community</th>
<th>Main host</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>3rd: Theater performance in the café</td>
<td>Co-op café</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9th: English seminar, Listening to Harvey's Lecture (~every morning)</td>
<td>Bin-Yeonguso</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9th: A presentation about Bin-Zib for SIX’s visit</td>
<td>Bin-Yeonguso</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11th: Public lectures on the humanities: Playing with Mencius</td>
<td>Co-op café</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15th: Songpeon (traditional food) gathering</td>
<td>Bin-Zib</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23rd: Leftover foods after Harvest Celebration gathering</td>
<td>Bin-Zib</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25th: Public lectures on the humanities: Reading Chuang-tzu</td>
<td>Co-op café</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>29th: Village feast at Haksuk</td>
<td>Haksuk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>3rd: Haebangchon Exhibition opening party</td>
<td>Co-op café</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9th: Public lectures of humanities: Rousseau’s Les confessions</td>
<td>Co-op café</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13th: Making banchan (side dishes) gathering at Masil-Zib</td>
<td>Masil-Zib</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15th: A presentation about Bin-Zib for Chinese scholars’ visit</td>
<td>Bin-Yeonguso</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16th: Public lectures of humanities: Talking about Sex with Foucault</td>
<td>Co-op café</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19th: Salim-Zib performance: A Room of Muck Up</td>
<td>Salim-Zib</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20th: Pansori (Korean traditional singing) performance</td>
<td>Co-op café</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25th: Concert for songs and poems</td>
<td>Co-op café</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>27th: Village feast in Haksuk</td>
<td>Haksuk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>28th: Seminar, Towards Alternative Finance start (~ every Monday)</td>
<td>Bin-yeonguso /Bin-Go</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>2nd: A solidarity night for Milyang</td>
<td>Co-op café</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4th: Opening of Bar Haebangchon (~ every Fri. and Sat night)</td>
<td>Co-op café</td>
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<td></td>
<td>9th: Bazaar at Sinheung traditional market and village festival</td>
<td>Haebangchon people</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9th: Bin-Go project lecture: How Should a Commune Deal with Capital? 1.</td>
<td>Bin-Yeonguso /Bin-Go</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Location</td>
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<tr>
<td>10th</td>
<td>Food tasting of Café new menu (~ every Thurs., Sun. for 3 weeks)</td>
<td>Co-op café</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12th</td>
<td>Four pillars of destiny workshop start (~Every wed.)</td>
<td>Bin-Yeonguso</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14th</td>
<td>Public lectures of humanities: Reading Prometheus</td>
<td>Co-op café</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16th</td>
<td>Bin-Go project lecture 2.</td>
<td>Bin-Yeonguso /Bin-Go</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18th</td>
<td>Gathering to support Dulggae’s Rejection of joining military</td>
<td>Some residents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19th</td>
<td>Marginal Screening: Mary and Max</td>
<td>Co-op café</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21st</td>
<td>Public lectures of humanities: Life of Spinoza</td>
<td>Co-op café</td>
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<tr>
<td>22nd</td>
<td>Café concert: Bom Bom [spring spring]</td>
<td>Co-op café</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23rd</td>
<td>Bin-Go project lecture 3.</td>
<td>Bin-Yeonguso /Bin-Go</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24th</td>
<td>Brewing traditional liquor workshop</td>
<td>Haebangchon people</td>
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<tr>
<td>24th</td>
<td>Village feast, at Masil-Zib</td>
<td>Masil-Zib</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26th</td>
<td>Marginal Screening: Wedding of Tuya</td>
<td>Co-op café</td>
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<tr>
<td>27th</td>
<td>Bin-Go’s lecture about alternative finance at Café Gu</td>
<td>Bin-Go</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>3rd: Marginal Screening: Our Daily Bread</td>
<td>Co-op café</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5th-7th: Café masters membership trip</td>
<td>Co-op café</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7th: Bin-Go project lecture 4.</td>
<td>Bin-Yeonguso /Bin-Go</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8th: Screening of World Peace and Other 4th-grade Achievements</td>
<td>Co-op café</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10th: Marginal Screening: Les Glaneurs et la Glaneuse</td>
<td>Co-op café</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12th: Public lectures of humanities: Zhu Xi’s Great Learning</td>
<td>Co-op café</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13th: Bin-Go project lecture 5.</td>
<td>Bin-Yeonguso /Bin-Go</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14th: Solidarity night for the Cort Struggle: Who Made Their Guitars?</td>
<td>Co-op café</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17th: Marginal Screening: Les Glaneurs et la Glaneuse, Deux ans Apres</td>
<td>Co-op café</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13th: Bin-Go project lecture 6.</td>
<td>Bin-yeonguso /Bin-Go</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22th: Village feast at Salim-Zib</td>
<td>Salim-Zib</td>
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<td></td>
<td>26th: A public reading: Sweater Reading</td>
<td>Co-op café</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>27th-29th: Marginal Screening: Punk Film Festival</td>
<td>Co-op café</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>28th: Village meeting, re-start</td>
<td>Bin-Zib</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30th: Village meeting (for setting up a new house)</td>
<td>Bin-Zib</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>2th: HIV infection talk show with a resident Danbi</td>
<td>Some residents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4th: Home coming day + Home living day</td>
<td>Bin-Zib</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other sources of data included public articles, academic writings, articles written by residents, and posts by the community that accumulated in the digital sphere. The digital sphere was an especially valuable source of data on the community. For seven
years, Bin-Zib residents have used several kinds of digital communication tools simultaneously including Wiki, a team blog, a website, and other social network services. Along with a considerable amount of meeting records, there were also numerous online posts written by residents seeking to theorize the multiple dimensions of the community while making sense of its everyday life as an important part of the movement.

Table 1.2 shows various digital communication channels Bin-Zib residents have used, in chronological order. The orange color signifies each time the online page is extensively used while the yellow part signifies each time the online page is used intermittently. Numbers in each cell signify the number of posts written each year. The numbers within the Website and the Wiki columns, however, only show posts for two selected categories. For the pages and tools using social media, such as Facebook and Kakaotalk, counting the exact number of units was impossible. All postings on the Wiki, the team blog and the website from 2008 to January 2014 were coded and analyzed, while Bin-Zib mailing lists and Facebook pages were not included in my research because their main use has been to invite people outside of Bin-Zib to participate in big events of the community. Chatting messages on Kakaotalk were checked and analyzed in case the contents were relevant to the study.

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29 The Bin-Zib team blog was set up in Februray 2008. While the blog was extensively used during 2008 and 2009, the system did not identify who the writer of each post was, as all residents used the same ID, Bin-Zib, and shared the same password.

30 The Wiki page has nine categories and the website has 52 in total.

31 Kakaotalk is a free mobile messenger application for smartphones in South Korea. Users can share diverse content and information from photos, videos, voice messages, and URL links. Both one-on-one and group chats are available over Wifi or 3G.
Table 1.2. Digital channels Bin-Zib residents have used

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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wiki</td>
<td>Open source media</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team blog</td>
<td>Independent media</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mailing List</td>
<td>Independent media</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website</td>
<td>Independent media</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>598</td>
<td>621</td>
<td>443</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Café blog</td>
<td>Independent media</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Café page</td>
<td>Social media</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haebang - chon page</td>
<td>Social media</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Bin-Go page</td>
<td>Social media</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>KakaoTalk</td>
<td>Social media</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In my account of the Bin-Zib community and my time there I discuss specific episodes or conversations in detail in order to transmit the depth and richness of the research, yet I have maintained anonymity for the participants. In the community, residents use nicknames mainly in the interests of avoiding the problem of hierarchy, which is deeply embedded in South Korean society. I changed the nicknames of residents to protect the identity, particularly when they shared their perspectives on sensitive issues, unless their statements were made publicly and signed with their nicknames on the website. I also omitted the specific date, time, and place of unofficial gatherings.

Amongst the 42 long-term guests I met, there were three teenage residents. One of the teenagers had left school and was working part time. The other two teenage residents were de-schooling students, who did not attend state-endorsed schools. One of them introduced herself as an animation director. The other was participating in an alternative educational program, called Road Scholar, through which de-schooling students traveled together with teachers. There were four residents in their late forties or early fifties. They had different careers: as a documentary film director, a member of a

32 Road Scholar is an alternative educational program run by a social enterprise by the name of Travelers’ Make an Amazing Planet.
NGO, a co-organizer of a co-operative restaurant, and a survivor of a Hyungjae Welfare Center.\footnote{The Hyungjae Welfare Center is a welfare facility run in 1980s in Busan, the second biggest city in the country. It was known for its incredibly brutal violence to inmates and severe corruption among management. Being funded by the military government, the facility not only took orphans and the homeless but also kidnapped people found out after the curfew set by the government. During its 12 years of operation, over 500 people died in brutal circumstances in the center. The facility was closed in 1987 without a proper investigation. However, this tragic and shameful affair was illuminated in 2012 as Jongsun Han, a survivor of the facility, held a one-man protest in front of the National Assembly, demanding a commission of inquiry. In 2013 J. Han published a book titled \textit{A Survived Child} with co-writers Gyuchan Jeon (a cultural studies researcher) and Raegoon Pak (a human right activist). An association for survivors and bereaved family of Hyungjae Welfare Center was also formed that year. Since the resident moved in to Bin-Zib during the last days of my field research there, I did not have a chance to interview him. He is still living at Bin-Zib. He earns his living by working construction while doing activities for the association for survivors.}

Most residents were in their twenties and thirties, living on a small income, working part-time jobs. Residents who were regular workers were mostly involved in non-profit organizations while six residents worked at the community café. There were differences among residents’ financial conditions, but not significant ones. In terms of the cultural, educational background, however, there was a great deal of diversity. For example, there were those who had traced the normative path of Korean society, having attended a highly privileged university while there were those who had not participated in the public education system as their parents suggested home-schooling or alternative education programs. There were also those who had been deprived of the opportunity of proper education altogether.

\textbf{1.6. Remarks on Methods}

Contrary to many researchers’ warnings that getting into a research locale “can be fraught with difficulties” (Berg, 2009, p. 204), my acceptance into the Bin-Zib community was immediate. This acceptance stemmed first of all from the exceptional openness of the community. Also, I had been acquainted with the individuals who became the first generation of Bin-Zib for a long time prior to the inception of the community. Lastly, I had also stayed there twice previously as a short-term guest, in
2008 and 2012, each time for a week. So I was no stranger to the community, although only two of my long-time friends still remained in Bin-Zib during my research there.

These personal dimensions of my relationship with Bin-Zib functioned as a kind of double-edged sword. While I was aware of certain aspects of Bin-Zib, aspects that many actual residents did not know about, this information was inevitably biased from having heard the stories only from particular participants. I was very accustomed to the unique atmosphere of Bin-Zib, one which many first-time visitors perceive as strange. This close yet limited perspective certainly affected my view of Bin-Zib, and as a result I tended to overlook certain phenomena, especially in the initial stages of the fieldwork.\(^\text{34}\)

Recognizing my ambiguous position, I tried to find the fictional balance between participation and observation in the early stages of my field research, as a novice researcher. Striving to establish a satisfactory position between those of participant and an observer, I could not help but restrain myself from interjecting my own opinion in discussions with the community. However, I felt uncomfortable with being a detached researcher. This discomfort perhaps stemmed from my own inclinations as an activist, having always considered myself a supporter of Bin-Zib. The discomfort also flowed from my scepticism about the dichotomy between researchers and subjects. Instead of presupposing the gap between academia, activism and everyday practices, I simply decided to become actively engaged in community life, while trying to analyze myself as part of the research.

1.6.1. Constructive engagement

In conducting the field research in Bin-Zib, I not only participated in various events in the community, but also organized some of them. I engaged in these events wholeheartedly, enjoying the daily rhythm of community life and developing a deep affinity with residents. I even clashed with some residents occasionally over important community decisions. From the viewpoint of methodological convention, which advises “an observer should influence the scene as little as possible” (Fine, 1993, p. 281), my engagement was inappropriate. However, I was able to observe the complicated and

\(^{34}\) Regarding the unique atmosphere of Bin-Zib, see Chapters 3 and 4.
nuanced stances of each resident more clearly by expressing my own opinions and eliciting deeper discussions. The moments of tension helped me to more clearly understand how various desires and interests clashed over issues, and gave me the experience associated with being a part of the process where residents dealt with those problems collectively. Ironically I became “unobtrusive” in these obtrusive acts.

Methodological strategies should of course be adopted with the greatest care depending on the type of group a researcher is examining. Deep engagement with the community, however, could be an applicable method when the community is established with the intention of forming an alternative lifestyle or relationships. Reviewing Michael Schwalbe’s (1996) ethnographic research on the men’s movement, Brooke Harrington (2002) defines Schwalbe’s key strategies as provocation and constructive engagement (p. 58). According to Harrington, Schwalbe raised tensions by expressing provocative opinions, to which many members might feel hostility, rather than blending in. These strategies were effective because the researcher not only aimed to “tell an interesting sociological story, but to change the movement itself” (p. 58) as one of the committed members. With a similar attitude, I tried to engage constructively to understand the community in which residents were required to change their daily life patterns in various ways, creating new values and relations, from the inside.

1.6.2. Estrangement as a lens of reflexivity

Estrangement, a concept I borrow from Berthold Brecht (1961), was another disposition characterizing my research. It was especially valuable considering the fact that I had admittedly formed an assessment of the community before the field research even began. As a friend of the community as well as a supporter of autonomous political movements, I had pre-existing conceptions and assessments of the community while never having actually lived there. I mistakenly believed that I could understand and

35 Men’s movement is a social movement, consisted of “networks of men self-consciously involved in activities relating to men and gender”. It emerged in the late 1960s and 1970s in western culture (Flood, 2007, p. 418). What Schwalbe examine is the mythopoetic men’s movement, based on spiritual perspectives.

36 Schwalbe (1996) writes, “My hope is that the mythopoetic men will benefit from having a mirror held up to the shadow side of their activity” (p. 7).
analyze this community well, but it did not take long before I realized that I only knew a small fraction of what constituted the community. This realization prompted me to pay attention to different voices, not only from earlier generations, but also others whom I had not heeded closely.

Going through Bin-Zib’s output in the digital sphere was a great way to listen to these other voices. In doing so, at one point I unexpectedly found myself staring at the transcript of a meeting I had attended in 2012. It was a very strange experience, even though I clearly remembered what I had said in the meeting. I came upon my own comments, articulating a specific direction for Bin-Zib as a social activist. Expressing my opposition to capitalist values, my words were aimed at those who did not want to share resources with others. This experience surprisingly estranged me from the way I had always viewed and related to Bin-Zib. Reading the record, I was able to observe my own participation in forming the specific constellation of Bin-Zib.

This experience provided me with a benchmark for how I should understand the balance between participation and observation, not as poised between two extremes but as one of being an active part of the community while analyzing myself as part of the research. In other words, it was about turning the “lens back onto one self to recognize and take responsibility for one’s own situatedness within the research and the effect” (Berger, 2013, p. 2). Being reminded of what Brecht (1961) describes as “the estrangement effect”, I tried to develop this experience as a strategy to secure the greatest possible degree of analytical distance.

In coining the concept of the estrangement (or distancing) effect, Brecht asserts that the audience should maintain some emotional distance to reflect on what is being

37 During my second stay in 2012, I witnessed serious debates concerning how to use collective money. When I heard that the debate had been going on for more than six months, a wave of frustration overcame me. It seemed beyond reason to me that they had endured this agony in order to convince newcomers who disagreed with the fundamental ideas of the community. I attended one of the meetings, to which, pursuant to the spirit of open community, non-residents were welcomed, and stated my opinion of Bin-Zib being not only a living space but also a movement, “as an observer as well as a supporter of the movement” (Che, 2012, June 25).

38 In this sense, being part of the community did not mean “going native by absorbing our subjects’ values” (Clawson, 2009, p. 68). Rather, it meant tracing diverse elements and threads in the complicated texture of community, while becoming a part of the rhythm of weaving.
presented in a critical manner. For Brecht the estrangement effect is achieved in Chinese drama, where “the performer shows that this man [the character] is not in control of himself” (Brecht, cited in Berggren, 1990). “The audience can no longer have the illusion of being the unseen spectator at an event which is really taking place” (Drain, 1995, p. 303). In doing so, actor and spectator both become critical observers (not without empathy) of the actions the actor performs (Martin, 1999). While the term was developed to describe theatre, it has significant implications for all relationships between those who are seeing and those who are seen. How do I become a critical observer of the actions performed by the actors, including myself? How can estrangement be adopted in the field of research?

As noted, during my time at Bin-Zib I was fully engaged in the communal events taking place. At the same time, I tried to distance myself from any personal feelings and the roles that I had when I analyzed the events at a later date. I thus changed the way I transcribed people’s contributions to community meetings. During the first month of the field research, I did this transcription myself.\footnote{My taking on of this responsibility was welcomed because it was otherwise undertaken by participants in rotation.} To utilize the method of estrangement through note taking, however, I eventually discontinued the task after a month, passing it on to other residents. By doing so, I could concentrate on my own memo taking to avoid missing any nuanced details. In addition, I was thus able to gain access to volumes of meeting records in which my engagements were transcribed and described in the third person.

I also changed the way I recorded field notes. Initially, I added analysis to my description of experiences on a daily basis. Later I changed the approach to simply record what happened, including my own speech and actions, as accurately as possible. In addition, as I built an affinity with Bin-Zib residents over time, they encouraged me to use an audio recorder, which allowed me to become absorbed in the situation to a greater degree, even for very intimate conversations over drinks. Transcribing the audio recordings of heated moments, which included my own awkward voice, also allowed me to keep a distance and analyze the situation at a later point.
The more I interviewed a person, the more intensive the quality of everyday conversations with that person was. Residents whom I had already interviewed tended to give me their opinions about my research questions in everyday conversation. It can be said that I was not the only one who experienced estrangement. Participants also were going through estrangement, whether consciously or not, through their engagement with my research, reflecting on their everyday life in critical ways.

1.6.3. Becoming a “co-researcher”

Rather than being a detached researcher, I was therefore immersed in the community, eagerly working to engage constructively in the movement of urban communing. At the same time, I tried to examine this movement critically, by turning the lens of analysis back on myself as well as situating both Bin-Zib and myself within the larger social context. I believe these strategies were conducive to a better and more thorough understanding of Bin-Zib, where residents themselves have analyzed their own situations reflexively in order to deal with their problems.

Osterweil (2013) argues that contemporary activism, which is “constituted by experimental, reflexive, critical knowledge-practices” (p. 600), offers a methodological model for critical academic studies. Bin-Zib’s online texts echo the discourses characteristic of contemporary activism that Osterweil describes. Bin-Zib residents have both read academic literature collectively and invited leftist scholars to their projects, pushing them to think of possible alternatives. They also have tried to experiment with what they learned from collective studies in their life, producing reflective articles. Research on Bin-Zib thus inevitably assumed the characteristics of public anthropology, which aims to engage larger social issues and the public beyond “self-imposed disciplinary boundaries” (Borofsky, 2007) by getting rid of “unnecessary distinctions” between politics, actions, and intellectual work. (Osterweil, 2013, p. 599-600).

For example, during my field research, people who worked for the communal bank Bin-Go and other residents who had an interest in the issue prepared a project involving a series of lectures dedicated to the question of “How should a commune deal
with capital?” For six weeks, we invited five scholars to deliver lectures on this topic. Through these lectures we not only aimed to learn from the scholars’ economic visions and analyses. We also questioned and discussed the situations we had confronted in running Bin-Go. At the same time, we explained the Bin-Go project to the scholars, trying to engage them with the project. In this sense, Bin-Zib residents who struggled to devise an alternative way of housing and money acted along what Gigi Roggero (2014) calls a “middle radius”, where “the theory becomes practice and the practice becomes theory” (p. 518).

I believe that this process, or “co-research” which translates and implements discourse into practice while transforming discourse from the starting point of a struggle (Roggero, 2014), constitutes a significant part of Bin-Zib’s communicative style—a style through which they compose the common. This process is always collective. Thus, I would say I became involved in the collective process of co-research while at the same time trying to catalyze the process.

1.7. Thesis Structure

This thesis is divided into five chapters. This first chapter has focused on establishing the research questions and theoretical frames, as well as reviewing relevant literatures and discussing the methodology. Chapter Two provides an overview of the socio economic and cultural context that influenced the formation of Bin-Zib. Chapter Three outlines a brief history of Bin-Zib, discussing how the community has evolved

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40 Here I use the word we as I was one of organizers of the lecture project. The way Bin-Zib’s residents contacted leftist scholars was simple. They contacted scholars they thought interesting and relevant based on the scholars’ published articles and books. As most scholars were working in the university, their contact information such as email address was easy to find. Bin-Zib activists sent an email, introducing themselves and the purpose of the lecture. Not all the scholars joined the project, but in this way Bin-Zib residents had built a kind of loose network of leftist scholars and activists.

41 In preparation for the lecture and fruitful discussions, we collectively studied the scholars’ writings and prepared relevant questions related to our experiences in running Bin-Go. Every Monday evening around 10-12 people joined the study, reading articles and books written by those whom they had invited. Residents tried to formulate good questions for each lecturer in order to get the most out of them, while preparing a presentation regarding Bin-Go to engage the scholars.
through solving problems it confronted. Here I attempt to periodize the micro history of the community as characterized by three distinct phases based on significant changes the community experienced. Chapter Four theorizes two significant principles of Bin-Zib, which have formed the base of the community; expanding communism and travellers’ communication. It also examines how the principles have forced the community to form an argumentative space where different ethics, perceptions and sensibilities collide. I present detailed case studies of particularly contentious issues in the community and try to understand how residents deal with those issues as well as how political subjectivation takes place in the process. Chapter Five summarizes my research findings and discusses the potentialities and challenges of Bin-Zib as an ongoing movement of communicating communes.
Chapter 2.

“Isn’t it Possible to Live Differently Here?”: Contextualizing Bin-Zib

Bin-Zib was started in February of 2008 in Seoul, the center of a metropolis where home ownership has much more to do with commodity investment than residency. Three Koreans rented an apartment floor with a rooftop in a dilapidated hilly neighbourhood located in the center of Seoul. To rent the apartment, the three paid a $135,000 (CAD) jeonse [key-money] deposit.

The jeonse is a type of rental contract, the predominant way to rent a house or a room in South Korea until the 1990s. A tenant rents a house for a year or two, making a lump sum deposit of key money, which is typically from 40 percent to 70 percent of the property value (Jinwon 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.\(^1\) Conventionally, the deposited key money has been calculated at 12 percent interest per year in lieu of a monthly payment.\(^2\) There is also a mixed form of jeonse through which “the tenant does not pay the full jeonse deposit, but instead pays monthly rent to fill the gap” (J. Kim, 2013, p. 338). For example, a $200,000 of full jeonse can be transferred into a $100,000 jeonse and $1,000 monthly rent.

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\(^1\) According to Seongkyu Ha (2002), who researches housing policy in Korea, jeonse was “most frequent in cities and the proportion of jeonse households has been growing since the 1970s” (p. 197).

\(^2\) The Housing Lease Protection Act puts a limit on the conversion rate for jeonse to monthly rent, but the actual rate is decided between a tenant and a landlord. From 2002, the upper limit of the conversion rate was 14 percent. In 2013 it became 10 percent (Miju Pak, 2013, October 19).
Jeonse is unique to South Korea. The jeonse contract was developed in Korean society due to specific conditions arising during the period of state-led economic development under the military government (H. Shin, 2008; N. Sohn, 2008; J. Kim, 2013). These conditions included the lack of an established system of financing (or mortgages) in the housing sector as well as a constant rise in real estate prices. As Hyunbang Shin (2008), who has analyzed political economy of urban development in Asian cities, points out, tenants favour this system over other rental systems and “[a] monthly rent payment system is more likely to be chosen when tenants are financially incapable of paying the full jeonse key money” (p. 412). However, the one who profits the most from this system is the landlord. While the government controlled interest rates to the advantage of the industrial sector, “housing has been regarded as a superior investment compared to financial savings” (J. Kim, 2013, p. 339).³ While the key money is “usually invested by landlords in formal and informal financial markets… the tenants relinquish the opportunity to make any interest on the income” (H. Shin, 2008, p. 413).

The jeonse deposit therefore works as a “source of funds” for landlords (H. Shin, 2008 p. 414), guaranteeing an unusually high rate of profit. Living conditions for those who do not have access to key money, however, have historically been extremely degraded. Tenants live in overcrowding buildings or illegal cheap boarding houses such as jjogbang [dosshouses], in many cases without adequate water supply, ventilation, or garbage disposal (Seong-kyu Ha, 2002, p. 197). In this context, the founders of Bin-Zib “communized” their key money and the rented home by opening the place to others. In opening Bin-Zib, the founders declared that the only principle that governed the experiment was that the place had no owner. Even the original residents considered themselves guests.

Opening Bin-Zib, the founders clearly intended to create social relations in the middle of the city different from those reigning within capitalist society in Korea. The following illustrates their critique of the privatized, neoliberal relations of home ownership

³ A journalist Dong-gi Kwak (2010, 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”.
in Seoul and their aim of promoting a different mode of life by organizing a different mode of housing:

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 that house. We have to compete to own things because nobody shares them. We cannot live with others because we don’t open our house to others. Even families are destroyed because we are calculating the gains and the losses between family members. Since nobody opens the door of her house, there are no neighbours or friends. (...) 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 enriching without accumulating things in our house. If we share a house, it makes us a family even though we’ve just met each other. Making new neighbours and friends everyday, we can propose to live together, loving and helping each other. Bin-Zib is an attempt to actualize this possibility (Jium, 2010, September).

Striving to form a different life in the urban setting, Bin-Zib differentiated itself from other social movements in South Korean society. It did not pursue a unitary value or attempt to change the whole of society but only residents’ relation in their own life. What social, political and cultural factors led to Bin-Zib’s formation? Keeping this question in mind, in this chapter I situate Bin-Zib in the socio-economic and cultural context of South Korean society.

2.1. The Real Estate Class Society: Bin-Zib’s Socio-Economic Context

According to the Seoul City Government (2013), more than 120,000 people in Seoul live in insecure and inadequate housing arrangements, unable to afford the rent required for standard housing. This is mainly a result of the fact that home ownership is primarily a means of investment in Korea. This situation is now a characteristic feature of cities under neoliberalism (Dunn, 2013; Harvey, 2014). Analysing the connection between the process of neoliberalization and urban transformation, Jamie Peck, Nik Theodore and Neil Brenner (2009) assert that “[c]ities have become strategically

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4 In 2002, 16.5 percent of households owned 60 percent of houses in the country (Nakgu Sohn, 2008, p. 48).
important arenas in which neoliberalizing forms of creative destruction have been unfolding” (p. 57).

Seoul can be seen as a key site in the “uneven, crisis-laden advance of neoliberal restructuring projects” (Peck, Theodore, & Brenner 2009, p. 49). This section of the thesis investigates how political economic dynamics have driven the development of what Peck, Theodore and Brenner (2009) call “neoliberal urbanism” in Seoul. The conditions for this mode of development were first brought about by the military dictatorship, which carried out land and housing privatizations and made Seoul the center of its urban development project, from the 1960s to the 1980s. Then, international capital received the baton of domestic capitalist development, catalyzing the process of financialization of land and housing, and advancing the full-scale neoliberal urbanism Seoul is marked by today. As a result, Seoul has become a node in a global network of neoliberalizing cities that produces and reproduces the neoliberal form of life, thus depriving the urban poor of “the right to the city” (Harvey, 2003).

With twenty two million people, the capital region of South Korea is home to forty five percent of the population. The rapid industrialization of the country beginning in the 1960s coincided with the explosive population growth of metropolitan Seoul. While the sixteen-year rule (1963-1979) of dictator Park Chung-hee, backed by the United States and Japan, is often credited with this period of economic growth, the so-called miracle on the Han River, one characterized by chaebol [conglomerates]-driven economy, supported by the government, was built on the backs of those who moved from the countryside to the city.

Korea was one of the poorest countries in the world in the 1950s, with a per capita gross national product (GNP) of less than $88 (Chonsoon Ihm, 1988, p. 165). For

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5 The expression the miracle on Han River refers to South Korea's postwar export-fuelled period of economic growth. In The Bare Face of Park Chung-hee (Jongil Yu et al, 2011), scholars analyze how the so-called economic miracle was achieved based on the exploitation of labourers, causing an extreme inequality and a chaebol [conglomerates]-centered economy.

6 Chaebol is a family-controlled large conglomerate in South Korea. The South Korean economy was led by a handful of large Chaebols during this economic period, including Samsung, Hyundai, SK and others. “The sales of Korea’s ten largest companies are equal to about 80 percent of Korea’s GDP” (Eunjung Kwon, 2012, August 28).
twenty-five years thereafter, Korea experienced some of the highest levels of economic growth in the world, with a 9.2 percent average annual rate of real growth in GNP between 1962 and 1979 (p. 165). Per capita gross national income (GNI) in South Korea hit $22,000 in 2007, ranking the country eleventh in the world (Statistics Korea, 2014). Given this seemingly miraculous economic transformation, South Korea was widely celebrated during the 1990s as one of four Asian tigers. This development also came at the cost of intensifying exploitation, inequality, and the repression of workers’ organizations, however. In other words, as Kwanghyeon Sim (2010), who has analyzed Korean culture from the perspective of political economy, points out, South Korean society has experienced “an extremely compressed and refracted form of development” (p. 21).

Among the reasons for rapid economic growth, the availability of cheap labour has been critical. While the military government “provided various incentives for export industries” under an aggressive policy of export growth (C. Ihm, 1988), a seemingly infinite supply of cheap labour in the countryside was significant (Jonggu Lee, 2002, p. 17). The influx of migrant rural populations created expansive shantytowns in Seoul, as the city’s population grew from 3,250,000 in 1963 to more than ten million in 1998 (D. Kwak, 2010, September 20). Working conditions for factory workers in the 1960s and 1970s were literally miserable, and any attempt to form independent union organizations was fiercely repressed (Minns, 2001). According to John Minns (2001), the hourly wage in Korean manufacturing was 75 percent that of Taiwan and 80 percent of that in Hong Kong, with the longest work week and the highest rate of industrial accidents in the world (p. 181). Tae-il Jeon (1948-1970), the 22 year-old worker who committed suicide in

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7 The term Asian Tigers, or Asian Dragons, refers to Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan, all of which recorded notable economic growth between the 1960s and the 1990s.
1970 by burning himself to death in order to protest of the harsh working conditions in South Korean factories, symbolizes this period of brutal labour repression.\(^8\)

The South Korean state tightly controlled the financial sector during this period (Yoonje Cho and Joonkyung Kim, 1995; David Kang, 2002; Sanghack Lee and Kiwoong Cheong, 2010).\(^9\) While the government used the banking system “as a treasury unit to finance development projects and to manage risk sharing in the economy” (Y. Cho and J. Kim, 1995, p. 9), chaebols expanded their scale because size was an important criterion for ensuring political connections with business (S. Lee and K. Cheong, 2010, p. 223).\(^10\) This arrangement resulted in high debt ratios for Korean chaebols. Industrial investment in South Korea was financed largely by debt incurred from the banks, and the government undertook four major corporate bail out exercises, in 1969-70, 1972,

\(^8\) Tae-il Jeon (1948-1970) worked in the Pyeonghwasijang [Peace Market], where over 20,000 women between the ages of 14 and 24 worked as seamstresses. They worked for an average of 15 hours per day in low ceillinged rooms where they even could not stand upright, being paid the equivalent of the price of a cup of coffee at a teashop for a day’s work (Minns, 2001). Recognizing the existence of the Labour Standard Act in 1968, Tae-il Jeon organized the first labour movement organization Babohoe [group of idiots] in the Peace Market. He researched labour conditions and let workers know about the Labour Standard Act. In 1970, he set himself on fire after police shut down a labour demonstration Jeon organized. He yelled “Following the Labour Standard Act! We are not machines!” Tae-il Jeon’s death touched off the formation of the labour movement in the country. See Critical Biography of Jeon Tae-il (Y. Jo, 1983).

\(^9\) Under the policy of financial repression in the 1960s and 1970s, chaebols were expanded significantly as a result of low-interest loans and tax advantages offered in return for political bribes (David Kang, 2002, p. 3-4).

\(^{10}\) Calling this “a government-industry-bank co-insurance scheme” (p. 7), Y. Cho and J. Kim (1995) claim “this style of economic management resembled the operational mode of a corporation - in this case, Korea, Inc.”, in which banks served as the treasury unit, the industrial sector as the production and marketing units, and the government as the central planning and control unit (p. 9). While, Y. Cho and K. Kim examine how the military government played a pervasive role in economic development, their research ignores the unbalanced financial structure caused by the policy and praises its “effective” economic development.
1979-81, and 1984-88, “in order to ride out recessions and avoid major financial crises” (Y. Cho and J. Kim, 1995, p. 53).11

While the chaebols increased in scale and took on critical levels of debt, land prices in the country were skyrocketing. In The Bare Face of Park Chung-hee, an economist Jeong-u Yi (2011) writes, “the developmental dictatorship gave birth to “two monsters” in South Korean society, namely the astronomical price of land and the consumer price index”. Backed by the government, chaebols raised funds using land as collateral, meaning the Korean economy “was a risk-free economy as long as land prices were secured” (Jong-gyu Pak and Yunje Jo, 2002).

Analyzing how land speculation was connected with the collusion between business and politics, J. Yi (2011) argues, “The miraculous and acclaimed economic growth during the dictatorship was actually the very hotbed of a bubble economy.” The military government, in other words, manipulated the Korean real estate market. “It was like cheating in gambling”, says Seok-gi Kim, a researcher of the chaebols. “Once the government made a plan for building infrastructure such as highways, the price of land went up more than tenfold overnight” (cited in J. Yi, 2011).12 The government enabled chaebols to produce high profits by informally giving them information regarding the imminent construction of infrastructure in return for political contributions (Junman Kang, 2006; J. Yi, 2011; Simin Yoo, 2014). From 1974 to 1987, businesses that invested in

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11 In 1969, the Ministry of Finance announced that 45 percent of 83 firms that had taken loans from banks were insolvent (Jang Gyu Lee, 2012). Three years later, in 1972, the government issued its Economic Emergency Decree to bail out “the debt-ridden corporate sector” (Y. Cho and J. Kim, 1995), shifting the burden to bank depositors. The so-called “8.3 bail out” in 1972 included an immediate moratorium on the payment of all corporate debt and extensive rescheduling of bank loans at reduced interest rates. In doing so, the debt ratio of chaebols went from 394 percent to 288 percent in a year, while economic growth rate went from 6.5 percent to 14.8 percent (J. G. Lee, 2012, p. 165).

12 While the back-scratching alliance of the government and chaebols over lands was an open secret, so-called Suseo Affair officially revealed a slice of the deep-rooted corruption. In 1991, a newspaper Segyeilbo reported a large amount of off-the-books money over land development in Suseo area. The prosecution investigation revealed that Hanbo group, one of chaebols, gave bribes to officials of Ministry of Construction, members of National Assembly and officials of Chung Wa Dae (the president house), but failed to give an entire picture and the de facto power. It was revealed in the 1995 that the then president Rho Taewoo got $16,844,000 of secret funds from the Hanbo CEO in return for removing restriction on land development for Hanbo owned land (J. Kang, 2006, p. 73).
land gained, on average, 1,004 percent profits, while businesses that invested in production gained 331 percent profits (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 chaebol assets.

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 redevelopment. 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 run-down neighbourhoods 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 title, around 80 percent was evicted from their home (p. 908-916). With demolition and redevelopment as its main methods, the project privatized most state-owned land, closing the rent gap between dilapidated neighbourhoods and other areas (p. 916). As far as development of the city is concerned, working class and proletarian neighbourhoods were eliminated, providing modern housing for an emerging middle class population.

While chaebols “wielded enough power and influence to launch a successful campaign for the steady dismantling of the state’s impressive regulatory apparatus” (Harvey, 2005, p. 107), national scale civil uprisings, the Yuwol Minjuhwa Hangjaeng [June Democratic Struggle], put an end to the military regime in 1987. South Korea was democratized, restoring basic civil rights including popular vote in presidential elections as well as freedom of the press (Seong-guk Go, 1994, p. 189). There also were a series

13 The development project was typically carried out by violently evicting residents as the shantytowns were razed to the ground. From 1983 to 1985 there were around 100 struggles against these evictions and demolitions as part of “the city poor movement” (Bohyeon Pak, 2010 February 23). In addition, professional demolition companies, which hired gangsters, appeared in the late 1980 as the JPR let the private sector be the main agent of the redevelopment project (Suhyeon Kim, 1999). Regarding demolition companies’ brutal violence, see The Report about Dawon Construction’s Tear Down Crime (1998), collectively written by twelve civil society organizations.
of labour struggles beginning in July of the same year, with more than 30 strikes per day over three months, sparked by the struggle of workers at Hyundai Heavy Industries (Munseong Kim, 2012, September 3). In establishing democratic labour unions, reducing working hours, and raising wages, the 1987 Great Labour Struggle enhanced the position of the working class in South Korea (Jung-gi Rho, 2012). As successive governments failed to deal with the rising power of organized labour, “the capitalist class came to favour its own version of neoliberalization” (Harvey, 2005, p. 108) which was mainly based on the deregulation of the labour market and finance.

The currency crisis of 1996 hit the country very hard. While the globalization policy of Moonmin Jeongbu [the civilian government] is generally considered the immediate cause of the financial crisis,14 there were already serious structural problems in the South Korean economy (Krueger and Jungho Yoo, 2002; J. Yi, 2011; J. Lee, 2012), with the “8.3 bail out” of 1972 being an early and clear example of these structural problems. Once the doors of the “risk-free economy” (J. Pak and Y. Jo, 2002) were opened to the world, the private sector could no longer be backstopped by the government. In addition, with the end of the Cold War, there was no longer a reason for US to offer financial support, and Wall Street pushed for “financial liberalization for its own specific reasons of profitability” (Harvey, 2005, p. 111). Many chaebols in the country went bankrupt during this period, a huge shock to the whole of South Korean society.

The International Monetary Fund (hereafter IMF) then took steps to reshape the national economy, imposing financial deregulation and corporate restructuring in return for a loan of $72 billion. As the ideology of neoliberalism started to take root in Korea, citizens became accustomed to lay-offs at affected companies. What South Korea’s first civilian government had tried to do, especially in terms of deregulating employment

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14 In 1993, the first civilian government, called Moonmin Jeongbu, held office in South Korea after 30 years plus military regime. Led by former president Kim Young Sam, Moonmin Jeongbu was the first flag bearer of neoliberalism. It pushed policies for a more flexible labour market while joining the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (Jihwan Hwang, 2006).
protection, was arguably accomplished by the IMF.\footnote{The Korean government sought to deregulate labour again in 1996, but failed to do so because of a series of large and radical strikes. However, as Klein (2007) points out, the rules of the game had been changed by the economic crisis. “The economic meltdown was so dire that it gave governments the license … to declare temporary authoritarian rule” (p. 270).} Between 1997 and 1999, the unemployment rate nearly tripled. The percent of South Koreans who identified as middle class, which stood at 63.7 percent in 1996, plummeted to 38.4 percent in 1999. The suicide rate shot up 50 percent in 1998 (Klein, 2007, p. 265-272). If the military government had constructed an ideal infrastructure for the growth of domestic capital in advance of wholesale privatization of land and housing, the IMF prepared the ground for a second round of exploitation by global capital, further driving the “flexibilization” of the South Korean labour force.

Meanwhile, the metropolis of Seoul was submitted to its own restructuring. As Sangyeong Lee, a real estate market researcher, (2011) puts 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”, recalling Harvey’s (2014) discussion of how “[h]ousing provision under capitalism has moved (…) from a situation in which the pursuit of use values dominated to one where exchange values moved to the fore” (p. 22). What followed can be described as re-gentrification. Apartment buildings in the 1980s were typically built on razed shantytowns, providing desirable middle-class housing for the protagonists 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. According to critical political economist Seokman Hong (2009), between 1999 and 2009 the contribution made by real estate development to South Korea’s GNP was 19.2 percent, the highest of any OECD country (p. 15). This was mainly due to the Project-Financing (PF) policy adopted in 2000, which enabled financial institutions to participate more directly in the process of redevelopment, issuing various derivative securities.

The greedy triangle of government, construction companies and speculative investors/financial institutions attempted to build luxurious
mansions and business centers after forcing out existing residents and tenants. (S. Hong, 2009, p. 25)

In combination with steady population growth, expanding speculative investment in real estate in Korea has caused a serious housing problem in Seoul. According to Nakgu Sohn (2008, p. 25), the author of The Real Estate Class Society, from 1963 to 2007 land prices in Seoul rose by a factor of 1176, the rate of inflation by 43, and the average worker’s income by a factor of 15. This trend has benefited property owners, and made urban living extremely difficult for low-income renters.

Other than ownership or renting through the jeonse [key-money] deposit system, remaining housing options are short-term and precarious. As mentioned above, more than 120,000 people in Seoul reside in unstable arrangements. These alternative modes of shelter include greenhouses, jjokbangs [dosshouses], or gosiwons. A greenhouse is a complex originally for farming but modified as a residential space without proper facilities. A jjokbang [dosshouse], referred to by the Health World Network (2012, December 28) as the “the last residence of the poor”, is around 9 square meter sized room which can be rented without a deposit. There is no kitchen, and residents use a common toilet (Wonseok Nam, 2013). A gosiwon was originally a residential complex for people going through an intensive preparation period for state examinations such as the bar exam or examinations to qualify for various kinds and levels of bureaucratic jobs. Since passing state examinations guarantees a corresponding social status in South Korea, many university students dedicate as much as 3-4 years to prepare for the exam, living in a gosiwon room not only to save money but also to be isolated from the outside world. However, since the 1990s, the gosiwon has been turned into a low-cost residential choice for low-income urban populations such as precarious workers, the disabled, welfare recipients, and others. As a result, the number of gosiwon complexes in Seoul jumped up from 811 in 2001 to 2814 in 2006 (Jeong Bong Lee, 2006).

These vulnerable residential social groups are expanding in number even though there is enough housing in the city to accommodate them. (N. Sohn, 2009, p. 48). The high price of urban housing, driven by redevelopment projects and real estate speculation, has not only shattered many urban neighbourhoods but has also turned financialization into a kind of moral virtue.
Seoul could count on fairly durable local communities and social relationships in shantytowns (daldongne) or old neighbourhoods. However, as gentrification destroyed most of these communities beginning in the late 1980s, the residential space for the poor has been both isolated and fragmented. The jokbang and gosiwon living arrangements typify the fragmentation of residential space and isolation in urban housing arrangements (J.B. Lee, 2006). The poor living in such conditions are not only deprived of their basic economic needs but also of a sense of community, whether familial, societal, cultural or political.

As we have seen, the recent economic development of South Korean society has been characterized by a gradual process of neoliberal urbanism, with the city of Seoul at its center. The military regime forged an extremely polarized society, promoting a chaebol-driven economy. The dictatorship not only gave chaebols credit and tax advantages, but also controlled their labour forces. The regime manipulated economic crises by shifting the burden to bank depositors through a series of bailouts of debt incurred by chaebols. Moreover, the military government carried out land and housing privatization, creating the conditions for widespread market speculation. During the 1960s and 1970s, the Korean government directly engaged in the functions carried out by private developers in a market-organized economy. The real estate speculation continued at the hands of private developers, backed the government, in the 1980s.

16 Harvey (2005) notes the continuities between the Korean case and the imposition of neoliberalism in other contexts: “the Wall Street—Treasury—IMF alliance had, in effect, done to South Korea what the investment bankers had done in the mid-1970s to New York City” (p. 111). I would add that the same had already been done repeatedly to the Korean people by the Korean military government.

17 According to the Committee of the Public Concept of Land Ownership (1989), 65.2 percent of private land was owned by the wealthiest five percent of people. 90.8 percent of private land was owned by the top 25 percent. N. Sohn (2008) argues that the overinvestment in land and housing in South Korea has put the country’s economy in danger. While the national economy has lost its balance, relying on real estate speculation, people who owned land were the beneficiaries of tremendous profits thanks to the rising land price for 21 years. Only five percent of this unearned income was taken by the state in taxes (p. 87). The Committee on the Public Concept of Land Ownership was organized by the government in the late 1980s in order to regulate the extremely overheated real estate market. However, due to ferocious opposition by the ruling class, the plan was dropped.

18 Harvey (2012) mentions that the government of Hong Kong is largely financed by controlled sales of public land for development at very high (monopoly) prices (p. 102).
In the late 1980s, the country’s economy ran up against a structural limit. As the newly empowered labour movement secured rights for workers, the debt-ridden private sector that had been supported by the government could no longer be sustained. Once the open market policy was installed, the so-called civilian government could no longer meet the needs of the capitalist class. However, the crisis of 1997 would bring the interventionist state “more in line with standard neoliberal practices” (Harvey, 2005, p. 72). By deregulating labour and financial markets, South Korea joined countries across the world in adopting neoliberal governance. These processes fed deeper levels of financialization in land and housing, manifested in repeated waves of urban gentrification. In the process, the urban poor have been forced out of their traditional neighbourhoods into increasingly harsh living conditions, deprived of basic needs and isolated socially.

It is against this backdrop of social decomposition that Bin-Zib started, reclaiming the right to the city as well as a right to different kinds of social relations. The significance of Bin-Zib lies in the fact that its residents not only have reclaimed housing as a right, they have also strived to realize that right by living together with others and creating a different form of housing practice. Rather than struggling to change the entire society, the founders of Bin-Zib decided to live as they wanted by simply opening the door of their home to others, and encouraging others to join them. In order to understand how the movement developed at the level of everyday life rather than according to the traditional understanding of politics of existing social movements in South Korea, we now look at the socio-cultural factors that catalyzed the formation of Bin-Zib and its collective practice of urban communing.

2.2. Forming a New Collective Sensibility: The Socio-Cultural Context of Bin-Zib

Bin-Zib was founded by three Koreans in their early thirties—Jium, Salgu, and Deban. Partly inspired by Andre Gorz’s (1989) critique of work and the resulting argument that people should reduce their labour time and increase their free time, Jium, Salgu and Deban decided to form a collective living experiment in order to live as they
Deeply sceptical of wage labour, they contemplated the question of how to live beyond capitalist work relationships. Salgu recollects the time they came up with the idea of Bin-Zib as follows:

Why did we start Bin-Zib? What did we want from that? We had pondered those questions for a long time. At least, it’s obvious we wanted to reduce our working time as much as possible. We felt our abilities had shrunken while we had been working for money. Living together would increase each individual’s ability. Living together also would reduce the cost of living. It would greatly enrich our lives. We thought, let’s do it and see what happens (Salgu, interview by E. Pak, 2012, p. 38).

This decision coincided with a period in which the social safety net in South Korea was being systematically disassembled, while various financial activities, such as investments in stocks and funds, had became core skills for individuals. While books like *Rich Dad and Poor Dad* (Kiyosaki, 2000), *Be Crazy for Investment in Finance in Your 20s* (Cheoljin Jeong, 2006) and *Managing Four Accounts* (Gyeongho Go, 2009) became bestsellers, the dominant discourse of the era urged the struggling population to “show your ability” and “upgrade yourself”.

On the other hand, various alternative lifestyle movements formed in South Korea based on the expansion of civil society after the democratization of 1987. These emerging and diverse movements focused on different aspects of life, from establishing alternative education institutes and consumer cooperative associations to ecological villages. As the cost of living became too expensive for many in Seoul, a number of

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19 Gorz (1989) distinguishes work-for-oneself and autonomous activities from work for economic ends, which is interrelated with commodity exchange. Work-for-oneself is work that guarantees the basic necessities of day-to-day life, such as preparing food, cleaning the home, giving birth to children, and bringing them up, etc. Autonomous activities are activities one performs freely and not from necessity as the activities themselves are ends (p. 154-169). E. Pak has noted that in the first Bin-Zib people had a complete set of Andre Gorz books on the bookshelves, saying that, “we can discern the interests and pursuits of the people who formed Bin-Zib in this collection” (p. 59).

20 As the initiators of the housing project graduated university in 1998, their work experience reflected this societal change. After graduation, Salgu got a position in an information technology (IT) company. As the company delayed payment of wages due to the economic depression, she gave up the position and became a freelance worker. Under neoliberal policies, however, working conditions in South Korea became more and more unstable. Meanwhile, Jium had also worked at an IT company. Since the company had not paid $20,000 in wages, he had quit the job and started to work as an instructor at a private academy, a popular job for highly educated people in Korea.
these movements took the form of Gwinong [back-to-the-earth] movements in the
countryside, especially in those cases where people attempted to live beyond the wage
labour relation. The initiators of Bin-Zib, however, recalled that they wanted neither to
leave Seoul nor to form a closed community based around a unitary value.

Many people who attempted to live differently went to the countryside at
that time. The back-to-the-earth movement was a kind of trend, you know.
But I didn't think that was the answer for me. I've lived in Seoul for most of
my life. Isn't it possible to live differently, here? I had no concrete idea but
I thought, who knows? There must be people who want to live differently
within a city. Maybe we could go back-to-the-earth here, in Seoul,
reducing our work time, I thought. (Salgu, interview by E. Pak, 2012, p.
38)

We got the idea of forming a guests’ house from visiting guesthouses
during our trip rather than alternative communities. In a guesthouse,
people freely come and go, building good relationships. While we
traveled, we met a lot of people who gladly helped us and let us stay in
their place. With respect to alternative communities... well... I am
interested in those communities, but I don't like the dilemmas and
problems that so-called communities usually have. Oddly enough, when
people gather together around a certain denominator, all of 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 so many different people, to make them act
under an identical value, the community requires something even 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. (Jium, interview by O. Kim, 2009)

The interviews clearly illustrate two important characteristics of the Bin-Zib
experiment. First, Bin-Zib was started as an attempt to reclaim the urban poor’s right to
the city. Seoul is an extremely expensive city. Living outside of the wage labour relation
is almost impossible for those who do not own a house or enjoy an independent source
of wealth in Seoul. However, the initiators of Bin-Zib not only rejected work for the
economic purposes but also enacted a refusal to be displaced from the city. In other
words, they reclaimed the right to live differently in the city. Secondly, while Bin-Zib
founders opened their house up to others in their attempt to overcome capitalist relations,
the intent was not universalizing. On the contrary, they intended to open Bin-Zib to an infinite heterogeneity.

Since political and social movements in South Korea have historically searched for ideological unity and the struggle to gain hegemony in society, Bin-Zib is relatively distinct from older forms of social movements. Bin-Zib residents have strived to change their micro relations in the realm of everyday life. As a result, Bin-Zib is similar to what Day (2005) calls social movement based on “affinity for affinity, that is, for non-universalizing, non-hierarchical, non-coercive relationships based and mutual aid and shared commitments” (p. 9).

In this section I explore the South Korean socio-cultural context of Bin-Zib. I weave in a generational perspective in this account to shed light on the larger social context. I discuss how the formation of Bin-Zib was influenced by the collective transformation of cultural sensibilities symbolized by the X-generation. My discussion places particular emphasis on a crucial part of this transformation: the innovative methods and technologies of communication that made it possible for Bin-Zib to become an open community.

Bin-Zib was started by the first generation that developed some degree of independence from the traditional, collective values of South Korean society. In modern South Korean history, student movement has played a pivotal role in democratizing society (Jae Gyeong Kim, 1996; Jungseok Seo, 1997; Munseong Choi, 2003; Seungwon Choi, 2009). Since the country was ruled by a military regime that oppressed the working class, until the late 1980s the student movement was the only sector that was able to provide an independent counterforce (J. Seo, 1997, p. 17). Significantly, it was student movement that triggered the national civil uprisings that democratized society in 1987, and civil society groups were rapidly activated and diversified from that point on (Ho Gi Kim, 2000; Haegwang Pak, 2010). The political sphere for civil movement expanded in society, but there was a tendency for a middle class-based perspective to replace radical discourses with the emphasis on economic stability (K. Sim, 2010).
The community-based alternative movements that sprang up in the 1990s were led by the so-called 386-generation, the icon of Korean democratization in the 1980s. The 386-generation aimed to reform the country’s extremely conservative political system, and achieved a certain level of democracy in the late 80s. Culturally, however, they were remaining tied to older sensibilities, holding on to traditional values of community and patriarchy. K. Sim (2010) argues that the 386-generation suppressed its cultural desires because they were overwhelmed by their political cause. The sociologist Hongjung Kim (2009) also analyzes how the morality of the 386-generation was inherently tenuous, putting emphasis on moral values of the community, which only could be sustained by individual introspection (p. 31).

Against this trend, the 1990s witnessed the emergence of a new generation that claimed to act according to individuals’ own desires. Abandoning political battles between progressives and conservatives, the so-called X-generation differentiated itself from all previous generations and political movements (Keehyeung Lee, 2010; Jae Won Yi; 2010). Two famous mottos in the 1990s reflected the X-generation’s attitude clearly: the first declared “I am what I am!” and the second “Do whatever you want!” K. Sim (2010) argues that the “cultural explosion around 1993 irreparably transformed the cultural geography of South Korean society” (p. 27). Coming into the picture at a moment of political and cultural changes such as shrinking social movements and a rising full-scale consumerist capitalism in South Korean society, the X-generation tended to be characterized as the flag-bearer of a consumerist culture.

Complicating the monolithic image of the X-generation that has been offered by some commentators, K. Sim (2010) draws attention to its ambivalent politics, arguing that it “penetrated the transitional period of the time, through which not only the subjectivity of a new consumerist society but also a new resistant subjectivity appeared” (p. 52). According to K. Sim, gender politics and digital culture were two significant dimensions for examining the X-generation’s vector as a new resistant subjectivity (p. 52). For example, it was this generation that criticized existing feminist discourse, which

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21 386 signifies those who were in their 30s (in the 1990s), fighting against the Korean military regime while students in the 1980s, and born in the 1960s. 
was rooted in a middle class perspective. The X-generation also brought attention to the issue of homosexuality when it was taboo for both progressive and conservative sectors of society. At the same time, the X-generation was the very first in South Korea to adopt digital culture, experiencing an open and horizontal way of networking among individuals.

Other researchers have focused on the student activists of the X-generation during the late 1990s. Most of the students who belonged to the X-generation did not join the student movement. The 1990s is thus generally regarded as the crisis stage of the South Korean student movement, even its final stage. Unlike these and other dismissive assessments offered by most commentators on the left, Seungwon Choi (2009) notes the positive role of student activists in the late 1990s. Choi asserts that the student movement of the 1990s sought a breakthrough by paying attention to various lifestyle-based issues in school and emphasizing interactive communication as opposed to the traditional student movement, which oppressed individual life under more authoritarian forms of political organization.

As student activists of the X-generation, the initiators of Bin-Zib had different experiences at university. They had common sensibilities however, ones that were

22 Feminism was imported into the society in the late 1970s by the authoritarian government and institutionalized at universities (Jeong Ok Lee, 2001). During the 80s, mainstream feminism tended to work with the government, promoting better policies for women and requiring enactments or revisions of relative laws such as family or employment law (Hyeong Jo and Jae Gyeong Lee, 1989) while radical feminist discourse also appeared, combining with the militant labour movement. It was the 1990s when feminist discourse grew explosively in its scale as well as diversity (J.O. Lee, 2001).

23 A protagonist in a play, recollecting the 1990s, lamented that “from the perspective of student activists in the 1980s, we were just a lame imitation of what they had been, while the following generation thought we were stuck in an old, dying value system” (as cited in Eunjeong An, 2006, March 29).

24 A common expression used for this cohort in the late 1990 in universities was the Kkinsedae [twixster generation]. The word twixster comes from betwixt and between, signifying the ambiguous position the generation had to confront. In North America, the expression signifies “young adults who live with their parents or are otherwise not independent financially” (Grossman, 2005, January 16). In the context of South Korean society, the word “twixster generation” has various meanings in different contexts. In one of these usages, the student activists of the late 1990s called themselves the twixster generation, as the remnants of the late 1980s heyday of the South Korean student movement, with a self-mocking sense of humour.
especially opposed to authoritarian structures. Salgu actively participated in a student union. She said that:

There were some older students who were still involved in the student movement based on political organizations, but the overall atmosphere was, definitely, not good. Almost all of the students were indifferent, while just a few continued with the traditional path of the student movement. (Personal conversation with Salgu, 20 December 2013, Haksuk)

Although she was not interested in the portion of the student movement that was organized along traditional lines, she was elected as a president of the student council at the College of Education she attended. Considering the fact that the elections for the president of the student council had been used as an ideological battleground for different student organizations vying for hegemony, Salgu's independent candidacy was uncommon.

When I ran for president of the students’ union, my friends and I had a couple of ideas for reaching out to children in the adjacent neighbourhood. We were students in the education department, but only 20-30 percent of us could had any chance to find employment as teachers. What should the meaning of studying education be, then? We wanted to make a good curriculum and open a summer school or camp, or whatever it would be called, for local teenagers. I didn't think of it as a local movement at that time. I just contemplated how we could enjoy what we studied, making it as meaningful as possible since we were aspiring to be teachers. (...) Political organizations? I don't know. I felt like there was a hidden side to political organizations. How can I express the feeling? It seemed like they continued their work in the shadows. I didn't feel good about that. There was always something they never showed me, hiding certain information, even when I worked with them on a project. I felt uncomfortable as a physical response. Unless I became part of them, it would always be the same, I thought. But what's the meaning of it? Do they have such valuable information? What's the problem with sharing information? It was not a time when student activists were going around hiding from the police. Anyways, I felt instinctually uncomfortable. (Personal conversation with Salgu, 20 December 2013, Haksuk)

Meanwhile, Jium entered a university that had a strong tradition of activism, but he did not join any political organizations. Instead, he joined a social science study group organized in a manner that was distinct from existing political groups in the university.

Members of the group still respected Marx, but not with his preoccupation with labour. We tried to use Marx for our own issues, such as the
information movement, the feminist movement, and so on. Above all, the group’s way of organizing was clearly different from that of typical student groups. We didn’t use the word anarchism, but I guess there was an inclination toward it. It seems people who started the group envisioned the form of organization as deeply horizontal. For example, we all use the honorific form of language regardless of our age or grade. Seminars were proposed by anyone who wanted to, and whoever wanted to join could join it. There was no hierarchy in the seminar. You know, it was not the typical way of seminar in which a senior taught a junior as a tutor. The membership was also kind of strange. No one knew the exact number of members. If you joined one seminar, you were regarded as a member, something like that. Drinking parties were always held. People got together every night, and that was fun. (Personal conversation with Jium, 3 January 2014, Haksuk)

The group’s horizontal and open manner of management was consistent with what Gyeongbae Min (2002) calls a new tendency of cyber social movements, in which “the social actors are not organizations but individual networks without specific forms and patterns” (p. 150). In other words, the technological innovation and the experiences in cyberspace had at some level influenced on the formation of new communicative styles.

I am not saying that new communication technologies guarantee social progress and open, democratic communication. However, considering that new forms of organization were emerging alongside the appearance of new communication technology suggests a certain possibility of a relationship. For example, Bin-Zib residents do not ask for a visitor’s name, age, career or any of the information one might expect to be asked when she meets a person for the first time. Instead, they introduce themselves with a nickname. Using a nickname was consistent with the culture of the online sphere, and the residents of the first Bin-Zib adopted it in their everyday life, forming a distinct culture of Bin-Zib. In short, the emergent technology of the Internet

25 After my field research, I got an email form Bin-Zib resident Naru in his early twenties. In the email, he reflected on “the similarity of Bin-Zib and the cyber community”. He then pointed out that contemporary cyber communities have lost their positive possibility by “re-introducing the reality” of hierarchical relations and profit orientation. In looking at how digital space became commercialized and hierarchical in South Korea, Naru warned of the risks for Bin-Zib.

26 This aspect is discussed in Chapter 4.
and its influence on social movement are key to understanding Bin-Zib as a new type of social movement in Korea.

South Korea is widely recognized as an early adopter and world leader in broadband Internet services and new media convergence (Dal Yong Jin, 2005). As many scholars in Korea have discussed, the emerging technology has had a significant effect on social movements in the country (Seongtae Hong, 1999; K. Min, 2002). The Jinbo [progressive] Network Center marked a turning point in terms of how online social movements have evolved. Jinbo Network Center was initiated by activists as a BBS (Bulletin Board System). Describing itself as “a progressive, independent, and autonomous network” in 1993, it became Jinbo Network Center in 1998. Since its foundation, the Jinbo Network Center aimed to build an independent Internet service for social movements as well as to protect rights to information from encroachment and violation by the state and capital.27

In terms of the “individual networks without specific form and pattern” mentioned by K. Min, the Jinbo blog sphere, where the idea of Bin-Zib was originally posted, circulated and discussed, is noteworthy. The Jinbo blog was a part of an independent Internet service developed and organized by activists from the Jinbo Network Center. As the name itself implies, most Jinbo bloggers had an interest in social movements and activism. Yet its characteristics were quite different from traditional activist groups in South Korea. The network’s digital infrastructure offered new possibilities for a movement based on networked individuals rather than organizations, and Jinbo bloggers organized many spontaneous direct actions, creating autonomous spaces, acting in solidarity with various struggles in South Korea, and all the while using the Jinbo blog as their hub.

Like the student group Jium had participated in at university, many of the Jinbo bloggers focused more on how to change one's own life with insights from feminism, to environmentalism, the information movement, etc. While each blogger had a different

27 “The Jinbo Network Center was the first established independent network in which various social movement groups were able to build solidarity, and became a leading platform of social movements in the Internet era” (K. Min, 2002, p. 106).
political background and topics she was concerned with, they were all trying to communicate without the intervention of authority. The Jinbo blog sphere was full of posts that described and connected the participants’ lives and considerations—as its motto says: “Post your trifling everyday life!” The Jinbo Network Center offered a digital infrastructure, enabling individuals and various groups to express their ideas.

Many of us actually met way before Bin-Zib’s opening. When the Jinbo network started to provide its blog service, people began to know each other. Before that, I guess, people only got to know each other in groups under a certain theme. When the blog service opened, we could meet individuals on a more personal level. We could read each person's posts. I thought: “Wow, this person has this kind of idea.” “This one is interested in these kinds of things!” (...) I read posts written by Dalgun, Shua, Jigak...^28 and many other people's posts. I read their experiences and insights. It seemed that each person had her theme, her own key issues, explicating and expanding on those key issues. (...) In the meantime, people started to meet offline. It was so great. Although there was no common ground, each one pursued an alternative value and was interested in social movements, feeding off each other’s work and ideas. (Salgu, interview by E. Pak, 2012, p. 32)

When initiators set out to imagine a communal living experiment, one of initiators Jium posted the vaguely articulated proposal on the Jinbo blog. Jium’s posts, alongside with initial ideas for organizing a guesthouse, drew the attention of many bloggers and resonated in the Jinbo blog sphere. Finally, in late February of 2008, a housewarming party was held at the first empty and unfurnished house. The party lasted for three days. More than 60 guests visited during this time, and many of these were Jinbo bloggers. People’s ideas added substance to the initial idea of developing a guests' house, and the place got a name—Bin-Zib—through a contest.

There were many great names proposed for the place, but we choose Bin-Zib, because the word Bin has three different meanings that fit our ideas: guest, poverty, and empty/vacant. With the attempt to live without a division between juin [owner/host] and guest,^29 we also believe we would rather be poor than work hard to spend more. Moreover, we would like to keep not only the place itself but also the name of the place empty. So,

^28 These people were Bin-Zib residents in its early period.

^29 In Korean, the word juin not only refers to an owner of something but also to a host of a certain place. In many posts or articles, Bin-Zib residents use the word in a paradoxical way. In English, juin can be translated in one of the two meanings depending on the context.
Bin-Zib is an empty place where anyone can stay as well as a place filled with people at the same time. (Salgu, 2011, p. 143-144).

While it was Jium who made the initial proposal of forming a guesthouse, Bin-Zib was from the beginning an autonomous project, which was suggested, discussed, and shaped by a number of people networked through the Jinbo blog sphere.

Given the context described above, it can be argued that a new collective sensibility, or a “structure of feeling” (Williams, 1977) was forming in South Korean society in the 1990s. According to Raymond Williams, a structure of feeling is “a particular quality of social experience and relationship, historically distinct from other particular qualities, which gives the sense of generation or of a period” (p. 131). In South Korea, the collective transformation of cultural sensibilities symbolized by the X-generation was interconnected with and drew upon the innovative methods and technologies of networked communication. Emphasizing forms of horizontal communication, this new collective sensibility was characterized by neoliberal individualism, but also facilitated the formation of a political movement based on individual networking.

Bin-Zib is an example of how people strived to act as nodes for new relations and lifestyle by contemplating and actualizing the political possibilities of the new technology. Residents of Bin-Zib have pursued egalitarian communication and social networking of different forms of life outside cyber space.

30 Williams (1977) suggests this concept as “a cultural hypothesis” to examine new forms of sensibility, for which “art and literature, are often among the very first indications” (p. 133). A structure of feeling is “social experiences in solution”, thus it is distinct from other social semantic formations, “which have been precipitated and are more evidently and more immediately available” (p. 133-134). He states that, “[y]et we are also defining a social experience which is still in process, often indeed not yet recognized as social but taken to be private, idiosyncratic, and even isolating, but which in analysis (though rarely otherwise) has its emergent, connecting, and dominant characteristics, indeed its specific hierarchies. These are often more recognizable at a later stage, when they have been (as often happens) formalized, classified, and in many cases built into institutions and formations” (Williams, 1977, p. 132).
2.3. Summary

As we have seen, a range of socio-economic and cultural factors combined in the formation of Bin-Zib. The Korean military government launched a campaign of extensive privatization of the land and housing. As the IMF took control of the national economy in the 1990s, increasing the flexibilization of the labour force and opening the era of full-scale neoliberalism, 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). In this context, Bin-Zib has reclaimed the right to the city, or more specifically, the right to form a different kind of city and a different life within it.

In order to work for oneself and perform autonomous activities rather than work for making money in the city, Bin-Zib raises a profound question: what should a house mean to us?

Bin-Zib is a house that is open to all. We composed Bin-Zib because we believe that houses should not be owned. We believe if there is any profit generated by money, it has to be shared with everybody in the world. By opening a house to everyone, by sharing money with others, we can live together. (…) We hope that we can expand Bin-Zib, the praxis of sharing, from the house to the town, and to the whole world. (Bin-Go, 2010)

Bin-Zib was formed as an attempt to live differently in the city, in opposition to the form of life capitalist society promotes. Instead of “waiting for the revolution to occur before beginning to build a social world” (Day, 2005, p. 12), the initiators of Bin-Zib just started to act against the logic of capitalism, opening their living space to others.

While pursuing socially meaningful acts in the realm of everyday life, Bin-Zib demands a spirit of egalitarianism and strives to preserve openness to heterogeneity. This sets it apart from other social movements in South Korea, which are based on united identity struggling to seize political hegemony. As this chapter has argued, at the core of the formation of Bin-Zib is the collective transformation of the cultural sensibilities of the X-generation, which are connected to the innovative communication methods and technologies arising at the time. As K. Sim (2010) points out, “the X-generation demonstrated the possibility of a cultural revolution, but the possibility was frustrated
soon thereafter by the IMF crisis and the arrival of neoliberalism” (p. 54). At the same time however, Bin-Zib has expanded its experiment both in terms of scale and depth over the last seven years. While most Bin-Zib residents fit the profile of a precarious worker, they create other ways to support themselves. In the next chapter, I delve into the micro history of Bin-Zib and the question of how the community has evolved since its foundation.

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31 A significant number of books (H. Kim, 2009; Chanho O, 2014; Giho Eom, 2014) have been published recently analyzing the subjectivity of those who grew up in full-fledged neoliberalism, with particular attention given to the growing necessity for endless competitions to achieve professional advancement.
Chapter 3.

A History of Bin-Zib, or, an Ongoing Process of “Navigating the Road Ahead”

Figure 3.1. Former and current Bin-Zibs
Photo from Bin-Zib Report (Haram, 2013), one of the Haebangmungo series. Under the each picture, the name and characteristics of the specific Bin-Zib are noted.¹

¹ Although each picture shows an entire building, each Bin-Zib is usually one of the units in the building. In case of Haksuk, Bin-Zib people are renting an entire three-story building.
Since there were no rules for membership in Bin-Zib, from the beginning, people could come and leave any time they wanted. The residents of each house, as well as the number of houses, were continuously changing. More than 20 Bin-Zibs have developed, and some disbanded, between 2008 and 2014. Over time the characteristics of Bin-Zib have changed because the characteristics and composition of the individual Bin-Zibs have changed as well as because other institutions such as the café and the fund/bank have been established (and sometimes dissolved). These transformations have come about also because Bin-Zib's history has been an ongoing process of trial and error.

Bin-Zib has changed predominantly by confronting specific problems residents have encountered. The ways of solving these problems were, in many cases, spontaneous. At the same time, the experiment is always guided by a will or a hope for living differently than the ways prescribed by the highly conformist yet neoliberal social norms in South Korea. Bin-Zib residents possess a desire that has vaguely guided this spontaneous experiment. The following quote, from an invitation letter for a lecture organized by Bin-Go (a collective fund/bank of Bin-Zib), clearly shows the most significant characteristic of the whole experiment. Since the beginning, the Bin-Zib experiment has been pursued with “a spirit of creativity and improvisation” (Day, 2005, p. 126):

Four years and 10 months of Bin-Zib. Three years and 10 months of Binmaeul [an empty/guests' village], 2 years and 6 months of Bin-Go, and two years of the café. Bin-Zib started as one rented house. As the number of people and houses has increased, we started a village meeting, established a village fund, and opened cafés. And now we are living in Haebangchon together. During this time, so many people came and left, so many things happened and were forgotten, so many words were spoken.

However, we are still looking for an answer to the simplest question. What is Bin-Zib? Why do we live here? Why do we live together? How should we live hereafter? It is actually not an easy question. With no map in our hands, we are walking on a path no one has treaded before. We are even not quite sure about the meaning of the path we left behind. (…)

As people live in a particular Bin-Zib together, each Bin-Zib can be considered a temporary community based on the particular rented house. In Korea, a rental contract legally guarantees two years’ right of living for a tenant.
Let’s get some rest, replenish our strength, look around, and get some information to pluck up our heart and go for it again. Bin-Zib has been a guesthouse where travellers meet by chance and communicate with each other. It would be great if we could meet experienced, wise travellers who have travelled a long journey before reaching us. (…) The biggest power of Bin-Zib has come from the constant influx of new people and their energy. This lecture would be another great chance for us to look around ourselves and revitalize our strength. (Bin-Go, 2012, November 27)³

In this chapter I offer a chronological overview of Bin-Zib from its foundation in 2008 to the end of 2013. My account proceeds through three phases or periods. While residents confronted specific and arguably defining issues during each of the three periods, there are repetitions of events and sentiments across the three timeframes. In addition, some changes I attribute to a later period actually started earlier. Periodization is dangerous and simplistic. Yet, my attempt to break down the history flows from the participants themselves. Residents used terms such as Bin-Zib 2.0 and Bin-Zib season 3 to delimit the phases in the housing experiment’s history, according to participants’ collective attempts to overcome specific issues they confronted. Based on this locally determined periodization, I divide the history of Bin-Zib into three periods, highlighting predominant issues that residents had to face in each.

The first period of Bin-Zib, with only one house, spanned its first year of life, from February 2008 to early 2009. The whole experiment started based on a rented apartment. The name Bin-Zib [an empty/guests’ house] reflected the founding residents’ hopes for a communal experiment grounded on unconditional openness and hospitality.⁴ During this early period, residents of the first Bin-Zib developed some key practices and

³ On December 2012 the collective fund/bank Bin-Go held a series of lectures titled “Binmaeul [an empty/guests’ village] in Haebangchon: Navigating the Road Ahead”. Five outside scholars who had undertaken research on alternative economies, the credit coop movement, local social movements, grassroots democracy, and anarchism were invited to present by Bin-Go. Plans for these lectures were developed when one of the most difficult periods of the community as the invitation letter implied.

⁴ As noted, since there is no owner, everybody living in Bin-Zib is considered a guest. People who stay in Bin-Zib for only a short time are called dantu [the abbreviation of dangitusugaek, which means short-term guest] while people who planning to live there beyond a short stay are called jangtu [the abbreviation of janggitusugaek, which means long-term guest]. While the number of long-term guests’ in each house is relatively stable, the number of short-term guests varies considerably.
attitudes, especially in terms of the use of space, while forming a unique culture at Bin-Zib.

The second period of Bin-Zib runs from early 2009 to the end of 2010. As the number of “guests” increased, so too did the number of rented houses. During this period, Bin-Zib residents struggled to define its meaning, and turned the experiment into what they called “Bin-Zib 2.0, a network of houses for autonomy, hospitality and sharing” without imposing authoritarian rules. Of particular importance is the fact that participants attempted to devise an alternative sharing system, through which each person could contribute to the community whatever she could and/or wanted, while everyone still had equal rights. The collective fund/bank Bin-Go was the result. At the same time, some Bin-Zib residents opened the Bingga [empty/guests’ café/store] as an experiment in working and earning money outside capitalist wage labour system.

The third period of Bin-Zib, or what residents called Bin-Zib Season 3, runs from 2011 to the end of 2013. Bin-Zib in this period experienced political gridlock, as participants failed to form a shared feeling, especially in terms of defining Bin-Zib and the relations between Bin-Zib, Bin-Go and the café. Instead of trying to come to an agreement over their internal conflicts, a significant number of residents of Bin-Zib got engaged in cultivating a desirable local culture, a project that had the second café as its center. They also tried to revitalize the local economy by networking with various local actors from individual artists to religious groups and the local merchants’ committee, and issuing an alternative local currency. By creating and circulating common resources in neighbourhood, in conjunction with improvising upon the unique culture of sharing that had been developed in Bin-Zib, participants strived to form a sustainable life in Binmaeul [an empty/guests’ village].

As noted above, the whole experiment has been driven by a seemingly self-contradictory idea: how to open a house to others and still maintain it as an empty/guests’ house? This question has created a controversial space where residents have been forced to regularly question the identity of the community.

Anyone could come and live in Bin-Zib. Any guest could become an owner of the place without getting permission from anyone. No one had
right to object to it. We never set a fixed number for Arae-Zib's accommodation. We let people come regardless of the limited space. However, it finally became packed, and Bin-Zib was not a Bin-Zib [an empty/ guests' house] anymore. (…) After discussions we decided to open another Bin-Zib by getting a 20,000,000 won ($22,000) loan. It was because we believed that Bin-Zib should always be available for newcomers. We believed that people who were coming in for the first time were also owners of Bin-Zib just like those who had proceeded. (Jium, 2013)

While the community has struggled to solve the recurring question of how to maintain Bin-Zib as an empty/guests’ house, specific problems appeared at certain points perhaps driven by the overall demographic conditions of the community. Drawing on the roughly 3,000 posts accumulated on the community website and the team blog, personal interviews with residents and former residents, as well as articles written by Bin-Zib people and researchers, this chapter aims to trace the history of the community, looking at how it has been confronted with specific problems associated with each phase and yet managed to expand its scope of communing by devising solutions to them.

### 3.1. Arae-Zib, an Experimental Space of Conviviality

In early 2008 the three initiators, Jium, Salgu, and Deban signed a contract to rent a 99 square meter apartment for a period of two years. In renting the apartment, the founders deposited $45,000 of co-fund, or everything they possessed. They also took out a $90,000 loan from a private foundation called Geumsan foundation, in order to cover their $135,000 of jeonse [key money]. The only principle guiding the participants was that no one had primacy in their rights over the use of the house. A housewarming party was thrown with the intention of letting people know that the place was communal and open to all. In this way, they intended to turn a house into what has been described in Chapter 1 as the common. The Bin-Zib Wiki page (http://jinbo.net/wiki), a mailing list

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5 The first Bin-Zib got its own name Arae-Zib when the second Bin-Zib was opened.
6 While the founders of Bin-Zib usually say they got a loan from Geumsan foundation, this was not an officially established foundation. More precisely, one of the founders borrowed the money from a relative, paying a 6 percent interest rate. The founders intended to delete any private names from the loan by suggesting the money came from a foundation. I will discuss this attitude in the next chapter, which considers the principles of Bin-Zib. Regarding jeonse, see Chapter 2.
(house@list.jinbo.net), and a team blog (blog.jinbo.net/house) were set up during the first month to introduce the community as well as to share experiences, reflections and ideas.

After a one-month test period, Bin-Zib residents announced how they would manage the community. What they agreed to was that each guest would pay the same amount of bundamgeum [shared expenses] for the monthly interest of the loan and utility bills, basic food and daily necessities, no matter how much a person co-funded jeonse [key money] or not. Based on the expenses and the number of guests for the first month, residents decided the amount of bundamgeum as "more than 2,000 won ($2.20) per day" or "more than 60,000 won ($66) per month". If there was surplus money at the end of the month, the participants decided, it was to be saved in case of a future deficit. They also set a regular house meeting in which any person could join.

The first Bin-Zib (hereafter Arae-Zib) formed a unique atmosphere among the community. "Simply put, Arae-Zib was so fun." One of the founders, Salgu said:

Well, for example, one day, after one of the usual nights of heavy drinking, you know? While we were idly rolling around the floor of the living room here and there, someone complained that Korean beer was so expensive but tastes shitty. Then someone else suggested, “Why don't we brew beer ourselves?” All of sudden, the place was full of vitality. It sounded so exciting. We all together went to Namsan Public Library to check out books about brewing beer. Reading the books, still rolling around the living room, haha, then we tried our best. The quality of beer was not always guaranteed, but sometimes it was really good. The process was definitely always fun. After a while, we could make fairly good beer. (Personal conversation with Salgu, 12 November 2013, Haksuk)

The everyday activity of Arae-Zib was filled with spontaneous events that might look absolutely abnormal from the viewpoint of mainstream society. The most abnormal

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7 The finances for the first month had been managed thanks to donations by visitors.
8 $2.20 a day, or $66 a month of the bundamgeum was a very small amount of money in Seoul, even compared to dosshouse accommodations for the extremely poor of the type described in Chapter 1. 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 shared key money and resources".
thing of all was probably the fact that many of residents were out of work and joblessness was encouraged in the community.

Arae-Zib was always full of visitors. Some of them decided to be long-term guests. Some of them even quit their jobs to more fully enjoy the everyday life of Bin-Zib. Actually it was hard to go to work when you see other people having so much fun and doing so many fun things. ‘Hey! When do you plan to quit the job? Come on! Be a full-time Binzibin [Bin-Zibite]!’ Those words were common jokes, at the time. (Personal conversation with Salgu, 12 November 2013, Haksuk)

Consequently, the average living expenses of people in Arae-Zib were surprisingly low. However, Bin-Zib people actively enjoyed the limited economic situation and tried their hand at anything they wanted to try out, especially during the first year of Arae-Zib. A lot of ideas were suggested, and some started to carry them out. Opening the second Bin-Zib was one of these ideas.

Things or events would typically take place as follows. An idea would pop up in someone’s mind, would grow bigger like a snowball while one or two of them talked about it. It then would begin to take shape with ease as three or four more continued to talk about it. Somewhere along the line the idea would circulate among the people. By then, it would be treated as a fait accompli. Some of them would already be doing something to make the idea a work-in-progress or even a working reality. Oh, in many cases, for unexpected reasons, a whole project would proceed in a completely unexpected direction. Anyways, this was how we began the second Bin-Zib house or the Bin café project. (Anonymous, 2008, November 12)

“All kinds of half-idiotic ideas and wild dreams were tried in Arae-Zib”, one long-term resident said. A dictum, “Bin-Zib, where binmal [empty talk] becomes reality” was on the residents’ lips. The phrase illustrates well Arae-Zib’s conviviality and experimental attitude.

9 According to one informant, the average living expenses were around $330 per person during the period. The official minimum living cost for a person in South Korea in 2008 was $510 per a month (Ministry of Health and Welfare, 2007), and the official minimum living cost suggested by the government has been criticized as “failing to reflect practical reality” to the point of “jeopardizing a person’s right to live” by citizen organizations in the society (Chamyeoyeondae, 2007, August 23; Chamnuri, 2014).
The convivial energy was a result of conscious effort to some degree. Many residents of Arae-Zib in the beginning were activist-mined. They actively participated in the life of Bin-Zib and formed a culture that was distinct from capitalism. They read critical theories collectively. They frequently recognized explicitly that they were voluntarily outside of the capitalist mainstream culture, even making puns about it. For example, when they announced “the first brewing workshop”, a member made a pun on a Korean word juryu, which means both mainstream and liquor.

We aim to recover our ability of brewing juryu [liquor], which had been stolen by the juryu juryu [mainstream liquor] capitalism. By doing so, we will promote anti-juryu juryu production as well as anti-juryu juryu culture.

We also strive to produce a smooth supply of juryu [liquor], which accounts for more than half of all Binzibin [Bin-Zibites’] consumption, to Binzibin. Of course, we have a hidden intention to sell some of the leftovers under the mask of hospitality.

Most of all, by this workshop, we aim to repeat drinking the juryu [liquor] brewed last week while brewing new juryu [liquor] this week for drinking next week over and over, so that we hang around happily together. (Anonymous, 2008, March 26)

It can be said that at Arae-Zib there was a shared atmosphere developed around the attempt to escape the capitalist wage labour relationship. The early residents’ collective efforts appear mostly to have been directed toward the greatest possible reduction of working time and securing free time in order to “work-for-oneself” and engage in “autonomous activities” (Gorz, 1989, p. 154-169). There was even a commonly employed phrase at Arae-Zib emphasizing the autonomous atmosphere: “Work only as long as it is fun”. The matter of how to earn a livelihood, however, has always been a core issue in Bin-Zib.

10 Regarding Gorz’s categorization of work, see the footnote 19 in Chapter 2.
Feasts were another significant characteristic of Arae-Zib. There were feasts of various sizes in the living room of Arae-Zib almost every night. People cooked food and ate together for numerous reasons. This was how a new guest mingled with other residents and was immediately treated as one of them. Ken recollects the time she went to Arae-Zib for the first time:

I got to know Arae-Zib through a group I joined. Every week after our meeting, all of us dropped into Arae-Zib and got wasted. None of us lived in Bin-Zib, but we sprawled out on the floor of the living room, laughing and chatting in the middle of night. (…) And, whenever I dropped by, Bin-Zib people put me up for free. I had been told that it was more than 3,000 won ($3.3) per night at the time. However, they made it free, saying it was “cause you washed dishes, or cooked” or whatever. I always felt so welcome. (Personal conversation with Ken, 8 January 2014, online chatting)
Newcomers could be accustomed to the atmosphere of Bin-Zib while they started to prepare meals or brought ingredients for others, as Ken did. First time visitors frequently ended up sleeping over at the home if they missed the last available public transportation. Those who stayed overnight usually came again and became friends of Bin-Zib, or long-term guests. “The feeling of being just accepted as one of them became the very basis of Bin-Zib, to keep the place open to others”, said Ken. Having feasts was thus an important way of opening the space to others.

Arae-Zib’s spatial layout, which has been a significant reference point for the community thereafter, is crucial to understand its unique culture. When the founding members tried to find a place with the idea of enacting a form of communal living, there were four people, including a couple. They initially tried to find a house with more than four rooms. This was because they wanted to have a spare room for guests, in addition to their own rooms. “We needed to find a four-room house. However, it was almost impossible with our budget”. Jium, one of the founding members who had lived in Bin-Zib until 2014 shared memories of their house hunting.

In the meantime, we saw the Arae-Zib, the first Bin-Zib. When I stepped into the house, I thought, that's it. It was relatively cheap; it had a very spacious living room and even a large rooftop! It was very easy to get there from anywhere in Seoul, and there were a lot of public facilities such as libraries and parks around the house. The only problem was that it was a three-bedroom house. (Personal conversation with Jium, 8 December 2013, Haksuk)

After a long discussion of whether to choose the place or not and how to arrange it for securing the maximum degree of openness, the three decided to give up on having their own private rooms. One of them, who still wanted a private room, decided not to join the project during this discussion.

Rather than coming from their actual desire, the decision to give up the use of private rooms was an unavoidable one in order to bring the idea of a guests’ house in line with their budget. Jium says:

11 This aspect will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.
Actually, it was a totally unexpected decision, a very random one. We had never considered the possibility of giving up the private use of a room before. Then we saw the Arae-Zib. It was fairly attractive but it had only three rooms. And it seemed impossible to find a four-room house. Then, suddenly, the idea arose. Why don't we share the rooms together? What's so bad about that? This significant marked the trajectory of Bin-Zib in its journey, but we didn't know that at the time of the decision.

(Personal conversation with Jium, 8 December 2013, Haksuk)

It seems that the decision itself pushed them to entirely rethink the process of how to arrange their space. From the moment of the decision, Jium started to read books about the history of modern housing and its effect on modern subjectivity, paying particular attention to texts that critically considered modern notion of privacy and the structure of modern housing.\(^\text{12}\) He posted his own considerations of living beyond a capitalist way of life on his blog. In one of these posts, he quoted a sociologist Jin Gyeong Yi (2000) who examines “how individuals are produced as modern subjectivity in a specific spatial organization of modern dwelling space” (p. 18).\(^\text{13}\) According to J. G. Yi, the rooms in modern housing are homogeneous as they are divided based on specific functions, while rooms typical of medieval housing were multi-functional and heterogeneous spaces where people engaged in a range of activities (p. 69). Having a very flexible structure, the medieval urban house functioned as “workshop, store, and counting house” at the same time (Mumford, cited in J. G. Yi, p. 65). The family was also “a very open

\(^{12}\) Many scholars, employing approaches ranging from the socio-cultural to the legal, point out that the notion of privacy was invented in the modern society and based on a well-defined separation between public and private. (Mumford, 1961; Babelon, 1977; 1984; Dibie, 1994; J. G. Yi, 2000; Y. Seo, 2005; Friedman, 2007). In other words, as Friedman notes, “[p]rivacy, as idea and reality, is the creation of a modern bourgeois society” (Friedman, 2007, p. 258). In the medieval era it was not unusual that parents, children, relatives, servants, and even journeymen slept together, sharing one bed in a room (Dibie, 1994, p. 76). This was common in mansions in Paris or even in the Louvre in the 17th century (Babelon, cited in J. G. Yi, 2000, p. 69). Previous to the 18th century, when the notion of privacy and hygiene appeared, people had shared a bedroom in almost all regions and cultures, from Mesopotamia and Egypt to the Koryo Dynasty (an ancient Korean kingdom) and through to medieval Europe (Y. Seo, 2005, p. 100). As a result, people living in the medieval era did not have the same concept of privacy, as “[n]obody was ever alone” (Friedman, 2007, p. 258). As J. G. Yi (2000) notes, “[t]hey had no obsession about privacy and comfort. Contrariwise, being alone was not only fearful, but something that should be avoided” (p. 69).

\(^{13}\) J. G. Yi (2000) argues that we should depart from all kinds of notions that consider the history of dwelling space as the history of development. According to him, private life is not inherent to human condition but invented notion.
unit”, including not only relatives but also groups of workers, journeymen, and apprentices (Mumford, 1961, p. 281).

All of the readings of books and reflection were conducted with the clear intention of turning a house into the common. Jium (2008) asked “how we create autonomous space without appropriating space privately” (January 17). After a series of books regarding space and housing were reviewed, he arrived at two conclusions. First, privacy should be re-defined beyond the modern dichotomy of private and public as well as the modern form of family as a unit of “perfect home” (Jium, 2008, February 13). Second, the realms of work, politics, and everyday life should not be conceived and practiced in isolation but in relation to one another (Jium, 2008, January 18). These contemplations were reflected in the basic spatial layout of Arae-Zib, where there was no private room but common guests’ rooms, and all the rooms were used in multiple ways.

Arae-Zib has been “the most Bin-Zib-like Bin-Zib” in residents’ collective memory. From its start in 2008, “[m]ore than one hundred long-term guests and countless short-term guests stayed there for periods ranging from one day to years” (Jium, 2013). Although eleven other Bin-Zibs were composed (and some dismantled) during the four years, “Arae-Zib has always been a kind of a reception room for new guests as well as a village hall for Binmaeuil [an empty/guests' village]” (E. Pak, 2012). “Many of Arae-Zib residents put a lot of effort toward following an ecologically conscious lifestyle. They also made various kinds of consumer goods by themselves” (Personal conversation with Norang, 18 November 2013, the Café Haebangchon). Most of all, “Arae-Zib residents formed what we might call a positive culture of Bin-Zib: hospitality, ecological life, etc.” (Personal conversation with Tei, 20 October 2013, Haksuk).

14 Regarding the medieval urban housing, Mumford (1968) states that, “[t]he workshop was family, likewise the merchant’s counting house. The members ate together at the same table, worked in the same rooms, slept in the same or common hall, converted at night into dormitories, joined in the family prayers, participated in the common amusement. (...) The intimate union of domesticity and labor, surviving now in the city only in petty shops or in the household of an occasional painter, architect, or physician, dictated the major arrangements within the medieval dwelling house itself” (p. 281-282).
3.2. Forming Bin-Zib 2.0: Networking Houses of Autonomy, Hospitality and Sharing

Eight months after the first Bin-Zib opened the community announced they would establish the second Bin-Zib. At that time, Arae-Zib was overcrowded with “eight long-term human guests, three to four semi long-term human guests, three cats and a dog, hundreds of earthworms, and dozens of vegetables and herbs” sharing space with over a hundred short-term guests per month (Anonymous, 2008, November 12). From that moment the residents of Bin-Zib began to hold a series of enthusiastic discussions around opening a new Bin-Zib and a café, checking available places to rent near Arae-Zib. They also had “1,780,000 won ($1,981) worth of accumulated money, which had no clear purpose but expanding the guests’ house” (Anonymous, 2008, November 12), and were able to access a $22,000 loan from Geumsan foundation. While there were ideas for opening a collectively run restaurant or a café, after some discussion they “decided to open the second Bin-Zib first” (Anonymous, 2008, November 17).

By April 2009 three more Bin-Zibs were formed. Residents started to use the term Binmaeul [an empty/ guests’ village] and hold dalgori [village meeting]. However, the very limited commonality between the houses was evident in a number of ways. All four houses were called Bin-Zib, but each house had different fiscal situations as well as different ways of using space (See table 3.1). Salgu noted “the four houses were in situations so different from one another, without any shared traits, at that point. No one had this sense of collective belonging, referring to all the Bin-Zibs as “we” or “us” at the time, I would say” (Personal conversation with Salgu, 10 November 2013, Haksuk).
Table 3.1. Fiscal situations of each Bin-Zib in the early 2009\textsuperscript{15}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bin-Zib</th>
<th>Form of rent</th>
<th>Method of funding key-money</th>
<th>Space</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arae-Zib</td>
<td>$135,000 of Key money</td>
<td>-3 residents co-funded 45,000 -90,000 loan charging 6% interest</td>
<td>-Three guest rooms (more than 8 long-term guests and a various number of short-term guests)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wis-Zib</td>
<td>$22,000 of key money +$500 monthly rent</td>
<td>-1 resident co-funded $11,000 -$11,000 loan charging 6% interest - Arae-Zib residents support Wis-Zib’s bundamgeum with surplus money from Arae-Zib.</td>
<td>-Two guest rooms (5-6 long-term guests) -A workroom for the film making group (3-4 members)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yeop-Zib</td>
<td>$99,900 of key money</td>
<td>-3 residents co-funded $99,900</td>
<td>-Two private rooms (4 long-term guests) -One guests’ room (for short-term guests)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net-Zib</td>
<td>$21,000 of key money</td>
<td>-1 residents co-funded $10,000 -$11,000 loan charging 6% interest</td>
<td>-Three private rooms (3 long-term guests) and one guests’ room (for short-term guests)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It was around this time that Bin-Zib residents started to experience difficulties in multiple ways. First of all, communication between residents became much harder than when they “lived all together in a same house, where the mere structural conditions of co-habitation formed an atmosphere of family” (Jium, 2013). Moreover, residents of Arae-Zib got stressed as people who were drawn by the low cost of living increased, and some of these youngsters were extremely incapable of housekeeping. Arae-Zib kept playing the role as the threshold between Bin-Zib and the outside, a place where...

\textsuperscript{15} Residents of Arae-Zib signed a contract for the second house, Wis-Zib, on November 20, 2008. Wis-Zib was rented, paying $22,000 in key money and $500 monthly rent. Since one resident of Wis-Zib contributed $11,000, they got a $11,000 loan from the Geumsan foundation. Given that the monthly rent, Wis-Zib’s bundamgeum [shared expenses], were higher than Arae-Zib, Arae-Zib residents decided to support Wis-Zib’s bundamgeum with the surplus funds. Meanwhile, Yeop-Zib [next-door house] and Net-Zib [the fourth house] were opened in March and April of 2009. In the case of Yeop-Zib, four new residents rented an apartment with $99,900 worth of co-funded key money. On the other hand, although the required amount was only $21,000, Net-Zib residents did not have enough key money. One Net-Zib resident contributed $10,000 worth of key money, and the residents got a $11,000 of loan from the Geumsan foundation (the maximum available from the foundation) to make up for the difference. Arrangements also varied as far as the organization of space was concerned. Yeop-Zib residents had private rooms at first, with two couples using two rooms exclusively. Although they had a room for guests, the occupancy was lower than that of Arae-Zib. Moreover, when an infant and her mother started to live in the Yeop-Zib’s guests’ room, Yeop-Zib actually had no guests’ room. On the other hand, Wis-Zib had two long-term guest rooms and a workroom instead of a short-term guests’ room. An independent filmmaking group, Banida, mainly used the workroom, paying the same amount of shared expenses as other residents.
residents first gave hospitality to visitors and new comers. Consequently, the residents who put more effort into housekeeping expressed frustration and fatigue. As one of the residents, Jigak, put it:

It is not only in terms of physical work but also in terms of emotional work. What makes things worse is that we started to experience the work as labour. Many activities which previously were joyful are turned into labour now, and only some people are burdened it. (Jigak, 2009, January 15)

Meeting minutes taken by Isel illustrate the atmosphere of Bin-Zib during this period. In the meeting, residents discussed issues regarding communication, especially with new members who did not participate in Bin-Zib’s activities, meetings and house chores. The meeting participants were those who wanted to keep what they referred to as “the positive culture of Bin-Zib”. They shared their thoughts about Bin-Zib and discussed how to prevent Bin-Zib from becoming “a cheap boarding house” (Isel, 2009, March 17).

G: I have had a dream about living in a community that is not only independent from capitalism but also open to different people. (...) When we started to talk about Bimnaeul [an empty/guests’ village], I was excited. I still believe that we can make some significant changes, politically. What I really like about Bin-Zib is the fact that we collect water after washing dishes and use the water again for flushing the toilet. Of course it is a chore but I think these kinds of concrete practices are important. I would like to make these practices a part of our collective life. I also would like to hear your thoughts about Bimnaeul.

N: Bin-Zib people have not shared any particular aim so far. It might be better if we have a clear aim or an idea.

K: Bin-Zib has been a guests’ house where anyone can come. I don’t think it’s good if there are only those who share a certain goal. I hope that people come here freely and they come again because they liked it here. (…)

O: We are living together, but we all came here for different reasons. Someone might think Bin-Zib is a cheap boarding house while others consider it to be an anti-capitalist den. Isn’t Bin-Zib what includes all those different ideas? Some dream of a revolution while others think about everyday life. We don’t want all to have a same dream. As long as a person performs her role as a housemate, isn’t it ok that the person misses a meeting?
G: I don't think so. Cleaning can be done by anyone who is willing to do it. However, attending a meeting, sacrificing one's own time to communicate with others, is a minimum obligation as a member of a community.

M: Agreed.

O: I came here with a light heart. I never heard anything like I should join a meeting or something. Since all of us started to live here in this way, it would be nonsense if we are all of a sudden talking about obligation.

G: That's true. We should think of how to share one's feelings with others in a positive way. How do we become intimate with each other, and how do we share our ideas and feelings about living together? (Iisel, 2009, March 17)

Meanwhile, other complicated situations began to unfold. First, all four houses were full yet there was no fiscal ability to establish a new house. Moreover, some people who wanted to farm decided to open Binnong-Zib [an empty/ guests farming house] on the outskirts of Seoul. One of them wanted to collect his fund in Wis-Zib and put the money toward Binnong-Zib’s key money. Last, as the contract of Arae-Zib was expiring in early 2010, residents had to make decisions such as whether they would re-contract the place, who would take the responsibility as a new legal contractor, and how they would co-fund the key money, etc.16 In his piece entitled “Networking Communities for Sharing, Autonomy, and Hospitality”, Jium recollects this time as follows;

In reality, only a few people paid the key money of each Bin-Zib. From time to time, the issues of fairness or feeling of indebtedness were raised. The bundamgeum [shared expenses] was different at each house. If someone who had contributed a large share of key money wanted to move out, we had to return the money. Complicated situations arose from time to time. (Jium, 2013)

In this context, the core issues Bin-Zib residents tried to deal with in this period can be divided into the categories of money, labour and space. And, as the excerpt of the meeting transcription above implies, the issue of how to share/communicate physical

16 The original person on the lease for Arae-Zib, Jium, decided not to be a on the lease again because he wanted to encourage other guests to come forward to take responsibility as a juin [owner/host] of Bin-Zib, I will discuss this paradoxical dialectics of hosts-guests relationship in Bin-Zib in the next chapter.
and immaterial resources as well as ideas without universalizing any value was a critical matter for residents. One resident pointed out that, “in an extreme case, Bin-Zib can be considered as just a shared house or a boarding house” (Isel, 2009, March 17). However, residents were mostly hesitant to impose their values on others, even though they were displeased with the attitude of some newcomers.

Bin-Zib residents started to put their collective efforts toward diversifying communication channels and activities. They particularly tried to gauge each individual’s desire carefully, and this took the form of a question: what is the meaning of Bin-Zib for each member? What kind of house do you want to live in? These questions have been constantly re-asked, as a kind of recurring leitmotif for the Bin-Zib experiment.

With the possibility of more Bin-Zib, or mutant Bin-Zibs appearing in the area, we might struggle to convert Bin-Zib from ‘Zib [house]’ to ‘Maeul [village]’. (...) Houses in the village cannot have the same structure, function or residents because they are not Lego blocks. However, the village is more than a group of houses. You can say it is like a flock that constitutes a common rhythm. If so, we might want to ask this. What kind of activities do we organize and how do we divide functions among ourselves? As a part of Bin-Zib, what do you want to do and what prevents you from doing something? What kind of transformation are we imagining? (Jigak, 2009, January 15)

Bin-Zib residents tried to deal with these problems in multiple ways for over a year.

First of all, residents held in-depth discussions both online and offline.17 They devoted significant effort toward establishing a collective fund/bank. They wanted to set a system through which people could co-fund whatever amount they could or wanted to while the money would be distributed to each house. Developing the idea of the collective fund, the residents also re-articulated the meaning of Bin-Zib while they held a series of gatherings given the title “Imagining the Bin-Zib where I want to live”.

Meanwhile, they continued to organize various workshops, cultural events, and solidarity actions with other social movements. From shooting documentary film to

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17 More than thirty-six meetings were held for in-depth discussions on the problems faced by the community, as well as village meetings held once a month and the house meetings held once a week.
making traditional bean pastes, engagement in a range of autonomous activities has been the most important generator of Bin-Zib’s alternative energy. Especially worthy of note is that during this period residents started to organize action teams to promote new residents’ participation in Bin-Zib’s communal work and collective projects.\textsuperscript{18} Solidarity actions with other social movements were also a significant part of Bin-Zib. From supporting the migrant workers movement, movements of the homeless, and the movement against the electronic passport which contains biometric data to inviting anti-G8 activists and anti-nuclear activists from Japan, Bin-Zib has been in touch with various social movements.\textsuperscript{19} Feasts had always been thrown for various reasons. I would like to note that these convivial occasions have played an essential role in Bin-Zib, especially whenever the community hit a deadlock.\textsuperscript{20}

Bin-Zib residents put particular effort toward diversifying their methods of communication in this period. They set up a new website. They also made a collective, open guidebook named \textit{Hitchhiker’s guide to Bin-Galaxy} on a Wiki page, which anyone could freely edit or add new content. Residents also tried to promote more intimate forms of communication in various ways.\textsuperscript{21} While setting up black boards to let people know who did what kinds of house chores, they also started to publish the \textit{Binmaeul News} at each village meeting in May 2009 in order to share news about each Bin-Zib and its residents.

\textsuperscript{18} From Banchan [side dish] team and Rag picking team to Web team and Farmers’ team, various teams were organized. These teams did various work for the community, from making preserved foods and farming vegetables to setting up a new homepage. Rag picking abandoned furniture and stuffs to recycle them in Bin-Zib had also been a part of culture of the community. Those kinds of work had always been conducted spontaneously by active residents, however, they formed teams during this period to encourage those who did not participate in community work. The Alternative money action team was formed in May 2009 in order to conduct monetary experiments and develop ideas. This team became the Kicking Bin-Zib 2.0 action team, which was dedicated to discussing Bin-Zib’s rearrangement for expansion.

\textsuperscript{19} During the period, many Bin-Zib residents were particularly concerned with the farmers’ struggle in Paldang area against the state’s controversial construction projects on four major rivers. Later, four of Bin-Zib residents moved to Paldang to devote themselves to this struggle.

\textsuperscript{20} This aspect will be discussed in the final chapter.

\textsuperscript{21} Dot-dot-dot was the one of those attempts. People got together every full moon night as well as the last night of a lunar month. They turned off lights and lit candles, for having intimate conversation on various topics, reading poem, playing music. The event began in 2009 and continued until around the end of 2011, on and off.
Last but not least, collective study has been a significant part of Bin-Zib. While residents have formed collective study groups about various themes from “the History of Italian Autonomous Movements Study” to “Critically Reading SF (Science fiction)”, whenever the community confronted a serious problem members almost always initiated collective study meetings as a way of addressing it. During this period, they focused on studying various theories and examples of alternative currencies. They also tried to issue an alternative currency at Bin-Zib in order to “valorize domestic work and promote autonomous activities” (Dion, 2009, March 23).

In the mean time, Bin-Zib residents experienced another substantial challenge in terms of the openness of the community. One of biggest newspapers in South Korea reported Bin-Zib on its first page on the New Year’s Day of 2010, and following this numerous visitors and short-term guests rushed to Arae-Zib from all around the country. Coverage by the mass media, in addition to the newly updated website, exposed Bin-Zib to many new people that residents otherwise would not have met. “Around 3-40 people were staying in Arae-Zib. More than ten people were crowded only in the living room”, one resident recollected the time. Although most of them rushed to pull out of living in Bin-Zib after a couple of months, the situation demanded Bin-Zib residents’ attention. As Ken recalled, “We could not help but reconsider our ability, seriously” (Personal conversation with Ken, 8 January 2014, online chatting).

To make things worse, a “sexual abuse incident” happened in the community involving one of the newcomers.22 Although the perpetrator left Bin-Zib on his own accord very soon thereafter, this incident was enough to alert Bin-Zib residents to the

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22 A male, who heard about Bin-Zib through the mass media, made a joke that sexually objectified the female body at a gathering in Arae-Zib. Women who were present felt uncomfortable, but did not react at the moment. As other residents heard about the incident, they decided to have a conversation over the issue. However, the male and some other male newcomers did not recognize the joke as a problem. As the newcomer blamed the people who felt uncomfortable as conservative, the dispute became heated. The male kept insisting his joke was of a kind that has currency in the society at large. Some residents told him to apologize to the people who felt uncomfortable. Finally, he left Bin-Zib of his own accord, mocking other people’s opinions, calling them comic. After leaving he left a comment on the website as follows: “It looks like a comedy, I mean all you’re talking about harm and damage blah-blah-blah. I’ve taught children for a while, but even the students make coarse jokes. Since I was used to the liberated atmosphere, I could not understand the conservative atmosphere of Bin-Zib. I really respect your atmosphere. It’s a very funny comedy” (X, 2010, January 15).
dangers that come with openness to the community. Bin-Zib was open to anyone, however when you were already inside, this openness can be risky for you as it “opens up into a violence” (Westmoreland, 2008, p. 6).  

Sharp contrasts among different desires and ethics surfaced. Some residents wanted to regulate membership or set a guideline to screen incoming guests while others spoke of hospitality fatigue.

Of course, there were always problems, like the limitation of space, the stress of long-term guests who should serve visitors, and the fatigue of hospitality, those sorts of things. Because of this, many residents wanted to set a guideline or a regulation regarding whether they accepted people’s request to stay or not. And there were some Bin-Zibs that actually set their own rules for membership. (Personal conversation with Ken, 10 February 2015)

On the other hand, there had also been different ideas and sensibilities regarding the openness/closedness of the community. Some residents believed Bin-Zib should be open, based on their own experiences of being accepted by the community. There were also people who pursued an open, horizontal, and expanding network of communities.

When I lived at Gongbu-Zib, there were some people who studied philosophy at Suyunomo. They spoke in an academic way, kind of hard to understand. Anyways, I remember one expression they made. “Bin-Zib needs something like the cell membrane.” But, I did not agree with the idea. When I came to Bin-Zib at first, I was being welcomed. People just believed me without any question. It was a very refreshing experience. I believe that we should not set a threshold and should give new comers a chance to live here. Well, anyways, there were people who wanted to set a higher hurdle, and I opposed to the idea. So, we discussed on that. (Personal conversation with Mong, 10 November 2013, the Café Haebangchon)

The term Web 2.0 became so hot because it reflected people’s hope to go back to the original idea of the Web as an open structure through which everyone can access information. Although the digital sphere in reality became fragmented and monopolized by the few, people still see the possibilities of open and diverse practice, calling it Web 2.0. What

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23 Westmoreland (2008) discusses Derrida’s notion of absolute hospitality, which is betraying the practice of hospitality exercised by filtering access to or retaining sovereignty over one’s home. Following Derrida’s discussions of hospitality, Westmoreland shows the notion of hospitality requires us to think beyond distinction between the self and the other.

24 Suyunomo is an independent social science and humanities research institute in the area.
would happen to the attempt of Bin-Zib 2.0, on the other hand? Isn’t the name Bin-Zib 2.0 a reflection of our hope to go back to the idea of an open community rather than an attempt to draw lines to keep something out? (Jigak, 2010, February 3)

While trying to solve these problems, Bin-Zib residents repeatedly discussed what Bin-Zib was and what kind of Bin-Zib each member wanted to live. While each resident described her own desirable form of Bin-Zib, many residents positively received a broad definition of Bin-Zib proposed by one resident, Hyun. In his post, titled “Bin-Zib 2.0”, Hyun defined Bin-Zib as a network of houses, in which residents try to practice autonomy, hospitality, and sharing (Hyun, 2010, February 7).

The turning point was reached in April 2010 when the residents reached two major decisions regarding community management. In the first, they decided to go through with a wholesale reorganization of the community. They held a village party and settled the matter of who would be living in which house and with whom by drawing straws.

![Figure 3.3. A representation of drawing lots](Photo by Bin-Zib residents in 2010)

I analyze this incident further in the next chapter, but for now it is important to note Bin-Zib residents’ satisfaction with this “crazy way of making decisions” (Sonnim, 2010, April 26). A resident, Sun, described it this way:

25 Hyun defined Bin-Zib based on three characteristics: “1) Space should not be privately appropriated in Bin-Zib. 2) Bin-Zib is open to all. 3) All residents are guests as well as owners.” He went on to suggest that various Bin-Zibs be based around certain themes, such as “a Bin-Zib for teenagers” (Hyun, 2010, February 7).
Someone made the suggestion to draw lots while we were drinking, and it was immediately accepted. It seemed like we all thought ‘[o]h! This endless discussion is finally gonna be end!’ ‘It is so fair to all!’ And, you know what? It sounded so fun, I mean, super ridiculous. At the same time, it somehow sounded just like Bin-Zib. I think that was why we were all happy after drawing lots. (Personal conversation with Sun, 20 November 2014, Haksuk)

Establishing the collective fund/bank Bin-Go was another crucial decision taken at this time. The word go means fund in Korean.\(^{26}\) Not limiting its membership to residents of Bin-Zib, Bin-Go accepts funding from whoever agrees with the project and has granted loans to each Bin-Zib. By doing so, bundamgeum [shared expenses] of each Bin-Zib became relatively similar as all Bin-Zibs depended on Bin-Go instead of individual co-funders. Crucially, all residents of Bin-Zib came to have the same rights regardless of how much money each person put in the fund by joining Bin-Go. In this way, Bin-Go “removed the feeling of indebtedness or issues of fairness” (Jium, 2013). It also helped Bin-Zib to develop some resilience in the face of potential fiscal problems. “Despite the fact that people have been continuously in and out, and contracts for houses have also been signed and terminated, we have dealt with fiscal problems smoothly through Bin-Go”, Jium (2013) has written.\(^{27}\)

Haebangchon Il-norito [work-playground] Bingage [an empty/guests’ café/store] was also a notable experiment boosted by the positive energy circulating during this period. Six residents rented the space, paying $22,200 of key money. Monthly rent was $666. They renovated the interior by themselves for almost three months before opening the café. The most significant aim of the café was to facilitate, as its name implies, earning money by doing what residents enjoyed. In other words, the café was established as the space where Bin-Zib residents’ activities interacted more actively and

\(^{26}\) The word Go is originally from Chinese word 庫, which means shelter/storage.

\(^{27}\) At the same time, the members who put their efforts toward establishing Bin-Go tried to find alternative ways of dealing with capital. This aspect will be discussed in the next chapter.
could guarantee them a minimum income outside the capitalist wage labour relationship.\textsuperscript{28}

We had done a lot of activities, work and play, based on the various talents different residents of Bin-Zib possessed. Yet we still needed to work for the minimum wage for living. This situation pushed us to contemplate the possibility that we could do what we had done within Bin-Zib in Haebangchon and earn some money from it. Six people hit it off and rented a small shop in the neighbourhood. We got a loan from Bin-Go for the key money, and co-funded some money for the improvement of the facilities. Although there were varying ideas regarding what they wanted to do at the café, we jumped into the project to do whatever we could do. It was basically a café and a bar, but there was a corner for second-hand stuff and goods from consumer cooperatives. We had a lot of performances, flea markets and other events there. (Jium, 2013)

Opening in November 2010, the café effectively took over Arae-Zib’s role as a village center and Bin-Zib’s threshold to the community beyond it. It became the place where residents of the different Bin-Zibs got together, holding events and workshops. In addition to serving as a gathering place, the café functioned as a gate through which outsiders could access Bin-Zib and residents could share the culture of Bin-Zib with newcomers. Many residents actually got to know Bin-Zib through the cafe.

I went to the café first. It looked like an anarchists’ den. I mean it looked like a place where activists were doing things together. You know? (…) Since I was a timid person, it seemed so cool. So, I started to visit Bin-Zib, where people were lying around in the middle of the day, doing whatever they wanted to do. I would call it ‘a slow pattern of life’. I felt, the life of Bin-Zib was, well, how can I put it? It was like an old socialist revolutionary song that sounds so distant from me. (Personal conversation with Gom, 11 November 2013, the Café Haebangchon)

A gathering for reading literature took place in the café. I joined the group. While I was participating, I got to know the people of Bin-Zib naturally. I went to a village party. Then I joined the alternative currency research which some of the Bin-Zib people were doing. It was maybe just after a collage entrance exam or around then. Then we made an experimental group to actually do what we had read from the books. It was so fun.

\textsuperscript{28} Meeting records accumulated on their website show that they paid particular attention to the way the café would operate: “how to make work at the café as work-play rather than labour? How does each person contribute to the café? How should each person get paid? What is the role of members and what should be the role of workers?” (Dion, 2010, December 21).
(Personal conversation with Len, 10 December 2013, the Café Haebangchon)

Figure 3.4. Bingage [an empty/guests’ café/store]
In the picture above, Bin-Zib residents perform the interior renovation work for the Bingage. In the picture on lower left corner, people hold a party for celebrating one’s conscientious objection to military service inside the café. The picture on the lower right corner shows a stand sign on the street outside of the café. (Photo by Bin-Zib residents in 2010-2011, edited by D. Han)

As has been described, during the second period of Bin-Zib residents tried to diversify the ways in which they communicated with each other, shared “the thoughts accumulated in Bin-Zib so far and promote[d] new residents’ feelings on the issues” (Jigak, 2010 February 3). 29 At the same time, they sought to establish Bin-Zib as an open network of houses by asking what each resident wanted. When Hyun proposed Bin-Zib 2.0, a network of houses of autonomy, hospitality, and sharing, he wrote that

29 The Learning Bin-Zib as new long-term guests program, which was held in January 2010, was one specific attempt to share the collective idea of Bin-Zib with newcomers. Currently, the Bin-Go information class is carrying out a similar role.
Bin-Zib should “return to zero in order to make a new version of itself” (Hyun, 2010, February 7). While all residents began to live in Bin-Zib as guests at some point, the place could not help but become territorialized as a living place for residents rather than a place of experimentation. Moreover, as the number of Bin-Zibs increased, “the work of operation and communication which have been based on Bin-Zib became concentrated on a few members of the household” (Jigak, 2010, February 3), raising various political issues in the community. In this context, the sweeping rearrangement of the community was a deterritorializing event for Bin-Zib, leading the community into new relations. Subsequently, they established Bin-Go and Bingage [an empty/ guests’ café/store]. While residents experimented with an alternative mode of work at the café, Bin-Go started to play a role in supporting the houses financially as an infrastructure for the network of houses.

We Bin-Go secretaries will try to contemplate and handle the fraught monetary issues. So why don’t you consider the issues that are really important: what kind of house would we like to live in? With whom, with what kind of principles, would we like to live? How should we share friendship, works and responsibility? How to make relationships with the neighbourhood? What do we want to do and what can we do in order to achieve it? (Jium, 2011, April 22)

3.3. Forming a Sustainable Life in the Local Area: Bin-Zib Season 3

The third period of the experiment, or Bin-Zib Season 3, runs from 2011 to the end of 2013. During this phase Bin-Zib expanded its experiment and made connections with other alternative communities. The community also started to be observed and

30 Deterritorialization is a concept created by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1983) in _Anti-Oedipus_. They define deterritorialisation as the movement by which something escapes from a given territory.

31 According to the _Bin-Go Annual Meeting Source Book_ (2011), there was a new operating committee consisting of 5 members (of whom four people were elected while one was decided by drawing lots), 2 people from the inspection committee, and 2 secretaries for doing practical work such as transacting money to members or performing the accounting for Bin-Go.

32 The term _Bin-Zib season 3_ first appeared in a post made by Sigumchi in February 2011. In this post, the person points out that people who love Bin-Zib looked tired because “Bin-Zib is too open while there is no premise upon which it is based”. Then, she suggests Bin-Zib residents should set “basic rules, turning the community into the season 3” (Sigumchi, 2011, February 14).
copied by a new culture that was sharing houses across various actors in the country. Not only similarly autonomous communities, but also publicly funded or even commercially shared housing projects began to appear during this period. Internally, however, Bin-Zib experienced a serious lull, failing to find a consensus on its identity. Disagreements over the community’s boundaries and the extent to which the members should share their resources with the outside became prominent at this time.\(^\text{33}\)

After the reorganization of 2010, the regular village meeting was divided into a village party held once a month and what they jokingly named a zibsa [butler] meeting. At least one resident of each Bin-Zib was supposed to participate in the meeting. On the other hand, residents of Bin-Zib tried to form each Bin-Zib as a “theme house”. For example, when four people formed Gongbu-Zib [house of learning] in May 2011 they announced this Bin-Zib had specific principles as follows:

[A Resident Promises]

- To reside for at least three months
- To participate in meetings and cleaning the house, while keeping communication with Binmaeul [an empty/guests’ village].
- To become a member of Bin-Go (Funding is better ^,^)
- To read a book together once a week! (It might be twice a week)
- To keep a good relationship with locals. (What do you think about running a study home for local kids?)
- To express your ideas and listen to others. (...) (Janjan, 2011, May 13)

In other words, people started to consider each Bin-Zib as one community with its own characteristics, while all Bin-Zibs were based on the idea of autonomy, hospitality and sharing.

The co-op cafe Bingage ran into a period of fiscal difficulty during this time. The café was inconveniently located for commercial purposes. “The location made the place a hideout for Bin-Zib residents rather than attracting outside customers”, one of the former workers of the café recollected. The “anarchists’ den-like atmosphere” (Personal conversation with Gom, 11 November 2013, the Café Haebangchon) was another

\(^\text{33}\) This aspect is discussed in Chapter 4.
reason for not attracting customers. It was attractive for those who wanted to join the alternative lifestyle, however, from the perspective of local residents the place and people inside might have looked strange. In addition, as a cooperative, there was neither an employer nor an employee but rather voluntary masters who tended the café. Masters who managed the overall situation of the café tried not to turn their work into labour.\textsuperscript{34} While the master system was designed to make an autonomous environment for workers, “external customers could not expect a stable and specialized level of service”, as E. Pak (2012) points out (p. 73).

These all resulted in an ironic situation where “Bin-Zib residents were paying more money at the cafe for doing what they had done at Bin-Zib with less money before” in order to maintain the space, as a resident put it (Personal conversation with Hani, 5 September 2013, Haebangchon). In addition, while they managed to pay the rent, they could not earn sufficient money to pay the workers. Consequently, the number of voluntary masters had reduced to the point that only a few people took the role of master. For those who committed seriously to the responsibility of the master position, the work was stressful. The first co-op café was closed in January of 2012.

It should be noted that during this period the characteristics of Bin-Zib residents’ underwent significant transformation. During its earlier periods, many residents of Bin-Zib voluntarily chose to live an alternative life style. In this period, however, “not activist types but just ordinary people formed the majority of Bin-Zib residents” (Personal conversation with Sun, 20 November 2014, online chatting). E. Pak points out that this change reflected a generational change in South Korean society:

\textsuperscript{34} While the word master in western culture has an authoritarian meaning, the people who run the café choose the word because of its use in Japanese manga [comic book] culture. In many Japanese mangas and dramas, masters are described as persons who work in a certain area, such as making sushi or brewing coffee, with creditable skills as well as pride. Although masters in the Café Haebangchon were not professionals, they have called themselves masters with the hope to work not for earning money but for deriving satisfaction and dignity from their work. Each master did what she wanted during the time they managed the café. For example, during my fieldwork, two masters in their early twenties ran the café with a specific theme. Haru opened a vegan restaurant under the name of Haru kitchen two days a week. Jeongmin opened the Bar Haebangchon as a bartender during weekends from 10pm to 2am.
During my field work, many long-term residents were students or irregular workers in their twenties. They were those who spent their childhood and adolescent period in the so-called IMF period, experiencing family dissolutions. (E. Pak, 2012, p. 86).

This change had an effect on the overall atmosphere of Bin-Zib. Although there had always been people who came to Bin-Zib for economic reasons, they “easily contracted the culture of Arae-Zib in a positive way.” according to Sun. However, “as the proportion of people who had already internalized Bin-Zib’s culture decreased, the whole atmosphere changed”. This change made it even more difficult to engage new residents to share the culture of Bin-Zib and its values, such as sharing and hospitality. Under this circumstance, the whole community started to experience significant discord.

Since approximately September 2011 residents of Bin-Zib have had a series of critical conflicts over the definition of Bin-Zib and the relationship among Bin-Zib, Bin-Go and Bingage [an empty/guests’ café/store]. The dispute began from what residents call *gimjang nonjaeng* [dispute over kimchi-making for winter]. The dispute was settled by establishing up a Bin-Zib Mutual Aid Fund. The debate again intensified when Bin-Go granted its loan to an alternative community, Manhaeng, and some of the Bin-Zib residents criticized this move. What is the purpose of using the money accumulated at Bin-Zib? To what extent should they share their accumulated resources with others under the name of Bin-Zib? These were most controversial issues faced by Bin-Zib residents during this period, and ones around which they could come to no agreement, as I will discuss in Chapter 4.

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From July 2011, residents of Bin-Zib had collected $11 a month from residents for the Binmaeul Activity Fund for supporting/encouraging communal activities. Anyone who wanted to hold communal events such as a “noodle day with local elderly people” or “planting cabbages at Paldang for solidarity” could utilize the fund. The “gimjang nonjaeng” was about if they could utilize the fund for making kimchi in Bin village. (Gimjang, making kimchi before winter, is usually a communal affair for a household.) There were people who thought the fund was saved not for reducing food costs of residents but for promoting communal activities. However, others insisted the money could be used for Bin-Zib residents. In the end, those who wanted to utilize the money for making kimchi established the so-called Bin-Zib Mutual Aid Fund. The main purpose of the fund was dealing with “Bin-Zib’s internal fiscal difficulties” (Cu, 2012, June 6).
After a series of long, exhausting debates, in 2012 Bin-Zib residents backed down from the unresolved issue and the community. The only decision made during this period was that of separating Bin-Zib from Bin-Go. Those who actively carried out this move operated the Bin-Zib Mutual Aid Fund exclusively for Bin-Zib residents. They also wanted to set up an official approval process for utilizing the fund, but failed to generate positive response. As the fund did not work well, residents of Bin-Zib decided to transfer the fund back into the Bin-Go account again after four months’ separation. The unprecedented doldrums of the community continued. Residents even stopped holding the village meeting for nearly a year, from January 2013 to December 2014.

It was around this time when a significant number of Bin-Zib residents got involved in cultivating local culture in the area of Haebangchon, networking with local actors, revitalizing the local economy, and holding local festivals and events through which local people converged. By doing so, Bin-Zib itself spread out to the local area, engaging local residents. As one Bin-Zib resident put it, “It was like Bin-ming out. I mean we were coming out of the closet, telling local people, ‘yes! Here we are! A bunch of weirdos who’ve got you suspicious’” (Personal conversation with Ken, 7 October 2014, online chatting).

There were several interconnected factors that led Bin-Zib to put down roots in the local area. First of all, Café Haebangchon, the second co-op café opened in April of 2012 by seven Bin-Zib residents, played a substantial role. When the first café was closed, some Bin-Zib residents decided to open the second café right away on the main street of Haebangchon. One of the circumstances thanks to which the Café Haebangchon was conceived was the conflict mentioned above. While Bin-Zib was defined as a somewhat bounded community at the time, distinguishing itself from Bin-Go,

36 While residents who felt offended by the “somewhat bureaucratic process” avoided using the fund, “people who run the fund fizzled out” according to a resident (Personal conversation with Haru, December 2013, Haksuk). On the other hand, those who did not want to set a boundary of Bin-Zib focused on operating Bin-Go and expanding the sphere of sharing. This aspect shall be discussed in Chapter 4.

37 Three people “who still had a vision or lingering affection for the idea of running a café” (Personal conversation with Salgu, 8 September 2013, Haksuk) decided to sign a lease and become masters of the café, getting a loan from Bin-Go for a $22,200 deposit. The monthly rent was $11,100. Subsequently four more people joined in the plan as masters.
people who had pursued a movement of sharing without boundaries attempted to take a different step, with the new café as the center.

While each master had different ideas regarding whether the space should be run as a consumers’ or a workers’ cooperative, they all agreed to the idea of “establishing a café of Haebangchon beyond the café of Bin-Zib” (Jium, 2012, February 7). It was in the course of running the first café when Bin-Zib residents started to pay more attention to the unique atmosphere of local area. Haebangchon had an “urban fabric of a spontaneous settlement” of a kind that was unlike many other areas in Seoul that had been fully redeveloped (2010, S. Seo and S. Lee, p. 109), although it was isolated and stultified in terms of its economy.

It was not a carefully considered decision, you know. Although we had to close the Bingage [an empty/guests’ café/store], one thing we knew for sure was that having such a space was great. Then, the new location was absolutely awesome. That was why. We decided to sign a contract first, and then started to talk about what kind of space we wanted to make. (Personal conversation with Ken, 11 December 2014, online chatting)

We aim to establish a café, which would function as a town hall for Haebangchon. Based on the Bingage’s experience, we would start a local café, where we would mingle with local people, where we would perform joyful work, and where workers’ lives would be sustainable. We would open a café, a cultural center of Haebangchon, turning the village into a village of liberation, freed from money by the force of sharing and cooperation. (Jium, 2012, February 7)

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38 One of founding members of the first café had pointed out the ambiguity of Bingage and made suggestions regarding the role of the café as an alternative space in the area of Haebangchon. She wrote, “the issue of space, the issue of home for beings, is actually a cardinal one for all generations in the city. How do we make the space? How do we live in the space? If we want to create such a space with a café as its center, how can we show this is a joyful and productive work in spite of the so many trifles that bother us? It would be great if we start with writing diaries, make records and share it. How about taking pictures of our neighborhoods, having interviews with local people, doing research as if we are local detectives?” (Dalgun, 2011, May 3)

39 The average age of Haebangchon population is 41.7 (Ministry of Government Administration and Home Affairs, 2013), while that of Seoul city is 39.7. Considering the fact that the average age of Seoul in the 70s was 22.8, the ageing population problem in the country is serious. Haebangchon has one of the most aged populations in Seoul. Local residents have called Haebangchon “dochdanbae [an abandoned boat], in the sense that the town was isolated without young people” (Song-i Pak, 2013, February 19).
Secondly, how to earn a living in the Binmaeul [an empty/guests’ village] was a crucial issue not only for those who ran the Café Haebangchon but also for the whole community. Bin-Zib had cultivated a distinct culture of sharing from its inception. People started Bin-Zib by sharing a space, and expanded the range of sharing not only by promoting the culture of everyday life but also by devising a unique sharing system, Bin-Go. By doing so, they had formed an environment where residents could “enjoy eating well, hanging around, and living well with 50 manwon ($555) a month”. However, residents still had to labour to earn the cost of this living.

Most Bin-Zib residents during this period worked as part time labourers (E. Pak). At the same time, there were always the communal projects in Binmaeul [an empty/guests’ village] to maintain the community as a network of autonomy, hospitality, and sharing. How to valorize these activities? How to earn the cost of living by furthering those activities in Binmaeul? Those who considered Bin-Zib to be a movement to create a mode of life that was different from that under capitalism had struggled with this question. The first café had been the very attempt of making a living by doing what they wanted to do. However, it turned out to be a failure. Running a second café, masters still did not want to turn it into a business. “We should find something else. And we took a look at the possibility of getting public funds”, Jium, one of those who signed the rental contract of the café, said.

We had already talked about applying for public funds when we started the first café. However, at that moment we had decided not to do that because we did not want to let our activities be involved with public institutions in any way. However, we decided to think “what’s the problem if we utilize the funds for what we would like to do?” We were sure that we could utilize the money better than anyone. We thought, “Why don’t we expropriate public money?” There were concerns that something would change by getting money for the work that we had done without being

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40 “Enjoy good eating, good hanging around, and well-being with 500,000 won ($550) a month in a Binmaeul” was a catch phrase for a project titled Osipmanwon [500,000 won] Club. People who joined the project survived on $550, while keeping track of where they spent the money. A resident Yunong drew a documentary cartoon based on the records. Many of the Bin-Zib residents in their twenties and thirties I interviewed spent $440-660 for their living cost. “Without consuming culture, I enjoy an enriching life here”, a resident told me (Personal conversation with Tei, 20 October 2013, Haksuk). Another resident said she “had the feeling of deprivation in normal society despite the fact that I spent much more money” (personal conversation with Hani, 5 September, 2013, Haebangchon).
paid so far, but we decided to give it a shot. (Personal conversation with Jium, 8 December 2013, Haksuk)

Bin-Zib received $133,200 worth of grants in total for three years from 2012 to 2014 from the public institution named Korean Art and Culture Education Service (ARTE). Since the application had to be made by a legal organization, the Café Haebangchon applied to the fund. The title of proposal was “cultivating an eco-system for art and culture in Haebangchon”. The main aim of the proposal was gradually expanded each year. Alongside that proposal, Bin-Zib residents applied to a program run by the Seoul City Government, titled “the Seoul City New Deal Jobs for Youth; Maeullo hwaldongga [Activists to the village]” (the Seoul city mayor, 2013). This program was launched in 2013 with the aim of creating jobs for youth as well as promoting village culture in the city. Eight Bin-Zib residents worked as the Maeullo hwaldongga, being paid minimum wage by the Seoul city during 2013.

It should be noted that around early 2010 terms such as co-housing, shared housing and village community became fashionable in broader South Korean society. Bin-Zib had an influence in the formation of this trend. The fact that Bin-Zib did not initially apply for the ARTE fund but was approached by the institution itself shows Bin-Zib was a still rare case of an autonomous experiment of forming a village community in Korean society at the time. Likewise, when the Seoul Metropolitan Government pushed forward with the so-called Maeul Mandeulgi [Village Community Development] Project, the government wanted to loot at Bin-Zib. Two civil servants visited the Café

41 Under the name of the Project of Establishing Educational Basecamps for Art and Culture, the institution selected six cultural spaces which had cultivated local culture and granted $36,291 to these spaces for the following year. In 2012 the aim of the Bin-Zib’s proposal was “establishing a base camp for promoting and networking cultural communities”. In 2013 it was “forming a network of common space”. The aim of the 2014 proposal was “expanding common ground for a village of autonomy, hospitality and sharing” (Café Haebangchon, 2013).

42 The project had been one of main pledges by Pak Wonsoon, 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. The Pak Wonsoon government is enthusiastically pursuing the Maeul Mandeulgi [Village Community Development] Project as a way of “recovering humanistic relationships destroyed by competition and urbanization”. The government presented the blueprint of the project on May 2, 2012, announcing that $87,703,430 would be invested into the project in stages (Yeoran Kim, 2012, May 2). In addition to this, various other public programs were announced, to the point that words such as co-housing, co-operative, and village became trends in the society.
Haebangchon to collect information in July of 2012, when I happened to be at the café. They asked questions about how Bin-Zib operates and its history, saying Bin-Zib was one of only two examples of autonomous alternative villages in Seoul they were able to find through their research.\textsuperscript{43} However, it seemed obvious to me that they could not understand what they were being told, that three people just opened their house to others, that people had started to fund their key money by offering whatever amount of money they wanted to contribute or could afford, and so on.

While the government programs failed to refer to the case of Bin-Zib explicitly, a significant number of similar communities and co-housing projects began to appear in the society. While there were those promoted by the government or capital, those who aimed to form autonomous co-housing communities without a commercial purpose also visited Bin-Zib to refer to what Bin-Zib had done or get a loan from Bin-Go. As one publisher put it, “Bin-Zib was the place where people declared the right to housing clearly for the first time in the society” (Jihye Ahn, 2015, January 30). Bin-Zib and Bin-Go have been inundated with requests for interviews, but residents have declined most of the requests from the mass media. Instead, they shared their experiences by visiting other alternative communities and activist groups, forming enduring links with them.\textsuperscript{44} In this way, Bin-Zib has played a crucial role in forming a culture of shared housing in the country, not only as an originator but also as the most radical benchmark for the movement.

At the same time, participants struggled to maintain and expand Bin-Zib, by setting down roots in the local area and forming a desirable local eco-system. Utilizing

\textsuperscript{43} The other case was Seongmisan village. Seongmisan village was started as a cooperative childcare in 1990s. As parents set up an alternative school as well as a cooperative café and restaurant, a village was formed. While Seongmisan is a successful model of forming a village in the city, it has been criticized for its closed nature. The families who form this village are of middle class background. As a survey in a study demonstrates, the biggest motive for residents of the village is that of “giving a good education to their children”. And the meaning of a neighborhood for the residents is a “relationship with people who have similar perspective” rather than based on physical distance (Min Su Kim, 2012). I discuss the Seongmisan village more in the final chapter.

\textsuperscript{44} Based on these links, Bin-Go officially became the Bin-Go communal bank in 2013 in conjunction with four other communities. I discuss the structure of Bin-Go and its changes in the next chapter.
public funds was one of the attempts to create jobs and a foundation for sustainable living in Binmaeul [an empty/guests’ village]. “The public funds will not be given forever, but, we might establish some infra or base structure during the time when we are receiving it. Let’s take a chance—that was what we thought”, Jium said (Personal conversation with Jium, 8 December 2013, Haksuk).

Utilizing the public funds, participants strived to devise a distinct way of sharing resources based on the communist principle of “from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs”. This attitude has always been at the very base of Bin-Zib, whether the members realized it or not, as I examine in the next chapter. However, in this period, they started to utilize it not only to share the living space and resources each one already owned, but also to earn a livelihood in the Binmaeul [an empty/guests’ village].

When they ran the first café, residents who volunteered as café master put down the time and day they wanted to work each month. At the end of each month the masters met and held what they called a redistribution party to share surplus revenue for the month. According to E. Pak (2012), who participated in the redistribution parties, money was given to people that was “relatively proportional to their working time. However, there was no clear standard” (p. 77).

Considering the total amount of profits and the number of masters, each master stated whatever amount of money she wanted to be paid. Then, they tried to divide the surplus money according to each master’s wants so long as it was possible. (E. Pak, 2014, p. 77)

The second café adopted a “more stable master system” as seven masters took responsibility for fixed working hours. However, when they tried to secure monetary resources for masters’ sustainable living in the Binmaeul [an empty/guests’ village], what they did was based on the communist principle. One of those who made a legal contract for the café space started to work at an NGO and devoted all of his income from work toward surplus revenue for the café. Then, all masters, including him, shared the total revenue until they began to utilize ARTE fund.

We masters, decided to receive 400,000 won ($440) to live in the Binmaeul. Working time was 7-8 hours a day. But, there was a person
who wanted to work at the cafe as if were a real job. So she told us she needed at least 700,000 won ($777), so she was paid that amount. (Personal conversation with Jium, 11 December 2014, Haksuk)

The way they utilized the public funds was similar. Although the percentage of payroll cost in the fund had been predetermined, ARTE activists voluntarily put a part of what they were paid into a collective fund, which provides for future deficits at the café.

On the other hand, participants also tried to do what they wanted in a spontaneous manner. For example, the village festival, one of the biggest performances, was not planned for when they applied for the ARTE fund. According to a report submitted to the ARTE, “the idea suddenly popped up in people’s minds when they were holding a village market” (Yunong, 2013). In other words, they tried to be deterred as little as possible by the bureaucratic process. Yunong, a Bin-Zib resident who worked as an ARTE activist said:

What I still remember as the most impressive thing was that, you know, when we made a proposal, some of us believed that we should make the proposal look like something, copying examples from abroad that ARTE held up as examples. However, Salgu told us “we don’t have to think that way. We should think what we want to do. We should do what we want to do”. (Personal conversation with Yunong, 22 October 2013, Haksuk)

Various individuals and groups in the area of Haebangchon began to be engaged with the activities as neighbours of Bin-Zib. The Café Haebangchon played the key role in networking various local artists’ and craft artisans’ communities in the area, offering them opportunities for workshops. Maeullo hwaldongga [Activists to the village] formed a

The way Bin-Zib residents in different groups shared what they were doing in their everyday lives also could not be captured by the bureaucratic logic of public grant projects. A project was usually shared or passed on to other actors or groups. In many cases it is impossible to distinguish who the main actors were in a given project conducted in Haebangchon. For example, one former resident of Bin-Zib suggested the idea of researching the micro-history of Haebangchon and interviewing local seniors in May of 2012 (See the footnote 38). This project was actually carried out by Maeullo hwaldongga [activists to the village] as one of the New Deal jobs funded by Seoul city in 2013. Five Bin-Zib residents in their twenties and thirties participated in this project. While the result was published by the city of Seoul as a book chapter, the café published the research results as five DIY books as part of Hebangmungo [Liberation Book] series utilizing the ARTE fund. Pictures and interviews were also exhibited in the café later as part of a big village event.
consultative group named Haebangchon Salamdeul [People of Haebangchon] with local residents including religious groups and small retailers.46

Residents who were actively engaged in the activities in the local area put particular effort into trying to revitalize the local economy, holding village festivals and big charity bazaars at the local market, named Sinheung market, which had previously gone into a decline. The village festival and the bazaar of the Sinheung market functioned as symbolic space where various groups and individuals converged. Haebanchon Salamdeul [People of Haebangchon] decided to issue an alternative local currency by using the profit they generated in the bazaar. Seven local residents including the representative of the Sinheung market trailers, a priest of the local Catholic Church and Bin-Go activists formed a committee to oversee the alternative local currency. Bin-Go issued the currency, called Haebanghawpe [Liberation Money]. Currently, 33 local shops have become affiliate members and accept the alternative currency. And, in the second Bazaar on May 2014, $7,700 worth of Haebanghawpe was circulated.

In February of 2013 a mainstream news article reported on Haebangchon as “an old village, which has become a basecamp of alternative communities where people contemplate the possibility of alternative” (S. Pak, 2013, February 19). In the article, an old resident described how Haebangchon had been stultified as the fever of redevelopment in the 1980s missed the neighbourhood, and the young generation left the village. “These days, however, more and more young people move into Haebangchon. (...) And many of them have visited the town due to the Café Haebangchon”, the article notes.

46 Haebangchon Salamdeul [People of Haebangchon] was started as a loose network of various groups in the neighbourhood. Bin-Zib, Suyunomo (an independent researchers’ institute in the area), Jongjeom sudabang (a place for young mothers and children in Haebangchon run by a progressive political party), Haebangchon catholic church, Daewonjungsa (a Buddhist temple in the area) and the committee of Sinheung market merchants were engaged in the network. Bin-Zib residents played a key role in networking the groups and individuals who had interested in forming local culture.
Figure 3.5. Bin-Zib in Haebangchon
In the above picture, people celebrate the six-year anniversary of Bin-Zib at the Café Haebangchon. Each person holds a small birthday cake with a candle. In the low left picture, people do a local radio show as part of a festival program for revitalizing a local street market. The picture on the lower right corner celebrates the launching a committee of the alternative local currency. (Photo by Bin-Zib residents in 2013-2014, edited by D. Han)

In wrapping up this chapter, I would like to note that the community is still evolving itself in a spontaneous manner. As Jiium and Salgu left the community in early 2014, Bin-Zib completed a generational shift. The village meeting was re-started in December 2013, unexpectedly. While residents talked about setting up a new Bin-Zib at a village feast, they drifted into restarting of the village meeting. Residents then started to discuss not only about establishing a new Bin-Zib but also about setting a town hall like Arae-Zib did before. At the last meeting I attended during my field research, residents discussed how to guarantee a minimum income for those who wanted to be a full-time Binzibin [Bin-Zibites], doing work for maintaining Bin-Zib as an empty/guests’ house.
In 2014, there were two official Maeullo hwaldongga [Activists to the village] that were paid $1,220 for a month. The $2,440 was shared by eight Bin-Zib residents, who worked as full-time Binzibin. What they did was “work for Bin-Zib, Binmaeul [an empty/guests’ village], Bin-Go, the alternative money Haebanghwapye, and the Haebangchon Salamdeul network while preparing a new institution of Common Housing Cooperative”. Dandi, an official Maeullo hwaldongga said that they distributed the money not according to who worked more but according to who needed it more.

For example, we think that one can live on 500,000 won ($555) a month in Binmaeul. Thus, I get 500,000 won because I don’t have any other source of money. For example, a person A who earns 300,000 won ($333) as a café master is paid 200,000 won ($222). B who earns 400,000 won ($444) as a full-time activist of Bin-Go is paid 100,000 won ($111). C who has no problem with her living as she has severance pay gets only 50,000 won ($55). We distribute the money in such a manner and accumulate surplus money as operational money for Haebangchon Salamdeul. It is a matter of money, but we don’t have an objective standard of distribution. Thus I actually had thought there was gonna be a problem. But, you know what? There has been not a single problem in terms of money, although there were so many troubles for other issues, haha. No single person wanted to get more. Contrariwise, some argued that they should get less as they work less. However, other members insisted they should get the money, as they needed it. Such heart-warming situations have taken place from time to time. (Personal conversation with Dandi, 16 December 16, online chat)

In addition to these activities, Bin-Zib residents started to publish a monthly zine titled *Monthly Bin-Zib; Noneunsalam* [tongue-in-cheek transliteration of Homo Ludens], available in DIY printed form as well as in digital format. With a particular theme each month, this zine communicates information, ideas, and the thought of Bin-Zib in various formats, including interviews, cartoons and articles. The zine particularly promoted what they called the lifestyle of “noneunsalam, or the voluntary poor”, not by offering politically radical ideas but by showing how people “live in Bin-Zib in every little detail” (Yeondu, 2014, June). In other words, the zine is stylizing Bin-Zib’s distinct culture. At the same time, editors attempt to show what Bin-Zib has done, drawing links with the current situation.
In the October issue the editors posted a story titled “Woodcutter Story”, which dramatized the conflicts over Bin-Zib’s accumulated money in the third era profiled above. I summarize the story here. There was a town where people built their houses with wood. At some point people began saving the surplus wood for other people to move in to the town, while they still worked for firewood. One winter, newly arrived people made a suggestion to use the saved wood for fuel. However, some residents thought it was not a good idea because the wood had been saved for building new houses. Then the story was finished without a conclusion, leaving just a question.
What do you think? How did the village survive the winter? What would you do if you lived in the village? If you wanted to use the wood for us, who should be included in the word we? Are we the residents who are living in the town? Or, does the word include those who came before or after us? We will bear these questions in mind and welcome another coming winter where we go through thick and thin, high and low. (Noneunsalam, 2014)

This story wittily illustrates what the most fundamental question at Bin-Zib has been, one generated by the name of the community. In the next chapter I examine what the guiding principle of the community has been, one that flows from its name, an empty/guests house. I also try to analyze how this principle has made Bin-Zib a fundamentally controversial place, pushing its residents to change their way of living.
Chapter 4.

What Makes Bin-Zib as an Empty/ Guests’ House: The Configuration of Political Space

One day, while I was socializing in Haksuk, a member received a phone call inquiring about Bin-Zib. After he hung up the phone, he came back to the living room and told us the call was “from a middle aged woman”. Since he sounded a bit sad, people there all looked at him. “She sounded so nervous. I couldn’t even tell whether she wanted her son to stay in Bin-Zib or herself.” He continued. “Anyways she started to bemoan her misfortunes, regarding a violent husband and so on.”

“It’s been kind of a long time since we got such a strange phone call, right?” another member cut in. I asked, “Oh, do you often get calls like this?” being surprised a bit. “Yes, quite often,” he answered and continued to say. “Anyways, I told her to just come check the place out. Then.... the thing is, she suddenly asked...” He took a breath before he went on. “People in Bin-Zib do not fight with each other, do they?” After a momentary silence, we all burst into laughter, feeling sorry for the nameless woman. “So, what did you tell her?” I asked. He continued: “I said, of course we fight. We fight all the time. Then, after a short silence, she answered with a sigh. Oh, I see. I see. Bin-Zib is just like any other place where people live.”

I think this short dialogue points to a significant feature of Bin-Zib. The woman likely read one of the media pieces that romanticized Bin-Zib by calling it “an alternative community for a fragmented society” (Su Jin Kim, 2011, February 24) or “an alternative space where the imagination comes true” (Eun Seong Kim, 2009, May 29). Perhaps she had investigated Bin-Zib’s website and read some visitors’ accounts of their stay. In such accounts, the most common words participants have used to express their feeling about Bin-Zib are weird, wonderland, and strange. What is the reason for those feelings of
strangeness, though? Why is Bin-Zib so easily romanticized from an outsider's point of view?

One reason for the feeling of strangeness comes from the fact that newcomers are welcomed without reservation. Mong, a resident who has lived in Bin-Zib for 4 years, illustrates this sentiment:

I still remember very well the first day I came here. One girl greeted me and led me to Yeop-Zib, as it had space for a new person at that time. The one who greeted me, however, had to go to work soon. So she explained some basic things in hurry, and casually told me, “Here is money for common use. You can buy food, shampoo, and those sorts of things with this money”. Then, she left the house. I was there alone for almost half a day. It was a weird experience. Very weird. Not bad, though. Actually, I felt so welcomed even though I was alone there. (Personal conversation with Mong, 10 November 2013, the Café Haebangchon)

The weirdness Mong felt was due not only to the hospitality, but also to the way Bin-Zib residents treated money. I actually had the same feeling when I stayed in Bin-Zib for the first time. Living in China from 2008 to 2012, I stayed at Bin-Zib twice when I returned to Seoul. At that time guests had to pay at least $2.20 a day for utilities and basic foods, but it seemed that no one kept track of things like that. Instead, they had a small green box with a bundamgeum [shared expenses] label on it on a table in the living room. As it was a transparent plastic container, I could see there were always bills and coins in the box. Anybody could use the money if the house ran out of toilet paper or rice, for example. I did, however, worry a bit about someone not paying her fair share. Even filching seemed to be happening, as there were many new and random visitors in Bin-Zib.

According to one informant, filching money from the bundamgeum box actually happened once in 2011. It was around $330, fairly big money for Bin-Zib residents, but Arae-Zib residents still used the same box even after the incident, although a couple of members became more vigilant and deposited the money more often into the bank account. (Bin-Zib residents use a government run bank, Kiup Bank, founded in 1961 for promoting small and medium sized businesses in Korea. It is mainly due to convenience as there is a branch of Kiup Bank in Haebangchon. “More than 90% of Bin-Go money is used as jeonse [key-money] deposit for spaces while around 10% of all assets is deposited in the bank”, according to a Bin-Go activist.)
There might be further reasons for the sense of oddness described by first-time visitors to Bin-Zib, such as the way people use space and treat household chores. It is certain that, when compared with what is considered to be normal in mainstream society, the customs within Bin-Zib could be thought of as strange. In addition, it usually takes a while before one gets the gist of Bin-Zib’s organizational principles. According to Bin-Zib residents they do not have an official stipulation of the principles in Bin-Zib, although each house has some provisional or temporally bound set of rules based on agreement between existing residents. However, how can a community (re)produce itself if there is no foundational idea or principle?

I argue that that there are two significant principles upon which the community has formed. I believe that the vagueness, the unusual nature of the community, and the reason residents say there is no official principles in Bin-Zib are caused by the principles I am about to describe in this chapter. Those principles stem from, and are potentially defined by the name Bin-Zib [an empty/ guests’ house]. In this chapter I first analyze Bin-Zib’s principles, exploring how participants have pursued egalitarian communication as well as communistic relations. In doing so, I shed light on how the principles of Bin-Zib have generated dynamics and conflicts in the community, constructing a “political space” in Rancière’s (2010) sense (p. 39). I then examine how constant disputes in the community have promoted residents’ subjectivation, leading them to devise and improvise upon the system of commingling. Throughout, I try to show how creating communistic relations in Bin-Zib has only become possible when residents of Bin-Zib produce themselves as the common through the subjectivation catalyzed by the encounters occurring in what Rancière (1992, p. 62) calls the “in between”.

4.1. Dialectics of Bin-Zib’s Principles

In the first month of communal living, the first generation of the community collectively wrote a short guide to Bin-Zib. The introduction has since been posted on the first page of Bin-Zib Wiki page and its website, giving a sense of the principles based upon which the community has formed.

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2 Regarding the meaning of subjectivation, see footnote 3 in Chapter 1.
Bin-Zib is a guests’ house. Like a guesthouse, it’s a place you can come by, eat, drink, hang out, rest and sleep. Unlike a guesthouse, there is no juin [owner/hosts] who will serve you. 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.

As a juin of Bin-Zib, you should do things by yourself. Of course, you can enjoy many things prepared and cultivated by people who arrived before you. You can enjoy the hospitality given by people around you. You also can prepare and cultivate something for the people around you as well as people who will come later. This place will continue to be changed by those who have yet to come, how they use and compose this place.

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 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 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)

This introduction seems to explain the very meaning of Bin-Zib. However, through its history residents of Bin-Zib have asked and re-asked themselves about the meaning of Bin-Zib. What does this introduction actually mean? The introduction is not an explanation but an oxymoron. It declares, by its own definition, that there is no juin [owner] at Bin-Zib. Anyone thus can join the community as a guest, without limitations. Then, guests are immediately called on to be a juin [host] to the community because Bin-Zib is guests’ house. The paradoxical name chosen for the community reflected values that were developed by its first generation of inhabitants. By forming an alternative community, participants tried to avoid becoming a closed community under an identical set of beliefs, or ideology. On the other hand, participants also wanted to form a culture of sharing, one that was different from the capitalist norm of reciprocal exchange. These conflicting ideas appeared as the form of Bin-Zib, whose name simultaneously expresses two basic principles of the community.

4.1.1. Travelers’ communication, as Bin-Zib’s first principle

As the introduction of Bin-Zib declares, anyone can come to Bin-Zib and stay there as long as she wants, as a “guest”. Since all members are just guests, no one can
assert one's right to set a rule, no matter how long a person lives there. Based on the name of the community, Bin-Zib’s first principle is therefore characterized by an egalitarian ethos. I call this first principle instituted within Bin-Zib travelers’ communication.

When the founding members of Bin-Zib started the communal living experiment, they desired to form an open, horizontal community. As I discussed in Chapter 2, this attitude was based on the cultural sensibilities of the first generation of the community. In pursuing an open community where individuals freely come and go, initiators compared their experience to that of travelling rather than existing alternative communities in the society. Travelers build a relationship by having conversations or being in the company of each other only as long as they want. Meeting on the road, temporarily, travelers cannot build any kind of hierarchy, which, as Graeber (2011) notes, “tends to work by a logic of precedent” (p. 109). In the absence of precedent, egalitarian communication thus might be the most usual way that fellow travelers communicate with each other. In addition, travelers tend to form different moral economy from that which is conceived in capitalist society. Notwithstanding the fact that they are much more used to capitalist ways of exchange in their everyday life, they tend to share not only information but also goods with strangers. Being warmly received by random local residents is usually

3 Before they started the experiment of Bin-Zib, Jium and Salgu travelled around Asia and Europe by bicycle for ten months starting from the end of 2006. Jium said, "When we traveled, a lot of kind people helped us. Although they never had seen us before, they invited us into their homes, offered food and shelter without reserve. Even when we stayed in a guesthouse, people were kind to each other, sharing things" (Jium, Interview by O. Kim, 2009). During the trip, they came up with vague ideas of running a non-commercial guesthouse, or organizing a space where they could greet guests just as they had been welcomed by the people they had met on the road. According to one of Jium's posts on his blog, traveling around Europe, they slept outdoors for 94 days and indoors for 106. The 106 days of indoor accommodations consisted of 41 days staying in houses of friends, 28 days staying in houses of new friends they met on the road, 6 days staying at the homes of local residents who had invited them, 7 days staying in the homes of local residents when they asked to stay inside because sleeping outside was difficult for various reasons, and 24 days staying in houses they contacted through websites such as warmshowers.org, hospitalityclub.org, and globalfreeloaders.com. Categorizing their accommodations in Europe, Jium wrote that all they paid for the three months' accommodation in Europe was 150 Euros, charged when they took shelter at commercial camping spots when the weather was bad (Jium, 2007, October 16).

4 I discuss the particular moral economy Bin-Zib has pursued in the following section.
considered to be one of the most ideal travel experiences, whereas people complain about local places that are too commercialized or touristic.\textsuperscript{5}

The communicative style at Bin-Zib has formed a distinct atmosphere in the housing experiment. As I noted in Chapter 2, Bin-Zib residents do not ask for a visitor’s name, age, career or other details one might expect to be asked when one meets people for the first time in South Korean society. Instead, residents would introduce themselves with a nickname, telling the visitor “you can let people know whatever name you want to be called by”. If someone wants to stay at Bin-Zib, she might make a phone call to get more information, or visit the community before making a decision. Except for the very basic information about how to pay bundamgeum and how to use communal money, the visitor cannot get detailed information. Usually Bin-Zib members answer inquiries by telling people that “well, there is no one to serve you here. Yes, we live together. The situation is a bit different in each house. You should pay $5-7 bundamgeum per day for rent, utilities and basic food. Why don't you stay here for a couple of days?” One might feel the resident(s) seem not very official and the information is vague in general. I would say that the ordinariness and inexplicitness mark what I call travelers’ communication. This kind of communication could simply be the way a traveler greets another traveler in a place where there is no owner. As a guest, a traveler would welcome another one. She would share what she knows with the new one but without having authority or sovereignty on the space.

The communicative style has two significant effects. First, it promotes a clearly distinct culture from the hierarchical culture within the broader South Korean society, where, influenced by Confucianism and the extremely hierarchical military culture promoted by the authoritarian government, a majority of Korean people have internalized an age-based hierarchy. Not only the ways of speaking (whether using honorific or informal language), but also the ways of addressing people are specifically defined

\textsuperscript{5} While the experience of travelling has been captured by the logic of commercialized tourism, even travel companies frequently use images of the untapped native culture and hospitality to promote their commodity. This fact shows that travellers (especially when travellers do not buy a travel package but travel by themselves) hope for encounters beyond capitalistic reciprocal relations. Websites such as warmshowers.org, hospitalityclub.org, and globalfreeloaders.com are examples of what I mean when I speak of the social relations of traveling.
based on age difference in Korean language, asking one’s age is necessary when people first meet each other.⁶ In this circumstance, Bin-Zib residents’ way of addressing and speaking to each other demonstrates a very distinct culture to newcomers without explicitly clarifying it.⁷

Second, travelers’ communication effectively blurs the boundary between newcomers and existing residents. For example, a guest often feels lost because of the way everyone is a host, and a guest, at Bin-Zib. There is no proper place for a guest. In addition, nobody treats the first visitor courteously, unlike an ordinary house where a host will serve a guest while the guest might not come into, for example, the bedroom of the host.⁸ If there is a gathering taking place at Bin-Zib, a visitor is likely to be invited in. Although residents welcome the visitor, nobody treats her in a special way. Whole conversations in front of the visitor might be conducted in a casual manner as if there is nothing special going on. If a first time visitor volunteers to cook or wash dishes, it might be regarded as the best sign that she has already started adjusting to the community, as Yeongjun did on his first day at Bin-Zib.

It seems like residents are very accustomed to having visitors and newcomers. They welcomed me, but without extravagance. It was very good to have the first dinner at Bin-Zib, together with all people. Food was

⁶ In Korea, the second person you is only used by a person who is higher than a listener in status, or among those of the same status, such as friends. Even if the age difference is only one year, the younger should call the senior Eonni/Oppa (the way females address a senior female/male) or Hyeong/Nuna (the way males address a senior male/female) instead of “you”, or by name.

⁷ Residents use honorific language to newcomers until they feel comfortable with each other or they make sure to use informal words that are fine for both of them. Although they call each other by nickname, they sometimes add the suffix nim, which has an honorific meaning, especially in the case newcomers are older than fifty and might feel offended. During my field research I met three residents in their fifties. While residents called one of them, who was female, only by a nickname, the other two (male) residents were called by nickname with the suffix nim. I found that this was based on specific reactions and the degree to which a person had become accustomed to Bin-Zib’s culture. However, if a person just uses informal language only because the listener is younger than herself, the latter would get offended, despite the fact that this is normal in the broader society.

⁸ In his empirical research on Western Samoa, Duranti (1992) examines how Samoan people, in their first moment of encounter, locate themselves in a proper place in a house through “an interactional step whereby participants not only gather information about each other and about the setting but also engage in a negotiated process at the end of which they find themselves physically located in relevant social hierarchies and ready to assume particular institutional roles” (p. 657). In Bin-Zib, the contrary is happening.
great. Moreover, I finally could feel calm. Or, I could realize that I had some nervous feelings up to that time. Thus I quickly did the dishwashing. (Yeongjun, 2014, June)\(^9\)

\[\text{Figure 4.1. Culture of Bin-Zib described in Noneunsalam}
\]
The picture on the left is the cover of the first issue of Bin-Zib zine Noneunsalam. The drawing done by a former resident depicts a typical dinnertime at Bin-Zib. The picture on the right is a cartoon drawn by a resident. It describes how she had gotten shocked at first by the fact Bin-Zib people used informal language to address seniors and how soon she became accustomed to the culture. (The picture on the left is illustrated by Mina in 2014, and the cartoon drawn by Yunong in 2014)

Once, a resident Len told me how she started to introduce Bin-Zib to newcomers from the second day of her staying at Bin-Zib. She said that, “since I was the only person in the house at the moment, I should greet a newcomer. I could not help but just copy what I saw and heard the day before” (Personal conversation with Len, 10 December 2013, the Café Haebangchon). Almost involuntarily, Len, a newcomer, filled the role of a host based on what we have called travelers’ communication.

\[^9\] Yeongjoon wrote the article as a newcomer in the first issue of Bin-Zib zine Noneunsalam.
The *Hitchhiker’s Guide to Bin-Galaxy* residents published on their Wiki page is another excellent example of how residents have tried to communicate with new comers. The guide was published in the form of an instruction manual for Bin-Zib. Using the Wiki page, the guide could be written and edited by anyone for future comers. According to meeting minutes, Bin-Zib residents decided to publish the guide not because they “want[ed] to set firm rules”. Rather, they wanted to “archive accumulated experiences and collective ideas to share with future comers” (Anonymous, 2009, November 6). In doing so, they hoped for their experiences and experiments to be “something like a compass” for new travelers to “find a way by referring to what early comers have tried to do while adding new ideas and practices” (Jigak, 2010, February 3).

### 4.1.2. Expanding communism as Bin-Zib’s second principle

The second principle of Bin-Zib flows from their attitude towards home ownership. According to the introduction to the community on the website, Bin-Zib has no owner. When Bin-Zib was started there were legal leaseholders who paid the key-money deposit out of their own pockets. Those leaseholders, however, chose to relinquish their ownership claim to the house by calling themselves guests. In this way they intended to turn a house into a common resource, or in other words, to communalize the house. Thereafter, the number of houses increased as more people joined. 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 maintenance costs, equally, regardless of how much or whether they had contributed to funding the initial deposit for the house. 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, 1938, p. 10).

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10 After Bin-Go was set up, the leaseholders’ role was also changed. Leaseholders are currently those people who are willing to form a community based on a contracted house rather than people who fund key-money deposit. Enabling whomever to be a contract holder was one of purposes of setting up Bin-Go.
Communistic relations have always existed in human history, in forms of behaviour referred to as “solidarity”, “mutual aid”, “conviviality”, or even “help” (Graeber, 2010, p. 4). However, the degree to which people communistically relate to each other and with whom they do so is astonishingly varied from one society to another. People are not calculating, but rather mostly tend to share things with their close friends and family members. And there is a significantly large set of examples of societies where this kind of morality is dominant (Mauss, 1967). On the other hand, in capitalist society where exchange is the social norm, the sensibilities associated with communism, as well as the extent of its practice through society have been shockingly limited.\footnote{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.}

Seen from this perspective, Bin-Zib residents have endeavoured 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 writes that, “a house seems like the most valuable property for a person in capitalist society, but a house is a space of sharing in its \textit{ab initio} meaning” (Jium, 2010):

Family members connected by blood do not quibble over the ownership of things 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 posits the notion of house as a place where people share things without calculation. Pointing out how this perception has even destroyed families in the society when people begin to consider homes as a form of property rather than a space
for living, he suggests that, “we can change the negative reality by acting conversely”. He asserts that “[b]y sharing a house, we can live with anyone and become-family even though we have just met each other” (Jium, 2010).

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. Becoming-family does not mean being identical, or having a relationship of possession. The practice of sharing that enables us to become-family should be happening/expanding gradually while living together with others. Becoming-family would happen not in a house but on a threshold of a house as we accept others and move towards others. We are not living together because we are a family. Living together is what causes becoming-family. (Jium, 2010)\(^{12}\)

What Jium calls “becoming-family” can be understood as making communistic relations in Graeber’s sense. 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.

Several fiscal principles devised by Bin-Zib participants reveal the moral economy on which the community has been based more clearly. Although they have never officially stipulated these principles, participants did at one point transcribe a list of what had been tacitly accepted as the fiscal principles of Bin-Zib when their communistic ideals faced the growing membership and the demand for more space. In other words, these were transcribed as a list of fiscal principles that had been provisionally accepted at the time, and have been altering thereafter.

It seems we have some provisional fiscal principles as such:

\(^{12}\) In the article, Jium coins the term *becoming-family*, presumably partly inspired by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s discussion of becoming. From 1990s activists who were critical of 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. The term *becoming* was used regularly in the community, often combined with other words such as *guest* and *host*, as I discuss later in this chapter.
1. Having money is nothing to brag about: There is no compensation for the money invested in Bin-Zib.

2. Loaning money is the same: There is no compensation for people who get or provide loans.

3. Private ownership is not abolished: how much funds one puts in and takes out depends on one’s will.

4. We don't buy houses: We reject any kind of real estate investment. The same amount of money can provide housing for way more people if we rent houses as opposed to buying a house.

5. We don't make money/profit from Bin-Zib.

6. Expenses should be shared evenly by all: the burden for utilities, interest on loans, and monthly rent is shared.

7. Shared expenses should be affordable for everyone. Expenses are more than 2,000 won ($2.20) a day, which is half the minimum wage for an hour's labour.

8. Anyone who shares in the expenses is a juin [owner/host] of Bin-Zib.

9. Deficits are paid off on a monthly basis. Surplus, if any, is accumulated.

10. The accumulated surplus is used to organize more Bin-Zibs.

11. The financial situation at Bin-Zib is completely open. All the residents do accounting in rotation.

12. How to get money for the expansion of Bin-Zib?: Would not more people mean more money?

13. And so on. (Anonymous, 2009, September 7)

We can see from these principles that communism in Bin-Zib is not about abolishing private ownership. Funding the formation of a house, even through getting a loan, is based on one’s ability/desire to do so. One can provide as much funding as one is able to. Such practices are encouraged as both confirmation and application of Bin-Zib’s communistic principles. Even when members 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 2,000 won ($2.20)”. What is significant is that residents tried to set an amount that was affordable for everyone while guaranteeing the minimum cost for collective living was satisfied. Accordingly, the principle of Bin-Zib is distinguished from capitalist exchange based on reciprocity.

In communistic relations, people are not dealing with reciprocity, but instead presume eternity. “Society will always exist” (Graeber, 2011, p. 108). However, Bin-Zib, as a house, faces inevitable spatial limitations. It is physically impossible to allow an unlimited number of people to stay there. Then, in practice, how do the Bin-Zib people make the original idea of Bin-Zib [an empty/guests’ house] available for newcomers so that Bin-Zib will always exist? After all, the community professed, “[r]egardless of how many people live here, Bin-Zib should always have room for others to come”. The answer to this question appears to be the multiplication of houses and the residents’ engagement in that process. The name of the community requires one to become engaged in the movement for expanding communism around housing.

What I would like to note here is the complicated dynamic upon which the two principles of Bin-Zib have been created. On the one hand, “communistic relations can easily start slipping into relations of hierarchical inequality—often without anyone noticing it”, as Graeber (2011) points out (p. 115). It is because each person has different abilities and needs, and they are not proportionate. In this regard, the first principle, which I have referred to as travelers’ communication, has played a role of setting safeguards against hierarchy. Residents also have tried to deal with feelings of indebtedness among them.

13 The 12th fiscal principle —“How to get money for the expansion of Bin-Zib?: Would not more people mean more money?”—implies that Bin-Zib’s expansion depends on the engagement of newcomers.

14 For example, when one of the initiators borrowed $90,000 at a low interest rate from a relative when they rented Arae-Zib (see Chapter 3) it was announced that the money was a loan offered by a private foundation. This was one way to enable other people to think of the money as neutral rather than private and thus consider Bin-Zib a commons rather than depending on some more than others. In the same vein, when residents established the collective fund/bank Bin-Go, one of the most significant reasons was to eliminate the feeling of indebtedness.
Figure 4.2. Culture of sharing
In Bin-Zib, communism has always been related with a pleasant of sharing foods and activities. In the picture above, residents are playing the board game Bin-Go designed by a Bin-Go activist. The left picture below is a captured image of Bin-Zib chatting room using a smart phone text message application where more than 60 people have joined in. (Photo by Bin-Zib residents in 2015, edited by D. Han)

On the other hand, the community requires newcomers become a part of communistic relations, creating an enormous and expanding circle of gifting. However, how can a person become involved in the process of expanding communism without enforcing rules? Based on the first principle, the community has accepted dissimilar people as residents while trying to eliminate hierarchy in practice. What if there is someone who enjoys all the things she is offered but gives nothing back in return? There is no guarantee that a new guest of Bin-Zib will enter into a form of communistic relation with the residents, no matter how much effort existing members put into creating the conditions for it. Tensions build up between these two principles, each of which stems from the meaning of Bin-Zib, producing the place as a fundamentally political space.

At the beginning of this chapter I mentioned the news articles that idealized Bin-Zib as a sort of utopia. In a sense, these articles contain some truth, although that truth
is only partial. The truth can be summarized as people of Bin-Zib give strangers something that people usually give only to their families and friends. What those articles missed is the fact that, for the exact same reason, Bin-Zib cannot help but be a battlefield. Different kinds of ethics, perceptions, and sensibilities regarding how to share/exchange space, labour, money and ideas constantly collide with each other at Bin-Zib.

4.1.3. Configuration of Bin-Zib as a paradoxical place

For many long-term guests, the experience of being accepted by the community without qualification was very significant. In addition, newcomers can easily mingle with existing residents through the frequent parties and convivial events that mark a significant part of community life. It is certainly an extraordinary atmosphere, especially for those who have just joined the community.

When I came to Bin-Zib, It reminded me of the movie *Big Fish*. Yes, that was what I thought, exactly—the village in the woods in the movie, or the *heterotopia*. It was a village where so many different kinds of people were together, fleeing from the big city because they hate the endless competition, obligations, suppression, or meaningless routines. So, this town is isolated from society, without the concept of money. (...) Bin-Zib seems just like a village. When you are in Bin-Zib, you lose track of time. (Personal conversation with Naru, 11 November 2013, Haksuk)

How can I put it? A paradise? I mean, when I skimmed the site at first, Bin-Zib looked so freewheeling, without any rules or nothing. You know what? It’s a matter of living together with someone. You need to believe the person. How do you know the person would not steal my stuff or do something violent? But they just accepted me without any reason. (...) There is a big difference compared to friends I’ve met in the society. How different? I don’t know. How can I put it? Even when I buy drinks, there is no feeling I am losing something. I had this feeling of loss when I was with

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15 During my field research, I stayed at Haksuk. Throughout the day, residents of other Bin-Zibs and a lot of friends visited Haksuk, just passing by. They dropped by to make a conversation, to have a meal together, to check if there was something fun going on. There were six residents including me in Haksuk, but at least more than 10 people ate dinner together almost every day, and new visitors joined frequently. There were also always messages such as "Here we are having a BBQ party in Salim-Zib, join us!" or "I am making a Kimchi stew right now, anyone wanna join me?" in Binmaeul chatting room using a smartphone text message application.

16 *Big Fish* (2003) is a film directed by Tim Burton.
friends. I don’t know the reason though. (Personal conversation with Hong, 12 November 2013, the Café Haebangchon)

In the course of becoming adjusted to the community however, residents inevitably encounter multiple difficulties. First, conflicts often arose because of residents’ different attitudes toward their collective life. I witnessed a number of residents who stayed at Bin-Zib simply to save on their costs of living during my field research. Once I attended a meeting of Gyedan-Zib where every resident of the house needed to participate in order to make an important decision regarding the contract for the house. In the meeting one resident stated, “I really don’t care about the decision. If I can stay here I would like to. But honestly, I cannot attend these kinds of meetings all the time because I am a hard worker who wants to live a decent life”. Obviously, his concept of the “decent life” was different from what was considered to be a decent life by the active Bin-Zib residents.

We are living together because we are all poor. More importantly, however, we have tried not to make a capitalist relationship in Bin-Zib. That's why, for example, we decided the amount of bundamgeum should be more than 2,000 won ($2.20). 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. Meanwhile, some people don't concern themselves with this, and even exploit Bin-Zib in a capitalist way. Yet we have had no way to prevent those things from happening. (Jium, interview by Okja. Kim, 2009)

For those who have internalized mainstream values and pursued the social norm of success, there was no reason to waste their time and energy in the collective life unfolding at Bin-Zib. They probably believed that bundamgeum they were paying was fair money for staying at Bin-Zib. And, such attitudes based on reciprocity simply concealed the fact that there had always been a surplus offered by some residents, and

17 These two interviewees expressed the similar impression on Bin-Zib with significantly different languages. Naru, who borrowed a Foucauldian idea heterotopia, quitted one of the privileged universities in the society to oppose the elitism of the university education. On the other hand, Hong could not finish his secondary school and grown up in an institution for teenage runaways.
the surplus actually had supported the community. Understandably, those who devoted significant amounts of time, money, and effort to Bin-Zib often felt exploited in Bin-Zib, as one former resident said:

Judging by my own values and thoughts so far, I was supposed to be active and happy doing things in Bin-Zib, but the reality was different. The most difficult thing was, I would say, the limitless openness. (…) There were some who just used the infrastructure of Bin-Zib. And, sometimes, for me it seemed like the one-way street. You know the word, hospitality. Once I even said, “this damn hospitality!” (…) Actually, we want to see positive changes in society when we are involved in any kind of activism. But when we are involved in social movements, we usually don’t see the people or the mass face to face in everyday life, even though someone likely myself had a romanticized image of the mass. At Bin-Zib, though I saw them concretely as someone I resented. There it was the mass right in front of my eyes, drinking beer without washing dishes or doing the laundry. (Personal conversation with Jay, 30 November 30, 2014, online chatting)

Second, economic uncertainty has been the biggest concern for the community. I would say that most of Bin-Zib residents fall along a wide spectrum between two poles: those who clearly pursue an alternative life and those who have internalized capitalistic values. And, for those lying somewhere in between, as a resident Tei put it, “the uncertainty of the future intimidates current life”. While they thought they got “valuable relations and experiences here in Bin-Zib” which they could not get in the broader society, they were also never free from the feeling of uneasiness about the future.

I don’t feel any economical constraints right now. But, from time to time I think it would be good to have a regular income. Yes, I have this concern about economic independence. (…) If I enter a big company to earn more money, how I can keep my life here? I am not sure yet. (Personal conversation with Tei, 20 October 2013, Haksuk)

Well, for me, 3-400,000 won ($330-440) per month is enough to live. (…) When I worked at a company, I was questioning myself, asking, “Will my life be like this until I am retired?” Those kinds of thoughts ran through my head. These thoughts were never put into words though. I captured these thoughts with words when I came Bin-Zib. The people whom I had met at school and work were very capitalistic. Of course at first I was repulsed by the idea of sharing capital suggested by Bin-Go. I also had this concern for investing my money to make it bigger. (Personal conversation with Mong, 10 November 2013, the Café Haebangchon)
In addition, each resident has different sensibilities regarding house chores, and this turned out to be one of the most significant sources of conflicts in Bin-Zib. For many early residents of Arae-Zib, doing housekeeping was interconnected with their contemplation of how to live a different life from capitalist way of life. However, as a number of residents increased, and as many of new residents were used to the social atmosphere which regards housework not only as women’s work but also as menial labour, Bin-Zib became a much more complicated space.

The most difficult thing for me was that, for example, I am ok with this situation but another person is not ok. If so, I should understand or have sympathy with how the person feels. It’s like a constant problem, from boiling water to cleaning, I mean, whatever trifling things. If the house is clean while I did not do it, it means that somebody did it. I have this stress to catch up all the details. (Personal conversation with Hani, 5 September 2013, Haebangchon)

Well, yes, I got stressed out. It’s different from the living by myself. Sometimes I got annoyed by those girls, who kept telling me “you should do this in this way, you should do that in that way”. I don’t know. I didn’t actually think it very seriously, but maybe they were being annoyed by me. I was also got stressed too though. Haha. (Personal conversation with Kong, 7 September 2013, Haksuk)

Above all, there are different sensibilities around space and privacy. “Many people, who visited Bin-Zib with some romantic expectations due to what they have heard from media, expressed the uneasiness of there being no private room”, as a resident Mong told me. On the other hand, a good few residents told me that they had enough space in Bin-Zib.

18 “We spent a lot of time, doing salim,” Jium said in an interview with E. Pak (2012, p. 40). Salim means housekeeping as well as revitalizing in Korean. According to Jium, the people who lived in Arae-Zib in the early period not only were good at housekeeping but also put a conscious effort into it and were proud of it. “We ate good food, although we barely made money. We wanted to show it by our life and it was true. We wanted to show it to newcomers, you know, the different way of life” (Jium, interview by E. Pak, 2012, p. 40). As E. Pak (2012) points out, residents of Bin-Zib in its early period had a critique of the patriarchal division of labour prevalent in Korea on the one hand, while keeping in mind that one should not appropriate others’ labour if they wanted to lead a collective, autonomous life (p. 40). I would say the whole project of Bin-Zib was started with a clear intention of reclaiming reproductive work and affective work as the very act of production and reproduction of life. See the following section for a discussion of how Bin-Zib became the place where the patriarchal, gendered bodies were clashed with the feminists’ sensibilities.
Like lots of things at Bin-Zib, it’s a great solution to the problems of affordable housing in the difficult economic situation faced by many of the residents. It’s practical and necessary in order to make housing affordable. But, I wouldn’t necessarily elevate it to a virtue. I think it’s a necessary evil. And for almost anyone, at some point in their life they will want more privacy. (Personal conversation with Toto, 29 October 2014, online chatting)

I worried when I found out there was no private room and everything was shared. However, eventually, things were not that uncomfortable, really. I would say that in Bin-Zib there is private space in a different way. One who starts to live here would find out soon. (Personal conversation with Mong, 10 November 2013, the Café Haebangchon)

I feel that my perception of space is different from others. People ask me if it is not too packed when I sleep with others in one room. However, I feel my space became enlarged here at Bin-Zib by living together in a bigger place compared to the bachelor apartment I had lived in by myself. (Personal conversation with Soo, 13 November 2013, Haksuk)

There were also a number of people who felt uncomfortable when some residents tried to regulate the number of people to keep the space as a “pleasant residential place”.

I don’t think we really need a vacant bed or a room for a newcomer. If we say we don’t have a place for you, what’s the meaning of Bin-Zib? We can let someone come in although the place is already packed. Someone can come, see the situation, and decide if she will stay or not. A long-term guest can give her place to the newcomer for a while. You know, I also had an experience where somebody gave her place to me. (Personal conversation with Ken, 10 February 2015, online chatting)

Consequently, Bin-Zib residents have come into contact with different perceptions of space and privacy and become involved in conflicts over space in their everyday life.

All these issues lie in 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 strain around the matter of if and how they establish a new Bin-Zib. In the following section I look at how residents of Bin-Zib have been involved in the process of expanding communism through subjectivations promoted by the reoccurring disputes over the meaning of guests and Bin-Zib. I try to show how the disputes are political, using Rancière’s notion of politics. Looking at Bin-Zib as “the place of subjectivation in
an argumentative plot” (Rancière, 1992, p. 60), I examine specific disputes and discuss the dynamic of subjectivation that takes place in the community.

4.2. Disputes over Bin-Zib

How have residents of the community been engaged in communistic relations? In Bin-Zib, production, distribution and consumption of the common is necessarily related to the issue of subjectivity because any kind of common resources in Bin-Zib are offered by residents to share with others. If subjectivation does not take place, Bin-Zib cannot expand, and the empty/guests’ house does not exist anymore. Given this dynamic, this part of the chapter investigates how forms of subjectivation take place in the community.

As noted, Bin-Zib has let people come in without demanding a common denominator. Conflicts inevitably arise, and members often had to discuss the same issues repeatedly, encountering constant disputes in their every day life. The table below indicates the main conflicts and issues in Bin-Zib.

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19 In this context, the political-economic dynamic of Bin-Zib cannot be fully captured by the theory of the “commons” as proposed by Elinor Ostrom (1990), because what residents have produced in Bin-Zib as the common is, in fact, a different kind of social relation rather than a physical object or resource.

20 Regarding the concept of subjectivation, see the footnote 3 in Chapter 1.
Table 4.1. Main conflicts and issues in Bin-Zib

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

The disputes in Bin-Zib are political in the sense that Rancière (2010) ascribes to politics. If the police is the art of governing a given community, politics is the act of recalling what has been exiled from the community (p. 37). Political acts disturb a given sensory order by placing a world where, for example, “plebeians and patricians can debate anything” in that “where plebs do not speak … because they are beings without a name, deprived of logos” (Rancière, 1999, p. 23). By placing two different worlds together, it demonstrates a gap between two “different partitions of the sensible” (Rancière, 2010, p. 38). And the gap is the very place where subjectivation takes place. Being exposed in the “gap in the
sensible itself” (p. 38), one is required to recognize what was invisible and hear what was mere noise.21

In Bin-Zib residents inevitably become implicated in the clash between two different partitions of the sensible. First, the clash takes place within a house. By living together with Others and by being in between different sensory worlds, residents of Bin-Zib are compelled to not only see what they could not see before but also adjust their personal boundary. Second, this clash takes place between houses as well as between Bin-Zib and the outside. While the society convinces people to maintain the norm of reciprocal exchange, the idea of Bin-Zib asks people to (ac)count parts/shares of Bin-Zib in a different way. Bin-Zib includes not only the future guests of the community, but also those who cultivate alternative communities wherever they are. Two specific questions have recurred constantly in the community, catalyzing the process of subjectivation: who is a juin [host/owner] in the house of guests? And, what is Bin-Zib?

4.2.1. “Becoming-ghosts” in a House: The question of who is a host in the house without an owner

Who is the juin [owner/host] in a house without an owner? During my field research in 2013 residents needed to establish a new Bin-Zib. Gyedan-Zib’s contract was going to expire while each Bin-Zib was full of residents. The atmosphere of the discussion was pretty heavy as none of the Gyedan-Zib residents wanted to take the lead in forming a new Bin-Zib. “If someone make an initiative to start a new house, I would like to live in it. However, I cannot be the main person to do that.” That was what I heard in a meeting from one of Gyedan-Zib residents. Others kept silent. “That was the most serious problem of Bin-Zib, you know.” After the meeting, one resident made a critical observation regarding the situation. “If there is no one inclined to take the responsibility as the juin [owner/host] of Bin-Zib, Bin-Zib becomes really a house without juin in its worst sense”, she said.

We say that every single person is a juin [owner/host] of Bin-Zib. In order to make this sentence true, every single person of Bin-Zib should share the right = duty of giving hospitality to guests. If there is no hospitality at

21 Regarding Rancière’s notion politics and partition of the sensible see Chapter 1.
Bin-Zib, it means we are neither hosts nor guests to each other. And Bin-Zib will not be an empty/guests’ house anymore and disappear. (Jium, October 4, 2010)

Bin-Zib cannot exist unless its residents become a part of the communistic relations that characterize it, by shifting roles between guests and hosts. The shifts between the two positions have never been easy however. How to engage newcomers, or those who are not concerned with the community life, in the process of becoming-hosts? The following quote provides a clue.22

We, as residents of this village, are repulsed by the act of consuming this space conveniently. Many of us consider Bin-Zib and Bin village a community or a guests’ house. And this is the place where guests and hosts are living together, mixing their identities as we called it ghosts’ house. (Seungwuk explained the term very well yesterday, but I cannot fully remember. Please fill me in on this!) (Anonymous, 2009, September 9)

I remember well the moment I was struck with the explanation. The term ghost refers to guests who are not consumers but who have the ability to be considerate of others, like hosts. In other words, ghosts are beings who are guests as well as hosts at the same time. If we can engage in both activities as guests and hosts without having a fixed role, it would make Bin-Zib a place where invisible hosts are hiding everywhere. And, we, in this sense, will be something like ghosts. So, it was a hope that Bin-Zib could be a ghosts’ house. (Hyeonmin, 2009, September 10)

As this quote indicates, in the course of discussion residents coined the English term ghost, which they intended to be a compound word based on host and guest. The term shows how much active residents of Bin-Zib yearned to engage other residents in community life. More significantly, it implied participants’ recognition that engagement in Bin-Zib is a matter of transforming one’s way of life from the life of consumers to ghosts who create a circle of mutual hospitality and affections.

Becoming a ghost in Bin-Zib consists of two processes. First, guests (newcomers) are required to become-hosts. In order to become-hosts, guests should

22 This quote was taken from part of the meeting minute during the second period of Bin-Zib’s history. As I examined in Chapter 3, at that time the community encountered difficulties as the number of houses and guests increased.
have the ability to see the invisible ghosts that are forming Bin-Zib. Otherwise, residents cannot understand why paying bundangjeum [shared expenses] is not a sufficient condition for becoming juin of Bin-Zib and how Bin-Zib is sustained by invisible affects and labours. “The ghosts enable my living here. A process of recognizing this invisible labour and invisible love would be part of how I can be one of the ghosts” (Jium, 2012, April). With this awareness, those who actively participated in Bin-Zib have made every endeavour to make the invisible labours, affections and flow of gifts visible.

Conducting collective studies and producing discourses were a significant part of how the more active residents of Bin-Zib tried to form what they called “common sense of Bin-Zib”, a common sense which clearly differed from the common sense reigning within the broader society.

Let’s do Bin-study again! While Bin-Zib people are constantly changing, we have not shared the ideas what we should constantly share to build a common sense of Bin-Zib recently. (…) For example, we choose the poor life positively for many reasons, but as time went by and as people have been changed, it seems that we don’t share these any longer. (Anonymous, 2009, October 28)

Within South Korean society, where a house is a commodity that one can own by purchasing it, Bin-Zib residents understood the juin [owner/host] of the house to be not the one who paid money, but the one who looks after the place, giving hospitality to others. Residents also tried to show how Bin-Zib was being maintained not through the logic of reciprocity but by numerous gifts—invisible affections and activities—offered by people involved. In this context questions such as “who is the juin of Bin-Zib” and “what is the meaning of guest in the guests’ house?” have functioned as stepping-stones, inviting people to see what they could not see before.

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23 This quote is part of a film review written by Jium. In the film titled Binjib [The Empty House] directed by Gidoek Kim (2004), a man who owns a house violently abuses his wife (it is obvious that the wife is also one of his possessions) while a wandering man, who sneaked into the house, makes different relations with the women and cares for the place. In the film the owner of the house only identified by his possession that he ruins. On the other hand, the visitor cares for and re-vitalizes the space/relations without claiming any possessive identity. Reviewing the film, Jium applies Bin-Zib residents’ discussion about ghosts to the film.
Residents also dedicated significant amounts of energy to visualize communal work in the community. In an article titled “Please Try to Do Housework, Up to a Point You Think is Excessive”, a former resident, Dion, explained how many conflicts over house chores had arisen in Bin-Zib, and how various measures—electing a manager, visualizing communal work by using black boards and post-it memos, valorizing communal work by issuing alternative forms of money, etc.—had been enacted in Bin-Zib in order to deal with these conflicts.

Obviously, males are socially made impotent to do house chores. They are also incapable of doing emotional labour, which is usually taken care of by women. For example, men are bad at doing things such as taking care of people and being considerate of them, even greeting people who get back home. Men themselves should be aware of this fact. (...) There are so many invisible things. Since women are good at finding jobs that need to be done, they tend to work more. Men should have this in mind, “I will do house chore more than others!” to do at least your part. Please be mindful.24 (Dion, 2010, January 26)

One of the important methods of allowing people to recognize house chores has been jansori [nagging].25 There were many folk tales in the community about “Jigak’s awakening for cooking” or “How Jibi became a whole new human being” by constant jansori and compliments of their housemates. When I met Jibi during my field research period, he was involved in many activities in Bin-Zib. Although he was not highly skilled in relationships, I could not believe what I heard regarding how he was nine months ago. When Jibi moved in, “he was totally messed up, extremely incapable of not only house

24 Being able to see what was previously invisible is profoundly interconnected with changing one’s body. If males were less sensitive in recognizing their surroundings in general, it may be because their body has been trained in a different way. In his book, Making Valorous Men, Noja Pak (2009) examines how the bodies of South Korean males are trained as “a patriot, an export warrior for boosting the national economy and a patriarch supporting a family” through “numerous official and unofficial drills from school boot camps to military service”. According to N. Pak a well-trained body, one which can survive a series of competitions while enduring extremely long working hours and an intense workload, became a symbol of civilization in Korean society. N. Pak argues that thanks to the complicity between nationalism and economism, Korean males lose the ability of caring others, but rather interact with others only through money.

25 As the prefix jan means trifle or detail, jansori is an action that aims to modify a specific behavior. And, jansori works only by repeating until the specific behavior is modified.
keeping but also socializing with people", according to one of his former housemates Norang.26 “At first, it seemed like no jansori could provoke him at all", said Norang.

We kept giving him jansori. Every one of us kept doing jansori to him. For example, someone would give him the first shot, telling him, "Hey Jibi, did you wash the dishes?" Then he answered he would. Then in a few minutes, another person would give another shot, "Please, Jibi!" Then he would reluctantly move himself. Then I would give the last shot, saying: "are you doing well?" Hahaha! So, it was like, every time, regardless who started it, there were more shots that followed, you know. (...) These days, Jibi looks like a totally different person. He is giving jansori to Ken about housekeeping, saying things like, "Hey, Ken! You should do it in this way". So amazing! No? (Personal conversation with Norang, 22 September 2013, Haksuk)

Jibi improved not only his skills for housekeeping, but also skills for making relationships, according to residents. What fascinated me about this story was the way the four women "who had kept throwing jansori at Jibi" talked about the story. While each confessed that she had hated him at first, even felt scared of him, all of them showed a deep affection to him when they told their story to me. Jansori, or making a person see what she could not see before is profoundly affectionate work through which not only one’s behaviour, but also one’s relationships change.

We had a lot of troubles, but sometimes it was fun. Money was actually the reason I started to live in Bin-Zib but, well, I didn’t hate living in Bin-Zib. I feel I was changed somehow, gradually. There is a kind of feeling that I am getting better, here. (...) I feel I became intimate with my housemates. (Personal conversation with Jibi, 22 October 2013, Haksuk)

26 Jibi is a male who had achieved some success according to South Korean social norms, graduating from an elite university. However, he said that in order to achieve this he had always felt severe pressure and anxiety, to the point of suffering chronic indigestion and depression.
Figure 4.3. Attempts to make housework a game, or play
While using blackboards or memos has been the way of making housework visible in Bin-Zib, residents have tried to deal with communal work in an enjoyable way. The picture in the lower left corner is the first alternative currency Bin-Zib residents issued to valorize communal work. The picture in the lower right corner is one of Bin-Zib awards given to residents in a village festival in June 2014. Various prizes were awarded to residents. While most prizes were compliments for those who did a lot of communal work from doing house chores to attending meetings and activities, there was some humorous criticism too. The name of the award in the picture is Muwidosiksang [Idle bread award], which was for a person “who ate well, kicked back well, and slept well while barely doing house chores”. The prize for the award was a pair of household rubber gloves. (Photo by Bin-Zib residents in 2009-2014, edited by D. Han)

However, the process of becoming-host is not enough to maintain Bin-Zib as an empty/guests’ house. Residents are called to become-guest again and again. Put it another way, residents should keep on trying to give up any privilege they may enjoy as first comers. And, in Bin-Zib, these privileges mostly appeared in the form of occupying space. “In order not to privatize Bin-Zib, long-term guests should keep the sensibility of guests” as Jigak (2009, October 5) once argued. One should give her living space to others, as she was once offered space as a guest. The difficulty lies in the fact that giving your space to others is not a matter of simply making decisions but a matter of changing personal boundaries.

As Edward T. Hall (1968)’s notion of proxemics suggests, the boundary of a person is not predetermined. It is created in the process in which “both man and his
environment participate in molding each other” (p. 85). Our body is not substantially given but constituted interacting its surroundings, permeating into as well as being permeated by. Personal space varies in size according the cultural and social context. People in different cultures are living in different sensory worlds (Hall, 1966, p. 95). From this point of view, Bin-Zib might be a totally different sensory world for most newcomers.

Dion’s articles provides an example of how Bin-Zib residents are required to readjust their personal boundaries as well as perceptions regarding the notion of privacy in the community. When Yoep-Zib was set up, Yeop-Zib residents secured two private rooms for two couples and opened a room for guests. Dion confessed that she had decided to live at Bin-Zib only because she had been offered a private room for her and her partner in Yoep-Zib. However, when a women and her newborn baby moved into the guests’ room, “everything changed”. Dion described how her body changed while she built a relationship with the baby, with whom she “never could expect to make conversation or communicate”. As time went by, she was “getting used to the sounds of crying like magic” while “becoming skilful in, for example, putting a suppository into the rectum of the baby”. After one year of living together, the baby and his mother left. However, the long-term guests of Yoep-Zib decided “not to keep private rooms and opened the house up further” (Dion, 2010, March 24).

This anecdote shows the long-term guests of Yoep-Zib had transformed themselves, increasing their capacity to live with others in the course of “living together in Bin village”. One of Yoep-Zib’s residents Moya gave a speech in a public lecture

27 Franco Berardi (2011) points out that, in our era, the spaces and times of bodily interaction between people have been reduced dramatically, affecting the whole of social proxemics (p. 102-103).
28 Regarding the question of how the modern notion of privacy is constituted rather than predetermined, see footnote 12 in Chapter 3.
29 Residents of Bin-Zib often estimate how much a person got adjusted to the community by seeing how much the person share personal items. “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 few who put nametags on food in fridge. While some people just put 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 all together. If you have something you don’t want to share with others, you might want to put it separately” (Dion, 2010, February 24).
describing how they had reshaped the concept of privacy and how they created private space when they needed it.\textsuperscript{30} He stated that:

\begin{quote}
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)
\end{quote}

Not long after Yeop-Zib residents decided to remove private rooms, the community carried out a “the wholesale rearrangement” that I discussed in Chapter 3. As Jium (2013) pointed out, this would not have been possible “unless all residents went back to their status of being guests, just like when they first came to Bin-Zib”. Many residents recollected that at the time they were very pleased with the seemingly irrational decision: deciding who live with whom in which house by drawing lots. And the community showed great animation from that point onward, establishing Bin-Go and opening the first café.

In Bin-Zib residents' collective memory, “the dramatic decision” (Jium, 2013) marked a significant turning point of the community. It was a collective experience of forming what they have called \textit{shared feeling}. It should be noted that this shared feeling is distinguished from making consensus in the language of Bin-Zib residents.\textsuperscript{31} Rather, forming this shared feeling has been described as chemical process, as I discuss in the last chapter. Dion compared the process to baking bread in her personal blog, writing, “some kind of textures and shapes are formed during all the times in which we are discussing, wholeheartedly, in these ever-repeating, quotidian moments of our everyday life” (Dion, 2010, May 8).

\textsuperscript{30} Three Bin-Zib residents Moya, Salgu and Jaju are invited to a lecture about \textit{sharing} in 2010 and talked about Bin-Zib. The scribe was published as a chapter of book, titled \textit{Nanume gwanhan yeolgaji jilmun} [Ten questions about sharing] (2011).

\textsuperscript{31} Salgu said, “We were satisfied. The satisfaction would be possible only because we had so many discussions, suggestions, and experiments for such a long time. We did our best. We did all we could. You know, this sort of shared feeling was there. (…) It was not making a consensus or compromise. We have learned that people do not move unless they are willing to do it no matter what kind of consensus we achieved in meetings” (Personal conversation with Salgu, 10 November 2013, Haksuk).
How dough rises is fascinating. Different mixes make different shapes. And even with the same mixture, different breads come out. What we have been doing might be compared to baking bread. We have repeatedly had these times of intense discussions and break time, like dough has some time to rise after being kneaded. Just as a handful of yeast swimming in dough, we have had our time of being kneaded, resting, and ripening. And finally we’ve reached the moment of being a glutinous chunk of something! Now we should bake it at a good temperature. (…) I came to understand the meaning of the phrase, “gaining momentum” as I repeatedly bake bread and talk about Bin-Go. I still don’t know how much this new form of life will rise as dough and what kinds of tastes and smells it will have. We, the yeast, are just making an attempt at an ontological leap while swimming among the flour, water, and salt. (Dion, 2010, May 8,)

4.2.2. (Ac)counting parts/shares of the community: The question of what Bin-Zib is

While residents of Bin-Zib are compelled to change their personal boundaries and sensibilities in the communal living at Bin-Zib, the existence of Bin-Zib depends on if and how residents get involved in the movement of expanding communism. However, why should one dedicate her efforts to prepare shelters for those whom she even does not know? Why should Bin-Zib share its accumulated resource with other communities?

Disputes based on different ways of counting parts/shares of Bin-Zib have reoccurred, echoing Rancière’s description of politics as “an opposition between logics that count the parties and parts of the community in different ways” (Rancière, 2010, p. 36). Some count not only “people who passed through” but also “people who will come in the future” as parts of Bin-Zib, but others only count present residents as parts of the community. When confronting issues of how to count parts/shares of the community, Bin-Zib residents have devised/improvised a system of communing through which more people can join and be part of the common.

As I discussed in Chapter 3, residents of Bin-Zib started a discussion on establishing the collective fund/bank to solve the fiscal issues they confronted.32 Their hope was to set up a collective fund/bank of the community that would enable people to easily join regardless of the amount of money each one could contribute. Those who

32 Regarding this, see Chapter 3.
wanted to set the collective fund/bank also believed that it would make it easy for residents to compose more Bin-Zibs. In other words, the idea of collective fund/bank was obviously driven by the principle of expanding communism. If they did not count “the people who will come in the future” as parts/shares of Bin-Zib, there would be no reason to set the collective fund.

It took more than a year to set up the collective fund/bank. While there were people who did not understand why they needed it, each person’s level of understanding as well as opinion on the collective fund was varied. Different ways of (ac)counting clashed with each other, as the quotes below demonstrate:

Although we had claimed that Bin-Zib is a house for all, including those who had not yet arrived, there were people who didn’t want to worry about future newcomers. (…) Those who wanted to set up Bin-Go also had different other issues, such as whether people who put their money in the fund should get interest or not. It took a lot of time for everyone to understand the exact significance of the discussion. In a nutshell, each person’s level of understanding and ideas were so varied. I think we needed the time to cross the threshold, setting up Bin-Go. (Personal conversation with Salgu, 22 December 2013, Haksuk)

Another conflict was on the issue of whether long-term guests should be obliged to co-fund Bin-Go. Some insisted that long-term guests should have an obligation, but others worried it would raise the barrier to entry. (Personal conversation with Bouqin, 27 March 2014, online chatting)

After over a year of extensive discussion, Woozoo Salim Co-operative Bin-Go was set up in April 2010. It “enabled anyone who joined Bin-Go to become a juin with equal rights” (Jium, 2013). What residents strived to do was devising a system through

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33 Wozoo Salim Co-operative Bin-Go was the full name of Bin-Go. Salim means housekeeping as well as revitalizing as noted. Woozoo is a Korean word based on the Chinese character 宇宙. While the term means the whole universe, each word 宇 and 宙 has the meaning of roof and living place. In other words, the name Woozoo reflects Bin-Zib residents’ desire to make housing common in the whole universe. Ironically, a commercial co-housing company also has used the name Woozoo from 2013, as I discuss in the final chapter.
which more people could join in producing, circulating, and distributing the common.\textsuperscript{34} It also was an endeavour of creating a new way of (ac)counting, one that was in opposition to capitalist forms of accounting. The “Purpose of Bin-Go”, collectively written by residents, clearly shows this goal:

We will share whatever we create with all people in the world. If we are making money in the course of our activities, we will share the money with people in Binmaeu[empty/guests’ village], people who have yet to arrive, as well as all the lives in the world. (...) Bin-Zib will stop its expansion only by when the whole world becomes Bin-Zib. Bin-Go will support and facilitate collecting, sharing, giving and receiving people’s power and abilities on the road. (Bin-Go, 2010)

Many residents went through a process of reassessing the meaning of Bin-Zib while they collectively discussed the foundation of Bin-Go and how to run the fund. A resident re-defined Bin-Zib as a “radical housing movement” (Moya, 2010, May 7,) in his article. Another resident, Dalgun, called it “a movement for the creation of a wholly different form of housing from a capitalistic one”. Throughout the collective endeavour to set up Bin-Go, “Bin-Zib residents defined Bin-Zib not as a community but as an expanding network of the common. And, Bin-Go was set up in order to help the expansion” (personal conversation with Salgu, 22 December 2013, Haksuk).

\textsuperscript{34} 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 loans 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, it meant that the communities shared 6\% interest with Bin-Go. The surplus was distributed in three ways. First, a person who put his or her money in Bin-Go got a 3\% of the Shares for Co-funds in her account—the same rate as that given by the major banks. Then, a portion of the surplus was collected for maintenance and expansion of the common, as the Bin-Zib Reserve Fund. The final portion of the surplus was allocated to the Shares for the Earth through which members supported various social movements they were involved or concerned with (Bin-Go, 2011).
The Bin village culture party was held in 25th June 2010 under the title of The Meaning of Living at Bin-Zib. A former resident Dalgun draws the poster and the map.

Since the official launch of Bin-Go, the experiment facilitated setting up a new Bin-Zib and finishing the contract while increasing its members as well as its activities. However, as I have mentioned in Chapter 3, residents of Bin-Zib had a series of disputes again over the meaning of Bin-Zib and its boundaries beginning around September of 2011. While there were two sharply different ways of (ac)counting for parts/shares of Bin-Zib, residents were compelled to think the meaning of Bin-Zib in between.

What fuelled the controversy was that Bin-Go had granted a loan to Manhaeng, an alternative youth community formed in Haebangchon. Cu, a former resident, criticized

New Bin-Zibs were established not based on jeonse [key money] contracts but based on wolse [key money and monthly rent] contracts. The main reason was the downturn in the real estate boom in the country as the financial crisis began to take effect. Many house owners started to prefer making wolse contracts. As jeonse contracts became less profitable, jeonse for renters went up, paradoxically, even when real estate sales froze up. From January 2008 to July 2012, jeonse price rose 28.0%, while the price of an apartment in Seoul has constantly fell (Yongkwon Yi, 2012, September 11). This was partly because potential sellers turned to letting out their property as a way of weathering the slow market, thus providing no respite for the poor people looking for a place to live in Seoul. According to the Korea Development Institute (2014), in 2014 average key money price for an apartment in Seoul rose to 64% of the sale price, hitting a record high.
the fact that “committee members of Bin-Go decided to grant loans to other communities”:

Bin-Go was born as the village fund of Bin-Zib for the purpose of dealing with Bin-Zib’s communal money. However, as Bin-Go granted a loan to Manhaeng and Café Haebangchon, Bin-Go is not the collective fund of Bin-Zib anymore (Cu, 2012, June 6).

Arguing that, “the whole characteristic of Bin-Go was changed by giving a loan to Manhaeng”, Cu asked Bin-Go to transfer the Bin-Zib Reserve Fund to the Bin-Zib Mutual Aid Fund that was exclusively for Bin-Zib residents. What he implied, although he never stated clearly, was that the collective money of Bin-Zib should be used solely within the boundary of Bin-Zib community. He argued that, “the Bin-Zib Reserve Fund was formed by the gifts that residents gave to Bin-Zib” (2012, June 6).

After Cu wrote this post on June 6th 2012, the whole community experienced an acute dispute for a week. One can see how intense, even painful the conflict was, just by reading online posts on the issue, the combined length of which was up to 50 pages. The most controversial issues were the use of collective money as well as where to set the boundaries for sharing it. As one former resident put it, “it was a matter of money, the matter of how we should use and distribute the collective money” (Personal conversation with Gom, 11 November 2013, the Café Haebangchon). There was a profound disparity in the ways of (ac)counting parts/shares of Bin-Zib.

On the one hand, there were those who saw Bin-Zib as a bounded community. They thought that Bin-Go managers clearly overstepped their authority by giving loans to other communities because “the money should be used for expanding and maintaining Bin-Zib” (Cu, 2012, June 11). Also, Bin-Go, which featured members who were not Bin-Zib residents, could not be an appropriate organization to deal with the community’s fiscal issues. They thus wanted to separate Bin-Zib from Bin-Go. It was in the pursuit of “sharing the risks of life and making a sustainable living by promoting mutual aid within Bin-Zib among those who actually live in the community” according to Cu (2012, June 6).

36 For more discussion of the Bin-Zib Mutual Aid Fund, see Chapter 3.
Now the collective money of Bin-Go is used for other communities rather than being used for just Bin-Zib. We should make an independent Bin-Zib fund to prevent possible fiscal difficulties because we no longer feel confident in putting the surplus revenues from each Bin-Zib into Bin-Go anymore. (Although we have called it a gift, it actually had the meaning of security savings or insurance.) (Hwanizzang, 2012, June 24)

Why should we lend this money to other communities? Aren’t we the ones who live in Bin-Zib? Isn’t Bin-Go for people who live in Bin-Zib? These were questions Gongbu-Zib residents raised. They were suggesting that we should make a clear boundary around Bin-Zib, and make more comfortable circumstances for us. (…) I agreed with this idea. I think there were different ideas on what the community should be. (Personal conversation with Tei, 20 October 2013, Haksuk)

On the other hand, there were people who believed that “Bin-Zib is not only a place people live but also shapeless spirit for sharing”, as Janjan put it (2012, June 6). They argued that the expansion of Bin-Zib did not mean the multiplying of houses within Bin-Zib per se. Rather, they wanted Bin-Go and Bin-Zib to count other communities as parts of the greater Bin-Zib community. For them, “[t]he expansion of Bin-Zib means the expansion of joyful life, different forms of housing, and solidarity amongst those space and people” (Kenzzang, 2012, June 8). Furthermore, they disagreed with the idea held by those who went on to establish the Bin-Zib Mutual Aid Fund, which put the utmost priority on maintaining the financial stability of the Bin-Zib community itself. One former resident put it, “people had saved the money not as firewood but as foundational stones for building new houses” (Malya, 2012, June 16). They considered Bin-Zib as the expanding network of the common, and Bin-Go was the means of expansion: supporting and encouraging others to open their place wherever they were and share their property with others as the common.

Many people remember this period as the time when “they failed to form a shared feeling”. There was fundamental disagreement on what Bin-Zib should be. Those who followed Cu's initiative and considered Bin-Zib as a bounded community, in Ranciere's terms, were those who counted “real parts only”. On the other hand, those who counted what Ranciere has called “a part of those without part” (p. 36) included not only future guests to Bin-Zib but also people in other places and communities. Thus, this was not a confrontation between different interests but a clash of different logics of
accounting, and it was this confrontation of these two divergent logics of accounting that turned Bin-Zib into a political space.

The ensuing dispute pushed the two groups to establish separate communal funds based on their beliefs. Those who saw Bin-Zib as expanding network of the common attempted to improvise the system of communing by turning Bin-Go into “a communal bank” in conjunction with three other communities. Defining the communal bank as “a network of communities”, they suggested that the way of reducing the power of 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)

In doing so, Bin-Go rearticulated the purpose of investment in Bin-Go as a form of resistance to the capitalist system. 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

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37 The communal bank was officially launched in 2013 as “a network of communities, in which Funders=Operators=Users=Solidaritiers were same and equal” (Bin-Go, 2013). The word Solidaritiers refers the external communities and social movements’ groups to which Bin-Go offers grants as the Share for the Earth.

38 Residents ask themselves why most of the experiments that aimed to overcome capitalist monopoly and injustice by building a healthy economy had failed in South Korea, and pointed out that a co-op becomes part of capitalism as long as members are motivated by profit. For example, the credit co-op movement in South Korea was started in the 1960s to build a system of mutual aid among poor people. Saving poor people from high interest private loans by offering them 1-3% interest per year, this movement was led by dedicated activists who worked tirelessly even without getting paid for their work (Seung Ok Pak, 2011). There are currently 963 credit co-ops in South Korea, with 5,570,000 members and $47,780,000,000 in assets. This qualitative growth, however, does not mean the development of the movement for all. Pak writes that “[a]s they lose their autonomous and independent characteristics, Korean credit co-ops are becoming a part of the capitalist economy”.

investment became, in this way, a form of practice to turn capital into the common by sharing the profit generated from that capital with others.\textsuperscript{39}

We are taking another step right now. Sharing a house (and its key money) with others beyond a family bonded by blood ties was the first step. Then we widened the sphere of sharing to the Binmaeul [empty/guests’ village] by establishing a collective fund/bank. Now, the third step will be an even broader sharing of the profit from our capital, with everyone. We have gotten families and friends to live together by sharing money and resources in the most literal sense. It has been our power as well as the secret of how we have lived so far. (Bin-Go, 2013)

More importantly, the demonstration of the sharp gap between different ways of (ac)counting promoted moments of subjectivation. The minutes of the village meeting on June 24, 2012 points to how this occurred. According to the records taken by Che, “so many people jam-packed Gyedan-Zib, having a four hours’ intense discussion” regarding Bin-Zib and Bin-Go. While each part that had a strong position on Bin-Zib argued for their views in the meeting, there were many residents who sounded puzzled, as the following quotes show.\textsuperscript{40}

Chisil: I have a question. I came to Bin-Zib when one of my friends introduced me. I checked the website but I thought the articles that introduced Bin-Zib were vague and unclear. What was the intention of establishing Bin-Zib?

Haru: I’ve been here for three months. Since I am a member of Bin-Go, and I am a resident of Bin-Zib, I have been interested in the issue. However, whenever I have asked someone, I couldn’t get a clear answer. I think it would be great if we have a clear introduction or set of rules for Bin-Zib. (Che, 2012, June 25)

\textsuperscript{39} Based on this reasoning, members of Bin-Go made a significant decision at the annual general meeting in 2013. On the one hand, they decided to raise the interest rate from 6% to 12% for using a Bin-Go loan as key money for renting space. By doing so, each community using Bin-Go gave up any interest generated by the key money, thereby sharing it with others. On the other hand, the communal bank re-adjusted its method of distribution. Besides the Shares for Co-funds, the Bin-Zib Reserve Fund and the 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).

\textsuperscript{40} This was the meeting mentioned in the first chapter in a discussion of research methods. Although I was there at the time, I could not hear the voices of those who were in between two clearly different ideas until I read the meeting records in 2013.
I had a chance to meet the people who were in between two strong different perceptions on Bin-Zib one and half years later, during my field research. They told me that the meeting was the first time they encountered the question of what Bin-Zib is. Haru said, “Before I went to the meeting, I thought that Bin-Zib should be separate from Bin-Go. You know, considering the membership, it sounded like this made much more sense”. However, she felt confused in the meeting as she confronted such different and opposed ideas. Then, as time went by, she came to rethink the dispute from a different point of view:

When Yeondu and I decided to set up a new Bin-Zib as a main contractor of the place, the people who managed the Bin-Zib Mutual Aid Fund made us submit an application. They even asked that “Is it really Bin-Zib?” I felt very uncomfortable. What is the real Bin-Zib? I thought that Bin-Zib was not supposed to be something we should get certification by an authority. Thus, we decided not to apply for the Mutual Aid Fund. I thought that what *sharing* should happen differently. (Personal communication with Haru, 2 December 2013, Haksuk)

Another resident, Soo, told me that when she started to live in Bin-Zib, she had heard about the problem but did not have an interest in the issue. For her, “Bin-Zib was just a place to live”. Then she happened to join the village meeting and “was surprised by the fact that people had such different stances on the issue”. Soo told me “it was so confusing, but I felt that I was witnessing what Bin-Zib was” (Personal communication with Soo, 13 November 2013, Bin-Zib).

After the meeting, I started to attend the Bin-Go meetings. (...) I think I am only barely beginning to recognize what Bin-Zib and Bin-Go are. I mean I am surprised by what I have become aware of words such as *hospitality* and *sharing*. Before, those words were just like a fancy banner or something like that. But now I am aware that the words actually have values. And the values create and form what we call Bin-Zib. I feel I am learning all over again. (Personal communication with Soo, 13 November 2013, Bin-Zib)

As we have seen, at Bin-Zib residents have encountered confrontation between different ways of accounting parts/shares of the community. And, by doing so, they have been compelled to ask “the meaning of living at Bin-Zib” (Dalgun, 2010, June 19). The following quote, from meeting minutes, captures the vital question that residents have
grappled with. It was one answer to those who had expressed their confusion and asked for clear rules to be set in the meeting.

I really understand why you feel so confused. I know the difficulty. But, since we started to live here, we cannot get away from that difficulty. Each of us came to Bin-Zib just carrying one bag. And we started to live here. Thus, we, every one of us, as a part of Bin-Zib, should share the difficulty we face. I believe that the word Bin-Zib already suggests its characteristics as movement, a movement of expansion. (...) We can think of how we live, helping each other or offering what we have called mutual aid. But, what we really should reflect on, in my opinion, is how to live right now and what our way of life should be. We should think of it through the reflection on the characteristics of movement, Bin-Zib. (Sun, cited in Che, 2012, June 25)

4.3. Summary

As discussed in this chapter, Bin-Zib has been a contradictory space. The idea of Bin-Zib invites people to the movement of expanding communism. On the other hand, all residents of Bin-Zib are assumed to be guests, so no one has any right to force others to do something. Fostering an anti-authoritarian ethos, travelers’ communication functions to keep the power of long-time community members in check. While people can live in Bin-Zib by virtue of Bin-Go’s financial support, joining Bin-Go is not an obligation for members, but voluntary. Although they are supposed to make contributions toward key money, house chores and many other activities according to their abilities, residents are never pressured to disclose their financial ability.

Based on these paradoxical principles, Bin-Zib has been created as an argumentative place, where disputes happen constantly. Being forced to be in between different sensory worlds, residents cannot help but ask “the meaning of living at Bin-Zib” while devising and improvising the system of communing. Subjectivations first take place in a house. One is required to become-host/guest by not only recognizing what she could not see before, but also by changing one’s bodily boundaries. Then, at the edge of

Without this fundamental inclination toward egalitarianism, the cultural ethos of modern Korean society heavily influenced by imperialist and dictatorial authoritarianisms would infiltrate and take control of Bin-Zib’s operation.
The community, the idea of Bin-Zib requires one to count not only future comers but also many other alternative communities outside Bin-Zib as Bin-Zib.
Chapter 5.

Conclusion: Communicating Communes in and against Capital and State

Please open Bin-Zib’s door as if you were opening the door of your place. Please open the door of your place, as if you were opening Bin-Zib’s door. -Bin-Zib song (2010)

In April 2009 a Bin-Zib resident put a post on their team blog, introducing a short essay titled “The Mobius Strip which is Communicating Communes” (Bohee Han, n.d.). In the article, the writer defines capitalism as “the wasteland of love and work” while blaming money as the cause of contemporary social desolation. Then, she attempts to suggest “love and work” are what Karl Marx (1964) calls the “chemical power of society” (p.167).

What might be the chemical power that binds us together? I guess it would be love and work, or more specifically, communicating (communing) with love and work. Here I use the word communication with a special connotation that is in association with the verb to commune. Communication is a verb and that is what binds us. (Bohee Han, n.d.)

The author of this essay states that our life is composed of the bonds of loving and working. According to her, “work always already includes the moment of love (which is unconditional giving/receiving)”. But she suggests that both love and work are ruined

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1 I could not find the article anywhere except on Bin-Zib’s team blog, website and mailing list, and two other people’s personal blogs.

2 In doing so, the author drew on Marx’s (1964) definition of money in the Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, as “the external, common medium and faculty for turning an image into reality and reality into a mere image (a faculty not sprung from man as man or from human society as society), money transforms the real essential powers of man and nature into what are merely abstract conceits and therefore imperfections—into tormenting chimeras—just as it transforms real imperfections and chimeras—essential powers which are really impotent, which exist only in the imagination of the individual—into real powers and faculties” (p. 168-169).
by the dominant reality and ideology, because “capitalism can only see reciprocity and has no ability to understand the logic of the gift, which turns the act of giving/receiving into pure surplus”. In a world where a person must work for money and buy things (for oneself or one’s family) in order to love, “love becomes glossy like a toadstool while work becomes drab like mold”. At the same time, she argues, love is never something that can be exchanged for money because love is “the act of giving/receiving the time of life”, something which we can never own or accumulate.

[Love] ultimately goes toward others. Work is the active expression and realization of the love, through which we can respond to love. Only through love and work, we communicate the communes, thus transforming ourselves as a true subject of our lives. (Bohee Han, n.d.)

This short essay drew on the ideas of philosophers such as Marx, Mauss, Lacan and Derrida, without citation. This made it difficult to understand. It was published in a university graduate students’ journal and not circulated widely. However, Bin-Zib residents were intrigued, and have collectively, and repeatedly, read this particular article. They came upon “this gem of an article” when they tried to search for “reading materials for their collective study on alternative money” (Anonymous, 2009, April 10). Then the article was read aloud at the “Binmaeul [an empty/guests’ village] culture party” in 2010. Residents read it again in their collective research into alternative finance in 2012. And it was circulated through their mailing list in 2013.

I believe Bin-Zib residents found the article fascinating because its theme resonated significantly with what many Bin-Zib residents have tried to do. They opened up Bin-Zib because they believed that “a house should be a place for living, not for buying” (Moya, 2010, May 7). However, for Bin-Zib residents, housing means more than a place for living. Housing at Bin-Zib is about forming different kinds of social relations by giving others a space for living together. In other words, housing cannot help but take the form of a verb at Bin-Zib. As a former resident Moya put it, “Bin-Zib is not about housing but about acting”. As this thesis has shown, residents have put significant time and effort—which, along with the author of the essay we can call love and work—into forming and reproducing Bin-Zib so they could invite others.
On the other hand, becoming a part of communistic relations and transforming one’s life at Bin-Zib is a chemical occurrence, which is only possible through struggles, conflicts, and fusions among the many differences in the community, as described in Chapter 4. In this regard, the way Bohee Han uses the term “communicating/commune-ing” goes the furthest, I argue, in capturing the communing process at Bin-Zib. What binds residents is not a given common background or even a political orientation. Rather, residents are forced to transform themselves through constant collisions. Bohee Han overlaps the terms “commune-ing” and “communicating”. Even though she does not give an explanation for this choice, I would say she intuitively expresses what Cesare Casarino (2008) suggests when he states that “the common is defined in terms of communication rather than in terms of community” (p. 12).

In this chapter I theorize Bin-Zib as a movement of communicating communes in and through which actors struggle—love and work—to create and network spaces of autonomy, hospitality, and sharing. I summarize Bin-Zib’s significances by synthesizing what I have discussed in the previous chapters. I also look at the current challenges Bin-Zib residents confront as a movement of communing within and against capital and the state.

5.1. Creating Joyful Life and Relations in the Present

Common is that which enriches the productivity of singularities [dei singoli]! Common is the fact that a lot of ideas come to me when you and I talk about something! Common is the fact that if I love you, we invent

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3 As noted Chapter 4, residents often use the metaphor of chemistry to describe how residents have formed what they call the shared feeling. Residents use terms such as “fermentation”, “ripening”, and even “contamination in a good way”, but there is a commonality in these choices as the terms are all related to chemical processes. Recently, a resident, Yunong, wrote about “how to spread this sensibility of creating the common space and the culture of being together”. In this text she compared the process to making yogurt. “If you mix some yogurt with a bottle of milk and put it in a warm place, the can of milk becomes yogurt. 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 yogurt. 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 certain conditions, such as ratio and temperature. If there is not enough bacteria, milk turns sour, failing to become yogurt” (Yunong, 2015).
things together. ... That which brings us together and constitutes the common is not difference per se; it is, rather, activity, that is, the activity that builds this thing, that thing, any thing. (Negri, 2008, p. 83)

Living in Salim-Zib I enjoyed life there a lot. I'm not just saying that. I really loved it. How can I put it, a fulfillment? I felt I became new day by day by being filled up with something new. It was because of the people with whom I lived, shared things. (...) You know? After all the confrontations and the agonies, I feel like I have a loving relationship with every one of them. And I from time to time feel these strong emotions that I desire to do this and that together with them. (Personal conversation with Vero, 13 November 2013, the Café Haebangchon)

The residents of Bin-Zib in its early period sought to escape from the consumer and worker lifestyle imposed by capitalist society. Instead of pursuing a sweeping change in the society, however, they simply started to live the way they wanted to live. In doing so they especially focused on recovering their ability to live an autonomous life. Residents produced food and daily necessities by themselves as much as possible, trying to turn work into a form of play. From shooting a 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).

The first Bin-Zib had something in common with the concept and practice of the 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). Before 2010, many of residents and visitors of Bin-Zib were activists. Many of them happened to know the community through the Jinbo blog sphere or independent media, which had relatively progressive viewpoints. These limited channels functioned as pathways through which people reached Bin-Zib. 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 a liberated zone (albeit limited in its extent) not only from the neoliberal form of life but also
from the extremely hierarchical and gendered relations that are dominant within Korean society.

As the number of guests increased, so did the number of rented houses. In this context, residents of Bin-Zib did not seek “to maintain its invisibility” (Day, 2005, p. 162), something which a TAZ, as a “free enclave” (Bey, 1991, as cited in Day, 2005), is supposed to do. 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 where different bodies and desires constantly collided. To maintain Bin-Zib as an empty/guests' house, newcomers needed to be engaged in communistic relations.

The most significant way through which Bin-Zib residents have promoted their unique atmosphere of sharing and hospitality was, as I have argued, not forcing ideology or ethics. Rather, the ethics of Bin-Zib or what Graeber (2011), calls “baseline communism” (p. 98) have been formed through shared conviviality and pleasure. For example, making food and sharing it has been an essential part of community life. Once a visitor put it in a pun. “I heard Bin-Zib is where binmal [empty talk] becomes reality. But I’m making biman [obesity] here” (John, 2008, April 13). 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 a host.

These convivial occasions have also played a 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.

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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” (Graeber, 2010, p. 7).
drinking parties) to remind themselves of the expanding potentials of shared life. For example, the minutes of the meetings archived on their website show they had a series of tough and intense discussions regarding setting up a new Bin-Zib and Bin-Go in August and September of 2009. At this time they suddenly changed topics and started to prepare a big feast for celebrating Chuseog, a traditional Korean holiday. They not only made a significant amount of traditional rice cake but also brewed two types of traditional liquor and beer, a reorientation of focus explained by the desire to “make food and share it as we were messed up in the head with so much stuff” (Anonymous, 2009, September 23). Such self-deprecatory jokes have been common at Bin-Zib throughout its history. And 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 don’t want the flow of gifting 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 was a living condition rather than any sort of shared ideology that continuously pushed residents to keep opening the community up to others, and thereby changing one’s way of life.

Residents have not only developed what Graeber called (2010) the “communism of the senses” through the daily experiences of sharing, but they have learned the joy of collective creation by the design and creation of various cultural works together. Many residents in their twenties who I met during my field research described life at Bin-Zib as fun. For example, one resident, Min, remembered his experience of preparing for the Haebangchon festival, saying “above all things, it was incredibly fun and incredibly tough at the same time” (Personal conversation with Min, 10 November 2013, the Café Haebangchon). Such collaborative working experiences gave residents valuable opportunities in which they created the common in the process, developed the skills for solving problems, and brought about collaborations among different kinds of voices.
Most importantly, these collective experiences gave them a chance to find out how joyful this collaborative process of creation is.

This happens all the time whenever we do certain events. Obviously, no one has any intention to organize such a big event at first. However, as people get together and talk like “this would be fun” or “how about that”, the event usually becomes bigger and bigger. And we always, somehow, manage the whole process. Without money, we get things done using our bodies. Instead of working with professionals, we encourage local residents to be a part of the event. And, we witness how we get to have the feature as activists and the ability as producers in the process, every time. (Yunong, 2015)

In the first issue of Bin-Zib zine Noneunsalam, a newcomer, Yeongjoon, notes in an article that “I got a very unique impression and feeling the first day I came to Bin-Zib. I thus wanted to write about it”:

The first day of staying at Bin-Zib, I was surprised by Bin-Zib residents’ easy and unstrained manner. They expressed their opinion without reservation while resolutely ignoring superfluous words. I believe that not many people have the experience of letting their opinions out in this strongly hierarchical Korean society. Even in a short time, I could see their confidence, which might be accumulated through their experiences. (…) How can Bin-Zib be a space where people express themselves and care for each other at the same time? (Yeongjoon, 2014, June)

In his text, Yeongjoon carefully suggested, “the strength might come from the fact that they live in that way”. The sentence can be modified borrowing the language of a former resident, Dion, who notes that the strength of Bin-Zib comes from “the very event of living together” (Dion, 2009, December 20).

5.2. Devising and Improvising Strategic Practices and Discourses

Where the practice of the citizen is oriented to ‘staying on the road’, as it were, and that of the nomad to destroying all roads, the smith is guided by an alchemical, metallurgical will to the ‘involuntary invention’ of new strategies and tactics. Rather than attempting to dominate by imposing all-encompassing norms, the smith seeks to innovate by tracking and exploiting opportunities in and around existing structure. (Day, 2005, p. 174)
Let's 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. If there are negative reactions, let's see what the reactions are and reflect on their meaning. Alternative money is just a tool, anyway. So let's try to learn by seeing how this tool works and what kinds of relations it will produce. Cheers Bin-Go! (A Bin-Go activist, 2014, October 25)\(^5\)

As Bin-Zib residents decided to open up the space to heterogeneity, the community could not help but be confronted by a series of issues, as I discussed in Chapter 4. How the residents resolved these issues in the community depended on the ever-changing conditions and circumstances of collective life at Bin-Zib, such as what the residents' concerns were at the very moment. Issues were occasionally resolved unexpectedly, but they tended to reoccur in different guises in different contexts. The most significant tactic Bin-Zib residents adopted at the toughest moments was throwing feasts while constantly asking each resident what kind of Bin-Zib they wanted to form and live in. At the same time, they put effort into organizing collective study projects through which they could devise/improvise a system to overcome the specific problems faced and engage more people.

The first communing system the residents devised is 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, as described in Chapter 3, they endeavoured 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.

\(^5\) The quote is a part of email circulated amongst Bin-Go activists for discussing the alternative local currency, which is currently circulating in the area of Haebangchon. Bin-Zib residents had studied alternative money, and had issued their own alternative money and circulated it within the community several times. While the previous attempts failed, their experiences became the basis for the alternative local currency Haebanghwapye [Liberation Money].
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, they set up the collective fund/bank Bin-Go, through which everyone holds equal rights of use regardless of the amount of funding they are able to contribute. Then members of Bin-Go widened the sphere of sharing in 2013 by turning Bin-Go into the “communal bank as a networked body of the funds of communities”. Members shared all the profits generated from key money with other communities beyond Bin-Zib.

We believe that capital should ultimately be extinct. But how does this become possible? Can we share the profit generated from my capital with other people? Can I use the key money for my house to share with people in a common place? Can I invest my money not for interest but for other value? Can I willingly give money to a friend who needs it and then forget about it?

We have to expand the common step by step in order to make capital extinct, to reduce our reliance on monetary relationships. We shall not be shocked when capital is exterminated. In addition, we should consider how we reduce the risk for individuals in case the commune becomes spoiled or ruined. We, of course, have to learn the art of the gift and do our best not to make a big deal out of counting money, which is trivial, but rather focus upon living together according to basic fiscal principles. (Jium, 2010)

Two things should be noted regarding the way Bin-Zib has expanded its experiment over the years. First, practices and systems have been invented 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 inquires 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 have 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 into the system. For example, when residents discuss the question of how to issue an alternative currency in the community to valorize communal work 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. Even when they set the amount of bundamgeum [shared expenses], residents inserted a certain ambiguity in it, by stipulating it as “more than” 2000 won ($2.20). They have also tried to insert some contingent, or game-like elements into their response 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 devised by residents. The first guests of the community who came to the house warming party chose the name through a contest. They declared that, “[s]ince it is empty, anyone can come anytime. (…) Even the name of the place is Bin [empty]. You can give a name to this place as you wish” (Bin-Zib,

6 Recently, Sin Yang Kim (2014), who has researched cooperatives and the 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 highlights the fact that “Bin-Go has no official articles of association, maintaining a flexible structure in which everything can be decided through discussion”.

7 I believe that the Foucauldian notion of the 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 knowledge” (1977, p. 196). Interpreting Bin-Zib through the lens of the dispositif could be an interesting topic to pursue in the future, but is beyond the scope of this project.
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 set of standards to qualify for access to the collective money of Bin-Zib, as noted in Chapter 4. In such circumstances the name Bin-Zib became either a potential obstacle or an irreducible surplus that limited those who wanted to keep the community closed off from the exterior. It is impossible to fully actualize the idea of Bin-Zib, *expanding travelers’ communism*. However, 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 scholar Kojin Karatani (2006). The concept of association is described as a regulative topos, which sublates existing *exchanges*.\(^8\) 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).

\(^8\) While Graeber uses the term *exchange* to refer to a 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 “In Marx’s idea, association has something like the transcendental apperception X-that which should not be considered as a substantial center, like a 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/s rather than a teleological program.
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 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 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 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 rub and collide against each other, residents could not help but constantly reconsider the meaning of Bin-Zib.

5.3. *Subjectivations through Everyday Politics of (Re)forming the Community*

What is a process of subjectivation? It is the formation of a one that is not a self but is the relation of a self to another. (…) In Latin, *proletarii* meant “prolific people” – people who make children, who merely live and reproduce without a name, without being counted as part of the symbolic order of the city. *Proletarians* was thus well-suited for the workers as the name of anyone, the name of the outcast: those who do not belong to the order of castes, indeed, those who are pleased to undo this order (the class that dissolves classes, as Marx said). In this way, a process of subjectivation is a process of disidentification or declassification. (Rancière, 1992, p. 60-61)

From the outsiders’ view, life in Bin-Zib might look like living with congenial buddies, or conversely, living stressfully with strangers. However, those views cannot capture what *living-together* is at Bin-Zib.
Dare I explain that it constantly involves questioning the boundary between myself and others and the composition of a new family. When I say *new* here, I don’t mean it is new because we are living together without blood ties. What we pursue is creating different relations in which even biological family members can transform their relations into new ones. In Bin-Zib, the matter is thus how to create different relations rather than how to make a relationship with new residents. (Dion, 2009, December 20)

People who live at Bin-Zib for a long time are called jangtu [the abbreviation of janggitusugaek, which means long-term guests]. Once, residents made a joke, saying, “jangtu might mean *janggitujaengdan* [long-term strugglers]” (Anonymous, 2009, September 9). This pun captures a significant aspect of the community. 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. Conflicts arose between different “partitions of the sensible” (Rancière, 2004). Being exposed in the sharp gap of perceptions, one is compelled to be in the process of subjectivation, becoming other than herself, constantly putting herself in a position of being in between.

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 their immediate surroundings. Being forced to see what they could not see before in the position of being 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.

Subjectivations also happen at the edge of Bin-Zib, placing residents in the sharp gap between two different ways of (ac)counting part/share of the community. The idea of Bin-Zib includes the future guests of the community as well as those who cultivate alternative communities wherever they are. Facing not only future but also outside of the community, there happen to be inevitable tensions between the idea of Bin-Zib and residents’ desires to form a closed community or return to reciprocal relations. Tensions appeared particularly keenly whenever Bin-Zib residents faced spatial limitations. Since
there are always people who want to come in, residents are confronted with the problem of how to establish a new Bin-Zib thereby living and letting the idea live, or closing the place off to the outside as well as the idea of Bin-Zib entirely. While the inevitable conflicts have posed a serious challenge to the community, they also have fostered a constant and ever-imperfect process of subjectivations by locating residents in between two different worlds.

The idea of Bin-Zib has forced the residents to act. However, we should remember 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, Dion, made an astute observation. She wrote on a web post:

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 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.

5.4. How to Communicate Communes in and against State and Capital?

The goal is not to ‘strive to be one community’, but to build many linked communities. (Day, 2005, p. 189)
We are inviting Bin-Go to our general meeting, where we report our activities and declare the right to housing. It has been three years since we decided to live differently, being perpetually in doubt though. Modudeul [together/the abbreviation of let’s get together moles] started as a small group of four young people, has formed 5 houses with 30 members. Although it is not easy, we are living together. Thanks to all of you who support the idea that housing is not buying but living. (Modudeul, 2015)

Do you know there is a space called Jaljari [space to sleep well] in Busan? It is near to the Gwanganri beach. In solidarity with the Bin-Go communal bank, we are waiting for friends who will form a life together with us. We will have time for introducing Jaljari and Bin-Go. Please come join us if you have an interest in co-housing community as well as the Bin-Go Communal Bank! (Jalgari, 2015)

We are Bihaeng [delinquency/flight], a living cooperative for teenage activists. (…) Living in a decent condition should be a right for everyone. However, society prevents us from talking about the rights of independent teenagers (teenage runaways) because of the logic that teenagers belong to their family. We, de-familied teenager activists, attempt to live together, forming a co-housing community. We will try to let the society know there are teenagers who have escaped from violent homes and we declare that a decent life for a teenager should be guaranteed not by persons with parental bonds but by the society. (…) Now we are forming the first house. We will form a house where everyone is juin [owner/host]. (Bihaeng, 2014)

During the period of my field research Bin-Go held a series of lectures entitled “Lectures Toward Anti-capitalism: How Should a Commune Deal with Capital?” People decided upon the theme based on activists’ desperate need to deal with the practical questions surrounding Bin-Zib and Bin-Go. In the whole process of preparation and during the event, Bin-Zib residents reflected on what they had done and discussed the difficulties that Bin-Go and Bin-Zib confronted.9 The biggest concern was how to prevent being swept up into the flows of capital or the state’s bureaucratic control.

The following quote is from a leaflet made in order to promote the lecture.

In capitalist relations we must earn money to eat and to pay rent. We collect money or are indebted. Capital is already the very condition and premise of our life, and nobody can be absolutely free from capital no

9 Regarding how residents organized and prepared the lecture, see the footnote 41 in Chapter 1.
matter whether a person is opposed to capitalism or not. Given this, is an anti-capitalist plan possible? How do we fight for reducing the power of capital and increasing the common? (...)

Considering the power of finance capital, which destroys our everyday life with incredible scale and speed, our experiences seem too small, being easily swept away in the flow of capital. However, let us put our minds together and grapple with these ideas and practices. We are hoping to form another commune: a commune of networked communes through this meeting between scholars and activists. (Bin-Go, 2013)

When we think of the enormous power of capital and the state, what Bin-Zib has done might seem feeble. What if Haebangchon gets swept up 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?

As mentioned in Chapter 3, 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. On the 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. Being subsidized by the government as a social enterprise, it rents places based on joense contract and remolds the places with various concepts such as “a house for baseball fans” or “a house of future finance specialists”.11

10 E. Pak (2012) argues that Bin-Zib is “an autonomous housing experience which supplements the lack of welfare” (p. 115).
11 When I read articles about the company whose name is coincidently 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 university students with housing at a relatively cheap price. The company is a clear example of how terms such as sharing economy and ecological life are captured by capital.
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. The community 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. For example, when Bin-Zib residents had a disagreement over the meaning of Bin-Zib, those who wanted to draw a strong boundary around Bin-Zib also wanted to set up an approval system for applications to utilize the funds of Bin-Zib for supporting communal activities.

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 fully 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, 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 standards regarding cleanliness and it can be a source of conflict” (Wuseok Jo, 2013, March 28). There was no ambiguity of the sort that Bin-Zib entailed. In other words, this example suggests the common is neither private nor public.

Secondly, when it comes to commercialized co-housing, the final aim is that of making profit. Private co-housing companies produce various concepts of community life.

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12 Regarding the Maeul Mandeulgi [Village Community Development] Project, see the footnote 42 in Chapter 3.

13 Sohaengju is the abbreviation of happy housing with communication. As co-housing it consists of around 8-9 housing units and common space such as a community room, a common garage, etc. in a 3-4 stories building. When we considers that the parcel price per household for the second Sohaengju was around $212,500, it can be said that the model is targeted to a well-to-do middle class who desire a form of community life. Combined with the co-housing project Sohaengju, the government officially started the official public co-housing project.
as a designer form of commodity. In other words, one can buy a community life specially designed and tailored to her preference. Paying money, customers 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 “moving service, housekeeping, food catering, and even mentoring are offered” (Woozoo, 2014). 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 depends on a completely different logic. 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 bundamgeum [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 the full time Binzibin [Binzibites], while contemplating how to live outside of wage labour relations. Bin-Zib promotes the production of different desires from those produced by capital.

Bin-Zib is, in all probability, the first case of a co-housing experiment in South Korea. Starting out with one rented apartment, the experiment now supports seven Bin-Zibs, the Café Haebangchon, four other autonomous co-housing communities, and two alternative communities across the country. The members of Bin-Go also have developed informal yet vibrant relationships with members of other alternative communities, holding public lectures or other communal events together. While trying to expand the scope of communing, Bin-Zib residents have struggled against the tendency of the movement to universalize its own original project. Rather than making the community bigger, they have diversified the community itself while expanding the

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14 The co-housing communities using Bin-Go loan are Modudeul (currently running five co-housing spaces in Bucheon area), Jaljari (introducing the community as Bin-Zib in Busan) Kkeutjip (a co-housing space for media activists in Cheonju), and Bih-aeng (a cooperative of teenage activists). Considering the fact that teenage runaways in society are treated as the object of protection, Bin-Go is clearly forming a relationship that is distinct from public welfare—a relationship of solidarity with the youths who are trying to form an autonomous community. The alternative communities using Bin-Go loan are Gongyong (an alternative media community in Cheonju) and Onzigonzi (an alternative education space in Haebangchon).
network of linked communities where people try to practice autonomy, hospitality and sharing.

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 kinds of relations with others. In other words, the main resources and the very products 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”, to borrow the words of Day (2005, p. 103). People have enhanced their ability to form an autonomous life while inviting other to the “unusual, novel, righteous and pleasant way of life” (Bin-Go, 2015).

The fourth edition of the Bin-Zib zine, Noneunsalam, casts light on the idle life of Bin-Zib, featuring eighteen full-time Binzibin [Binzibites].

There are people who enjoy their freedom to the fullest, loafing around the village, when you are swamped with heavy workload and drowsiness. If you are a very hard worker, please skip this article because it will make you kick yourself, asking, “why, why am I working so hard?” Kongbat, a neighbour resident of Haebangchon, put it in elegantly: “Is it appropriate to allow such idleness in the capitalist society?” (Seowon, 2014, October)

While exaggerating “Bin-Zib residents’ yingyoroun [surplus-like] lifestyle”,15 the zine wittily shows how this absurdly idle life (from the viewpoint of capitalism) actually contains intense joys, and, at the same time, suffering. The zine illuminates how these idle residents, for example, voluntarily put their time and energy into publishing the zine

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15 Yingyo comes from the vocabulary of precarious youth living in neoliberal society. While yingyo means surplus, or residue, at the margins of the society, it can be said that Bin-Zib residents are voluntarily being yingyo, and thus recuperating the term.
just for fun. It also reveals a resident’s amazement after a party for supporting a particular resident’s fiscal difficulty:¹⁶

For me, this was the event that turned the question of “how we live together” from idea into experience. In retrospect, it might be nothing new. We have collected our money and efforts to provide against critical moments. These collective efforts have formed a security net by which even those who cannot pay bundamgeum [shared expenses] to live here together. Numerous long-term and short-term guests have shared their time, heart, and money to form and reproduce this commons. If there were no such people, Bin-Zib could not exist. How about Bin-Go? It makes possible maintaining more than 10 community places [including Bin-Zibs] with the money which amount is correspond to the key money for one family. (Sujeongchae, 2014, October)

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 form of (sub)urban housing par excellence. Instead of closing the house to secure it as 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. By opening itself to others without claiming a name or a fixed identity, the community has become a node of networking, communicating communes.

¹⁶ Bin-Zib residents encountered a couple of economic difficulties during the fall of 2014. A large fire occurred at Salim-Zib, and one long-term guest was involved in a car accident while he was helping out another resident. Although these situations were quite worrisome, Bin-Zib residents were able to pull together by pouring in work and care. Residents collected money and held a fund-raising bazaar and a party to help the affected. Needless to say, many of them volunteered to repair Salim-Zib.
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Appendix.

List of Analyzed Posts on the Bin-Zib’s Digital Sphere

1. Bin-Zib Wiki (http://jinbo.net/wiki)
   (2) Hoeuilog [Meeting record 20090323] (Dion, 2009, March 23)
   (3) Binmaeuleul yeohaenghaneneun hichihaikeoleul wihan annaeseo [The hitchhikers’
       guide to the Bin-Galaxy] (n.d.)

2. Bin-Zib team blog (http://blog.jinbo.net/house)
   (1) Sulbijgi wokeusyab cheosmoim [The first brewing workshop] (2008, March 26)
   (2) binjim tusukgi [How was John, staying at Bin-Zib] (John, 2008, April 13)
   (3) Binjib 2 ttoneun bingagega sijaghabnida [We are starting Bin-Zib 2 or Bin-cafe]
       (2008, March 26)
   (4) Ibeonjumal naenae yaegihae bobsida [Let's talk during this weekend!] (2008,
       November 12)
   (5) Binjib 2 mandeulgi gasogdo butda [Boosting up of Setting Bin-Zib 2] (2008,
       November 17)
   (6) Saranghaneun Bin-Zib sikgudeurege [To my beloved Bin-Zib people] (Jigak, 2009,
       January 15)
   (7) Hoeuiragoneun hajiman [Although we called it the meeting] (Isel, 2009, March 17)
   (8) Seonmul, hwapye, nodong, sarang [Gift, money, labour, love] (2009, April 10)
   (9) Binjaedan gomineul wihan jaryo [Materials for contemplations on Bin-foundation]
       (2009, September 7)
   (10) Binmaeul chuseogmaji [Celebrating the Thanksgiving Day] (2009, September 23)
   (11) Binmaeul gongdongchee daehan dansang [A thought about Bin village community]
        (Dion, 2009, September 9)
   (12) Comment on Binmaeul gongdongchee daehan dansang [A thought about Bin village
        community] (Hyeonmin, 2009, September 10)
   (13) Jangtuui jogeon 2:uimupyeon [Duties of the long-term guests] (Jigak, 2009, October
        5)
   (14) Oneul aeksyeon intim hoeui chamseogeun motajiman [Although I cannot make it
        today meeting] (2009, October 28).
(15) Unnyeongtim cheonmoim [The first meeting of managing team] (2009, November 6)
(16) 20100124 Maeulhoeui [20100124 village meeting] (Labong, 2010, January 25)
(17) Bin-Zib 2.0 (Hyun, 2010, February 7)
(18) Binjipgwaja jugeoundong [Bin-Zib and housing movements] (Moya, 2010, May 7)
(19) Binjibgwaja banjabonundong [Bin-Zib and anti capitalism movement] (2010, May 14)

3. Bin-Zib Website (http://binzb.net)

(1) Bin-Zib 2.0 (Jigak, 2010, February 3)
(2) Dadeul michyeosseo [We are all crazy!] (Sonnim, 2010, April 26)
(3) Binmaeulgeumchokwihjimun [Statement of purpose: Why Bin-Go?] (Bin-Go, 2010, June 27)
(4) Sonnimmajiwa juindoegi [Welcoming guests and becoming hosts] (Jium, 2010, October 4)
(5) Johabwon jagyeokgwagwonhan, hyetaegedaeheaseo [Regarding the right, responsibility and benefit of the coop member] (Dion, 2010, December 21)
(6) Binjibe hyeogmyeongongilyohalkka [Do we need a revolution at Bin-Zib?] (Sigumchi, 2011, February 14)
(7) Jibgwa maeuleul cheoeumbuteodasi mandeundamyeon [If we establish Bin-Zib and Binmaeul all over again from the start...] (Jium, 2011, April 22)
(8) Geunyangnyang [Just because] (Dalgun, 2011, May 3)
(9) Gongbu-Zib iyagi2 [Discussion on Gongbu-Zib 2] (Janjan, 2011, May 13)
(11) Haebangchon maeulkkape cheosbeonjjae junbimoim [The first meeting for the cafe of Haebangchon] (Jium, 2012, February 7)
(12) Kkomyuneun jaboneuleotteoke haeyahaneunga [How a commune should deal with capital] (Jium, 2012, March 13)
(13) Binjipgwabingoedaehansigui byeonhwa [The change of recognition on Bin-Zib and Bin-Go] (Cu, 2012, June 6)
(14) Comment on Cu's post (Janjan, 2012, June 6)
(15) Cu geule daehan pebugeoseouiyagideul [Discussions on Cu's writing on Facebook] (Janjan, 2012, June 7)
(16) Bingoga ijeongdokkajimoduui hollaneul bulloireukljureun mollanneyo [It is surprise that Bin-Go has led so much misunderstanding] (Kenzzang, 2012, June 8)
(17) Ohaehasyoeteosumniadaneun mal [The phrase that you misunderstood] (Cu, 2012, June 11)

(18) Comment on Cu's post (Malya, 2012, June 18)

(19) Maeulhoeui Janchi [0624 village meeting and feast] (Che, 2012, June 25)

(20) Yeonsog gangyeonhoe "haebangchon, binmaeul, gileulmudda"eseo gati gileul mandeuleobwayo [Let's navigate the road together in the lecture, "Bin-village in Haebangchon: Navigating the road ahead"] (Bin-Go, 2012, November 27)


4. Bin-Go Website (http://bingobank.org)

(1) Cheongsonyeonjugeohyeopdongjoham bihaengeul hamkke mandeureojujuseyo! [Support the living cooperative for teenager] (Bihaeng, 2014, November 23)

(2) Cheongnyeonjugeohyeopdongjohap Modudeul Ui Changnipchonhoega 3Wole Yeollimnida! [Modudeul, the youth housing coop holds the first general meeting] (Modudeul, 2015, March 13).

(3) Jugeogongdongche busan 'jaljari'wa gongdongcheunhaeng 'bingo' seolmyeonghoe [Co-housing community Jaljari and Bin-Go orientation] (Jaljari, 2015, April 26)

5. Bin-Zib/Bin-Go mailing list (house@list.jinbo.net/ bin-go@googlegroups.com)


(2) Haebanghwapyee daehaesoo [Regarding the Liberation Money] (A Bin-Go activist, 2014, October 25)

6. Gongbu-Zib team blog (http://blog.jinbo.net/gong_sandang)


7. Personal blog of Bin-Zib residents

(1) Yureobui uriippdeul [My houses in Europe] (Jium, 2007, October 16)

(2) Icheungchimdae dugaega inneun bang [A room with two bunk beds] (Jium, 2008, January 17)

(3) Jib... jadongcha... [A house and a car] (Jium, 2008, January 18)

(4) Meoggo sal gungli [How to making a living, well?] (Jium, 2008, February 13)

(5) Ppangeul mandeuldaga [While making bread] (Dion, 2010, May 8)

(6) Binjibe sandaneun geon [The meaning of living at Bin-Zib] (Dalgun, 2010, June 19)