Itaewon as an Alien Space within the Nation-State and a Place in the Globalization Era

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Abstract

This article is about the fieldwork research findings on the ways "place-making" can be political in discussions of people's lived experiences, identities, and powers surrounding the neighborhood Itaewon, located in Seoul. Itaewon became a deterritorialized space due to the geopolitical exigencies of the Cold War period and came to be acknowledged as a foreign space within Korea. It was a consumer space that met the desires and needs of American soldiers, transient subjects who consumed women and imitation goods. At the same time there were Koreans who were recreational business owners and merchants keeping their identity referent to Itaewon. And to some Koreans, it also signified a new window through which they could access exotic, American culture. So two subjects of Itaewon, both foreigner and Korean, were in a co-dependant relationship with shared interests during the Cold War, when Itaewon was the only alien space within Korea. But in the transnational globalization era, in which various exotic frontier zones have been created, residents standing in their localities and foreigners heading toward diverse alien spaces have been practicing different politics of place.

Keywords: Itaewon, deterritorialized space, place, American military base, transnational space

Prologue

In discussions of globalization as an era in which temporal and spatial distances are

becoming extinct, place has recently risen as a new topic of interest. In general, the globalization debate that emphasizes travel, border crossing, migration, displacement, diaspora, and deterritorialization does not treat place—understood as a specific location—as an important issue. The global is at the center of such a debate, and the local is regarded as a space that is subordinate or resistant to the global. As the local and locality are only discussed in relation to the global, it is assumed that people constituting the local are always on the move, such that places and experiences based on them are not counted as political issues.

When it was presupposed that the material territory of a specific area was fixed, and constituted the matrix that provided people with culture and identity, place and the local were treated as important topics of discussion. In the modern world where nation-states had clear territories and functioned as actual political, economic, and cultural entities distinct from other nation-states, the local was considered fixed and essential. That is why local/area research was possible, and anthropologists conducted fieldwork in specific places to explore cultures and identity, which provided a kind of ethic to people's identity attached to a place (Escobar 2003). But as economy and culture are created beyond particular regions in transnational spaces, and suggestions are made that relationships between space, culture, and identity are the products of power dynamics, criticism of place as objective and fixed has taken the center of debates in anthropology, cultural studies, cultural geography, mass media studies, and so on (Appadurai 1996; Gupta & Ferguson 1992, 1977; Kim S. 1995; Ong 1999; Escobar 2003).

Nevertheless, political ecologists, anthropologists, and post-developmentalists who are dealing with the politics of local knowledge raise the criticism that globalization debates acknowledge and presuppose capitalistic development and the expansion of the market economy as inevitable, and at the same time marginalize and erase places (Mirsepassi, Basu, and Weaver 2003). Dirlik (2001, 17) points out that the marginalization of a place reflects the asymmetry between the global and the local that exists in discourses of globalization. There, the global is equated with space, capital, history, and agency while the local is bound with place, labor, tradition, women, and minorities. In the global/local setup, place is erased. Dirlik sees such marginalization as problematic because place is at the center of the politics of the most important issues in

our lives today, such as development, culture, and environment. He claims that place, which allows the imagination of a different context, should rise as the new political scene for a renewed exploration of politics, knowledge and formation of identity. Embracing Dirlik's claim, Escobar (2003, 40) poses the question of how the experience of knowledge, consciousness, and life based on place—which is already embedded with capital and modernity—could function, in the transnational globalization process, as a radical criticism of mainstream society or power itself.

As such debates unfold, empirical research regarding what changes people from specific places are experiencing because of transnational globalization is in high demand. Criticism of globalization does not presuppose an isolated area that rejects globalization all together. Explaining how globalization is localized in a specific place is also a critical reassessment of globalization. In other words, place research under globalization requires looking into how the local and the global are connected in specific places, who are the subjects attempting such connections, who participates in constructing the new relations of places, and how a politics based on a place—yet one that goes beyond it—is possible.

The purpose of this study is to observe how Itaewon, which became a deterritorialized, alien space due to the geopolitical exigencies of the Cold War period, creates a politics of place through the "place-making" project of multiple cultural spaces in an era of globalization. It also intends to show the meaning of place under globalization and how local and global powers operate in the process of place making. The paper is the result of fieldwork research on how a place could be imagined as a critical space where people's experiences may become knowledge, power, and the references for their everyday lives. This paper will deal with the alienness and deterritoriality of Itaewon, and also with the politics of this neighborhood in an era of globalization when transnational frontier zones are increasing.

Itaewon in Transition from a Space of Nation-State to a Place of Transnationality

In modern society, the authority of the nation-state is taken as territorially exclusive and absolute. This is the concept of the state that Koreans were taught during the

nation-state building era. But when foreign armed forces are stationed within the nation-state, or special free trade zones are established, it becomes apparent that the nation-state negotiates with intervening forces from the outside to create deterritorialized places where its authority has different implications. Itaewon was one such deterritorialized space, resembling military camps established within the nation-state during modernization.

The material space called Itaewon usually refers to the 1.4 km area from Itaewon 1-dong to Hannam 2-dong in Yongsan-gu, Seoul. There are around 2,000 stores in Itaewon, including shopping centers, lodgings, restaurants, recreational facilities, trade firms, agencies, tourist bureaus, hotels, and hospitals. But Itaewon as a foreigners' space includes Hannam-dong and Itaewon 2-dong, where the foreign residential district and a number of foreign embassies are clustered.

The process by which Itaewon has come to be perceived as a deterritorialized and alien space—or a "foreign area"—in Seoul is intricately connected with the establishment of the American military base in the nearby district of Yongsan. After the 1945 liberation of Korea and followed by the Korean War, Itaewon became the site of the American military base. In the 1960s, American army apartments were built in Yongsan, paving the way for a residential zone for the American forces. Itaewon soon became a military base camp filled with small stores and saloons built in temporary buildings, and functioned as a comfort town for the Americans. Itaewon was called the "Las Vegas of Seoul," which meant that it had turned into a recreation center and a place of cultural consumption for American soldiers. Until recently, the Korean mass media viewed Itaewon as a place of excretory culture, where American soldiers engaged in hedonism, prostitution, illegal drugs, and criminal activities. But in the globalization process, transnational phenomena have become everyday affairs and the cultural particularity of Itaewon is fading.

The globalization process creates many new spaces within the nation-state. As Sassen (2001, 173) says, when a global agent overlaps and interacts with the nation-state, be it a firm or a market, a frontier zone is formed within the state's territory. Such a frontier zone is not just a boundary that distinguishes the nation-state from the global, but also a zone of political, economic, and cultural interactions. This is where new places are created and old ones are transformed. Itaewon finds itself in a kind of

contention with new spaces being formed in this globalization era.

Many Itaewon storeowners I met while conducting fieldwork from June 2002 to August 2003 remarked that Itaewon was no longer the Itaewon of the past. They say it is no longer an area of Americans or American soldiers in particular. Many merchants claim that the growing number of anti-American demonstrations in Korea since two middle-school girls were run over by an American army tank in 2002 threaten their livelihood, and that Itaewon's night life is disappearing due to curfews on American soldiers since the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The storeowners claim that, of Itaewon's two main industries, recreation and shopping, recreation is diminishing. They add that the issue of returning the Yongsan base to Korea is threatening the livelihoods of the Korean residents of Itaewon who depend on the housing leases of American personnel, making the future of Itaewon unpredictable.

After liberation, Itaewon was seen as a foreign zone and an area belonging to the American army, and gradually became deterritorialized in several respects. Since the 1990s, and with the sudden decrease in the number of American military soldiers, the uniqueness of Itaewon as a foreign zone has greatly decreased. For this reason, Itaewon merchants and the City of Seoul have launched a place-making project to firmly establish Itaewon as a foreign or multi-cultural zone. This can be seen as a re-territorializing effort, or an effort to reconstruct Itaewon as a unique foreign space in Korea. Now that the need to protect the nation-state from foreign elements has diminished, and the city's topography is being reorganized, alienness as a concept needs to be readdressed. This paper tries to examine the historical reality of Itaewon's alienness and the relationship between that alienness and Korean society.

Methods and Subjects of Research

The data for this research was collected from academic literature and press reports on Itaewon, as well as through fieldwork conducted from June 2002 to August 2003. The empirical data used for this paper came from in-depth interviews with 25 interviewees (Table 1). The interviewees who shared their experiences of Itaewon were customers of the area's clothing shops, luggage stores, and restaurants, employees of the district

offices, real estate agents, owners of clothing and luggage shops, managers and employees of restaurants and recreational businesses, a Japanese tourist, and North American and European residents of Itaewon.

Table 1. In-depth Interviewees

	Name	Gender	Nationality	Age	Relationship with Itaewon	Industry/Job	Primary Customers
1	Mr. Jeong	Male	Korean	59	Runs a tailor shop since the 1970s	Tailor shop owner	Employees of American and European firms; embassies
2	Mr. Seong	Male	Korean	65	Runs twoKorean and German restaurants	Restaurant	Japanese tourists; Europeans
3	Mr. Yi	Male	Korean	58	Owner of clothing and shoes shop	Bags	Tourists
4	Mr. Sin	Male	Korean	51	Runs a clothing business since the 1960s; made a recent transition to recreational business	Karaoke bar; beer hall	Japanese Koreans
5	Mr. Kim	Male	Korean	32	Employee at Yongsan-gu Office	Public service	
6	Mr. Kong	Male	Korean	70s	Owner of a building in Itaewon shopping center	Owner of commercial building	
7	Ms. Yi	Female	Korean	55	Runs an American restaurant since the 1980s	Restaurant	US soldiers; employees of American firms; American tourists
8	Ms. Yu	Female	Korean	46	Runs a Korean restaurant since the 1990s	Restaurant	FIT Ttourists
9	Mr. G	Male	Korean	32	Runs a gay bar	Gay bar	
10	Mr. Bak	Male	Korean	59	Choreographer of transgender shows	CEntertainmen thoreography	
11	Mr. Shin	Male	Korean	32	Frequents gay bars and clubs	Publisher of gay magazine	
12	Mr. Jo	Male	Canadian	26	Resident of Itaewon	Student	
13	Ms. Jo	Female	Belgian	32	Resident of Itaewon	Artist	
14	Ms. Yi	Female	Chinese	32	Employee of a Korean restaurant	Service work	
15	Mr. Seong	Male	Korean	48	Employee of the Itaewon-dong Office	Public service	US soldiers
16	Ms. U	Female	Korean	46	Agent of real estate office designated by the American 8th Army	Real estate agent	US soldiers

17	Mr. Kim	Male	Korean	48	Real estate agent	Real estate agent	Employees of European firms
18	Mr. Kim	Male	Korean	31	Agent of real estate office designated by the American 8th Army	Real estate agent	US soldiers
19	Mr. Yun	Male	Korean	65	Agent of real estate office designated by the American 8th Army	Real estate agent	US soldiers
20	Tommy	Male	Korean	66	Agent of real estate office designated by the American 8th Army	Real estate agent	US soldiers
21	Mr. Yi	Male	Korean	51	Agent of real estate office designated by the American 8th Army	Real estate agent	US soldiers
22	Ms. Y	Female	Japanese	35	Japanese tourist	Office work	
23	Ms. E	Female	Russian	27	Employee of a recreational business	Recreational work	
24	Mr. Ku	Male	Korean	52	Cultural consumer of Itaewon	Professional work	
25	Mr. Jo	Male	Korean	42	Cultural consumer of Itaewon	Professional work	

Itaewon's Alienness and its Deterritoriality

The Space of American Military Soldiers: American Military Men and Korean Women in Itaewon

The American military base located in Yongsan-gu, Seoul, is considered a symbolic space guaranteeing security and development by many Koreans who have experienced communism and war. Until the 1970s and 1980s, many Koreans thought that the stationing of American armed forces was the basis for Korea's national security. They thought that American soldiers in South Korea would have the effect of preventing a war with North Korea, and even in case of war, would guarantee full US military support. But in the 1990s, Koreans began to view the American forces differently. Some openly voiced their opinion that the American military in Korea was hurting the autonomy of the nation-state. Such opinions had almost never surfaced in the Korean society even during the modernization process in the 1980s. But with the fall of the Cold War, the aggravation of North Korea's political and economic situation, and

Korea's globalization process, public opinion in Korea regarding the Yongsan military base has changed dramatically. Those who believe strongly in an autonomous and independent nation-state point out that Yongsan is a space that symbolizes the submission of national security to a powerful foreign country, and is constituted as an unjust and forgotten space.

However, the Cold War is not the only reason that the Yongsan area became militarized. Owing to its strategic location, Yongsan has historically served as a major military station during attacks from the outside. The use of Yongsan as an army post for foreign forces began on a full scale with the Russo-Japanese War in 1904. With liberation in 1945, the American 24th Army marched into Seoul, taking over Japanese headquarters and the barracks of the Japanese 20th Army. In early 1950, the American army temporarily withdrew after the US Secretary of State Dean Acheson's announcement excluding Korea from the US Asian defense line. But with the Korean War, US forces returned and started using Yongsan again after the cease-fire agreement. Thus gaining strategic command over the Korean army, the American army set up its headquarters in Yongsan in 1957, and built the ROK/US Combined Forces Command headquarters in 1978. Because of the Korean War, which broke out during the American forces' temporary withdrawal, both Korea and the US felt that the stationing of American forces in Korea was inevitable in order to maintain Korea's security and preventing another outbreak of war. Koreans felt so strongly about the necessity of a US military presence that the US government commented that Korean anxiety seemed exaggerated (Moon 1997[2002, 107]).

The American military bases scattered throughout Korea, including Yongsan, became the centers for camptowns that were sites of service businesses for American customers. They were mainly sites of prostitution catering to American soldiers and of commercial activities for both the soldiers and the women of camptowns. Located near the Yongsan base, Itaewon started out as a military camptown for soldiers stationed in Yongsan. In the 1960s, foreign diplomatic establishments were set up in Itaewon-dong and Hannam-dong, and in 1963, a group of American army apartments were built as a collective foreign residential area in the firing ranges. Itaewon became a comfort zone for American soldiers. Indeed, Itaewon is still widely regarded as Seoul's American military district to the present day. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Itaewon had been

developed into a densely crowded commercial area with a large number of recreational businesses, earning it the name “shopping paradise by day, prostitution paradise by night.”

The main relationship between American military soldiers and Itaewon was realized through the comforting recreation that Itaewon provided, and more specifically represented by relations between US soldiers and Korean women. Access to American power and resources were important to Korean women as part of their relationship with American soldiers. Ms. Yi (case 7) has run the most popular American-style restaurant and bar in Itaewon since 1982. At the opening of her restaurant, she was divorced with two children. She makes the following observation about what America meant to Koreans in the 1970s and the early 1980s:

> When I went to America, I found that it was really a paradise. So I wanted to send my kids to America and let them go to school there, but I couldn't find a way to do that. It was going to take 10 years to enter America through invitation by my sister living there. And that would cause problems with my sons' military service and also mean that they would have to go to college here. . . . Invitation by sibling wasn't the way. So as soon as I opened a store in Itaewon, I started looking for an American to marry. Since it was a second marriage and I only thought of the kids, I looked at the conditions of the man rather than love. And I found someone who had a kid, who was older and who could earn money here with me.

Ms. Yi remarried and sent both of her children to her husband's parents. They both became doctors, and she felt that her life was a success. She said that in the 1980s, many Korean women worked in her restaurant and bar as waitresses, and all of them dreamt of marrying an American and moving to the US, which many of them successfully did. To many Koreans, Itaewon was the place of the American Dream throughout the 1970s and into the mid-1980s. It was the general assumption that the US was a wealthy country, and Korean women were under the impression that American men were kind to women and children and liberal compared to Korean men. Therefore, many Korean women regarded marriage with Americans to be an upgrade of life.

Ms. Yi says that after the 1988 Olympics and into the 1990s, there was a change in the consciousness of the women working as waitresses in Itaewon. In the 1990s, female college students working part time in Itaewon preferred to travel to the US rather than

marry an American. There began a pattern of student employees working for 6 to 12 months in Korea and then leaving for the US to study English. With the liberalization of travel overseas and the rapid growth of the Korean economy, as well as a general change in social consciousness, the dreams of marrying Americans lost a great deal of their appeal.

Ms. Yi's restaurant and bar did very well until 1999. But since 2000, business in Itaewon declined. Today, many merchants are considering either changing industries or quitting their businesses in Itaewon altogether. Since the mid-1990s, a large portion of the recreational businesses that targeted American soldiers shifted to serving Japanese clientele. According to Ms. Yi, there are currently only two nameable restaurants that cater solely to American soldiers and Europeans. Ms. Yi says that even though business is slow, she takes comfort in the fact that her restaurant bar still has foreign customers, the trademark of Itaewon, and that she has regular customers on weekends.

According to my 2002 fieldwork, many people in Itaewon said that the red-light district of Bogwang-dong, which used to be frequented by American soldiers, was disappearing. Some real estate agents said that many of the girls who catered to American soldiers had moved out, and Philippine and Russian women were coming in instead. As more and more Japanese started entering Itaewon in the mid-1980s and spent money there, merchants started targeting Japanese customers, with many of the entertainment businesses and clothing shops changing to accommodate them. And since Koreans started showing up in Itaewon in significant numbers in the 1990s, recreational businesses that had previously banned Koreans from entering began to accept them. Ms. Yi's restaurant started serving Korean customers in 2001. Many businesses in Itaewon have specific English-speaking or Japanese-speaking groups of customers that they focus on. This focus is determined solely by each group’s purchasing power. Therefore, despite the growth of Chinese tourism in Itaewon, shops catering exclusively to Chinese customers are still rare because they are not a powerful buying group. Also, foreign worker groups such as Nigerians are emerging, but the merchants also do not consider them clientele because of their lack of purchasing power.

A Unique Space of Liberation, Hedonism, and Exoticism

Itaewon is often described as “alien territory in Seoul,” referred to as “a foreign country within Seoul” (*Seoul Shinmun*, April 1997), or “the outsiders’ district” (*Hankyoreh*, 15 November 2001). There are about 40 embassies and consulates on and surrounding Itaewon road, with as many as 20,000 foreigners around the neighborhood, including the Yongsan army base and foreigners’ apartments in Hannam-dong. Itaewon has bars, clubs, and restaurants that cater to foreigners. Since the 1990s, not only foreign tourists, but also foreigners residing in Seoul, including foreign workers, have been visiting Itaewon to exchange information as a community and engage in social activities. Itaewon has therefore come to be viewed as a foreign cultural space, a place where exotic culture has taken root.

Today, there are a variety of clubs in Itaewon, ranging from blues and jazz, gay and general nightclubs, to Western bars. The fact that there are over 20 gay clubs in Itaewon is considered extraordinary in Korea. J. Lee, a gay activist, says that Itaewon's image allows Koreans to accept whatever happens there, even activities outside the norm, which is why gay bars and transgender bars are able to exist in Itaewon.

The perceived exoticism of Itaewon is related to American culture, the English language, and dollars. The following is an examination of the exoticism and difference of Itaewon, as understood through the examples of 3 Korean men who attended college in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s.

In the 1970s, the entertainment space of Itaewon was divided into three sections. The first space was defined by bars for American soldiers, which purposefully excluded Koreans. The second was defined by clubs with prostitutes for American soldiers, and the third by pubs for Koreans who wanted a taste of American culture. Many young Koreans who wanted to experience something new and were discontent with Korean society came to Itaewon to catch a glimpse of foreign culture. The pubs in Itaewon provided a space of freedom that let them escape the 1970s' culture of construction, production, and oppression under the modernization project and the Yusin (Revitalizing Reform) Regime. The college students who were able to taste Itaewon's pub culture were happy with what it had to offer—something different from other places in Seoul—and for much cheaper. Mr. Ku, who visited Itaewon quite often during his college years in the 1970s, says the following:

> I started going to Itaewon in the 1970s and I still like to go there. When I came back from the army, my college seniors and friends who had been to foreign countries told me that Itaewon had good music, so I went there to hear it. At the time, there were original records in Itaewon that were hard to get elsewhere. The first music I heard was Leonard Cohen, and I got into it. While meeting other people in Itaewon, I acquired different cultural tastes. At that time, in Mugyo-dong there was draft beer, in Myeongdong there was folk guitar, in Chungmuro you could go to "Philharmonic," and Itaewon had rock music at "Nashville." Rock and marijuana were introduced at the same time. To me, rock, marijuana, and Itaewon all signified liberation.

In the 1970s, youngsters like Mr. Ku, who embraced the bar culture by listening to rock and country music, drinking, and smoking marijuana, considered their cultural preference and taste as part of an elite culture. The freedom that they enjoyed was based on the cultural capital that allowed them to frequent Itaewon. In order to have a good time in Itaewon, they had to speak some English, have some knowledge of music, and be confident enough to say "This is our country. I have the right to go where I want." This kind of cultural and emotional capital was the backdrop against which it was possible to enjoy long hair, marijuana, and rock, all of which were considered deviant by the average Korean. Itaewon goers truly felt a part of American freedom, difference, and high culture. Mr. Ku comments that visits to Itaewon during the 1970s were a sort of declaration of young people's cultural distinction. Children of rich parents spent their time in the Chosun Hotel's bar "Yesterday"; those who liked going to nightclubs frequented the Daeyeon-gak Hotel, the Tower Hotel, or the Pungjeon Nightclub; and many young people made the most of folk guitars. Korean college students in the 1970s admired American culture. They were able to access American culture through Itaewon and saw the difference between the two cultures as one defined by freedom and privilege.

On the other hand, Mr. Jo, who attended college in the 1980s, says that he would usually go to Itaewon discotheques to finish off a night of partying. Mr. Jo didn't like to see American soldiers hanging around, so he didn't particularly enjoy being in Itaewon, and had no intention of staying there until the early morning hours. Although Itaewon seemed a little too strange for students, they went there as the last part of a night of partying because of its good discotheques. Mr. Jo went to Itaewon only to enjoy discotheques with his friends, and for him, frequenting Itaewon had nothing to do with

cultural taste or identity. College students of the 1980s generally hung out around their schools. Mr. Jo's friends started going to nightclubs in Myeongdong and Gangnam to dance.

Mr. G, who was a college student in the 1990s when diverse entertainment business had already flourished in many parts of Seoul, went to Itaewon because of his sexual orientation. In order to find clubs or bars for homosexual men like him, Mr. G hung out in Itaewon area and wished to meet Western homosexuals who might have more knowledge and experience about homosexuality.

When Itaewon started opening its doors to Koreans in the 1970s, Koreans were looking for something exotic, different from mainstream Korea, or something American. In the 1980s, Koreans came to Itaewon to buy clothes during the day, while drinking and enjoying Itaewon culture at night. With the advent of international conferences, the Asian Games, and the Olympics in the 1980s, Korean society recognized the potential of Itaewon's exotic culture to bring in foreign currency, and began to develop it into a commodity for international tourists. Itaewon was promoted by advertising its entertainment and exoticism for foreigners. However, soon after the 1988 Olympics, the Korean government announced that Itaewon would be reformed of its hedonism and illegality in order to encourage its rebirth as a socially acceptable space. In order to elevate Korea's image, social and political pressure was applied to Itaewon through censorship and restriction of Itaewon's alien culture.

Many interviewees said that during the Olympics, Itaewon was packed with tourists, but that afterwards, the mass media looked down on Itaewon as a place of crime and squalor. They were angry that the government first behaved as if it were satisfied with earning dollars, but that once Itaewon became famous, the government treated the neighborhood as if it were corrupt. The interviewees claimed they were patriots who had earned dollars for the nation during its hard times.

In the 1990s, Itaewon merchants' associations, the government, and the City of Seoul agreed that Itaewon should be developed as a shopping unit, free tourist zone, and multicultural area, rather than a cultural space for American forces. Even Ms. Yi's bar, which catered exclusively to Americans, began to accept Europeans after 1995 and Middle Easterners after 2003. The emergence of a gay culture found in the growing numbers of gay clubs and cafes, the appearance of Japanese signs for Japanese tourists,

and the construction of a subway line that facilitated easier travel to Itaewon were all factors that contributed to changing the character of that space.

The Shopping Zone of Bonded Goods and Fake Brands

Itaewon began to take shape as a commercial area when the US 121 Evacuation Hospital was relocated from Bupyeong to the Yongsan army base in the early 1970s, which brought the migration of 10,000 US soldiers and army employees as well as 30% of the base's camptown merchants. With Korea's prosperity in the textile industry in the 1970s, Itaewon won the spotlight as a commercial center where one could buy bonded goods that were low in price and high in quality, in particular imitations of famous overseas brands. The five main focus products were clothing, fur/leather, bags, shoes, and men's wear. In the late 1970s, the government acknowledged Itaewon's contribution to bringing in foreign currency, and provided tax reduction benefits and increasing its cost competitiveness, which gave momentum for its rapid growth as a commercial center. Itaewon gained recognition throughout the world as a shopping and recreational spot in the 1980s with the help of international events that were held in Korea, such as the general assemblies of the ASTA, IPU, IMF, and IBRD, the 1986 Asian Games, and the 1988 Olympics. Itaewon came to be included in the shopping tour itinerary of foreigners, and its entertainment businesses boomed.

As a tourist and commercial zone, Itaewon hit its peak in the late 1980s with the demands created by the Olympics. However, it dipped into depression in the 1990s due to negative images of its imitation goods, rip-offs, and hard bargains, as well as strong regulations by the government on the selling of foreign brand knockoffs. Before the 1988 Olympics, Itaewon was considered a high crime area that housed many unlicensed entertainment businesses in semi-residential areas and stores that dealt in fake brands. According to Mr. Seong, president of the Itaewon Tourism Association, at that time the government permitted the operation of unlicensed businesses because there were no tourist zones in Seoul developed for foreign visitors during the Olympics. The government had said that after the Olympics unlicensed businesses would be given a change-in-use and officially licensed. It even gave financial support for restroom remodeling and other renovations. But within a year after the Olympics, 27 nightclubs

in Itaewon were ordered to shut down, having been banned from operating late at night. However, during the 2002 World Cup Games, the government returned to investing in the infrastructure of Itaewon and promised to support local development. During the World Cup, residents and merchants of Itaewon held a World Food Festival, sold World Cup related products, and ran service corners. But again, when the World Cup games were over, the government reasserted its control and reimplemented regulations on the area.

Mr. Sin (case 4), who currently runs a recreational business for Japanese customers, opened a clothing shop in 1969 in Itaewon and made a considerable profit thanks to a boost in demand. He sold imitation clothes in Itaewon for about 30 years before he was caught by customs officials and lost his fortune. Mr. Sin says that his life is a reflection of the past 40 years of Itaewon.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Itaewon's clothing shops only dealt in bonded goods with foreign trademarks attached to them. Back then, Korea had no famous clothing brands, and bonded goods were all sold to foreigners. Bonded goods were usually surplus stock items. If a Korean subcontract factory had an order of 100,000 t-shirts but ended up making 101,000 out of the raw material with the spare material, Itaewon merchants would buy the 1,000 extra t-shirts by paying only for the labor and not the raw stock. Products procured in this way could be sold at comparatively low prices. From the early 1970s to the early 1980s, Itaewon was well known as a shopping area with diverse bonded goods of American brands. During this time, the industrialization of Korea through exports based on cheap labor was underway. 90% of the customers of these products were American and 10% were European. The brands sold in Itaewon at the time included casual clothing lines such as Polo and Jordache, as well as women's wear such as Donna Karen and later, Escada, Chanel, and so on. But later during the mid-1980s, foreign brands stopped giving subcontracts to Korea, due to Korea's higher labor costs and the revaluation of the Korean won.

Bonded goods were no longer coming in, but customers looking for them were on the increase. As a result, fake brands started coming out. The interests of Itaewon merchants and factory owners were the same: merchants had a high demand, but no goods to sell, and factories had the manufacturing skills but were not getting any orders. The combination of these two factors resulted in copies with the same design as the

original, but made with different materials. Itaewon's imitation brand products looked authentic, but were not identical to the originals.

Mr. Sin, mentioned above, sold many imitations in Itaewon, and back then, was a local celebrity. He also dealt in glasses, shoes, and a wide range of accessories that looked exactly like the original. He was well known in the Los Angeles imitation market as well. Because his goods could not be officially exported, he set up a ghost company and shipped the goods first to Southeast Asia or Hong Kong and then reshipped them to LA. In 1994, Mr. Sin was caught trying to ship out his goods. He consequently lost the fortune he had made in Itaewon, a loss that amounted to 3.6 billion won (about 5 million dollars).

During the 1988 Olympics, government regulations were not very strict. But after the Olympics, as Korea's international status was raised and the issue of intellectual property came to the fore, the credibility and reputation of the state became the most important criteria according to which commercial activities were regulated in Itaewon. In the early 1990s, when the government proclaimed a war against crime, Itaewon began to be treated as the breeding ground of social evils. With the passing of the Trademark Act and the Intellectual Property Law and the establishment of a designated prosecution department, imitation goods were confiscated without exception, and Itaewon imitations could no longer dodge the law. Many of Itaewon's merchants were fined or arrested. Mr. Sin was prosecuted 3 times under the Trademark Act.

According to Mr. Sin, Itaewon used to be a shopping zone by day and a recreational zone by night, but has become a dying shopping area since 2000. The recreational bars and restaurants are disappearing, and the bonded goods industry has been turned over to China, which has a cheaper labor force. In January of 2003, merchants selling fake brand goods, along with travel agencies bringing in group tours to buy them, started being prosecuted and fined. Today, Itaewon is no longer prosperous and glamorous. As a shopping zone, Dongdaemun and Namdaemun markets have replaced it. As a recreational zone, Gangnam and Hongik University clubs started replacing Itaewon in the 1990s.

According to data published in 2001 by the Seoul Development Institute, 60-65% of the shopping or entertainment space consumers in Itaewon are Korean and 35-40% are foreigners, with foreigners reaching 54% on the weekends. In the past, most of the

foreigners were American soldiers and tourists, whereas from the 1990s, Japanese tourists have taken up 60-70%, 25-30% are American and European tourists, with Chinese and Southeast Asian tourists also on the increase. As such, Itaewon is changing as the foreigners' district of Korea. As the transnationalization of Korea progresses, the significance of a specialized foreign district will inevitably weaken.

The Politics of Itaewon in the Globalization Era

Recreational Culture of the American Army and Territoriality of the Bodies of Prostitutes

Itaewon became a foreign zone because it was the only place in Korea of the 1960s and 1970s in which foreigners could communicate in English, eat familiar food, and find suitable living spaces and recreational activities. The Namdaemun and Dongdaemun markets, by contrast, were not places where foreigners could easily communicate and shop. Itaewon first provided a place to consume and enjoy what Korean society lacked. From the 1960s to the mid-1980s, Korean society was on an all-out quest to become an industrialized modern nation-state. Based on a strong state-centered consciousness, it was dedicated to integrating its labor forces and productive power into a single, unified entity. In this context, Itaewon, where the consumptive and pleasure-seeking lifestyle of Americans was openly carried out, was deemed exotic, alien, and deviant.

This alien quality contributed to the definition of Itaewon as a zone of illegality and deviance, exempt from Korean norms or laws. Nevertheless, Korea wanted US dollars, and therefore permitted Itaewon to continue its activities, created by American soldiers and Koreans alike.

The most outstanding quality that made Itaewon what it was and distinguished it from other parts of Korea was the recreational culture of foreign men, especially American soldiers. The pleasure, hedonism, and eroticism of that recreational culture were carried out through the bodies of Korean prostitutes. While prostitution is officially prohibited in Korea, it was unrestricted in American army camptowns. With the proclamation of the Nixon Doctrine in 1970, the Korean government launched a

revamping of the prostitution establishments of the base camps in an active effort to accommodate the stationing of the American forces. The Korean government went as far as to give special instructions to the prostitutes not to discriminate between black and white soldiers. The prostitutes were to take on the role of ameliorating racial tension between the blacks and whites, a large problem in the American army bases at the time (Moon 1997). Such efforts were rationalized through the agenda of maintaining American forces for national security and acquiring foreign currency. The Korean government's position in the 1970s is shared by many Itaewon merchants even to the present day. They are of the view that it was unavoidable that Korean women were mobilized by the sex industry in the process of Korea rising from poverty. The dollars were always held by men, and those men wanted women. Ms. Yi claims that the women of Itaewon, like the waitresses working in her restaurant, were patriots who earned dollars for the nation by serving American soldiers. She adds that prostitution was inevitable under such circumstances, and criticizes the double standard of Korean society that criminalizes the prostitutes who contributed to the acquisition of foreign currency.

Even though prostitutes who serve American soldiers are Korean women, their bodies are deterritorialized as Korean. In Korea's patriarchal system, the territoriality of women's bodies is obtained through the father, husband, or son. Therefore, the bodies of women who sell their bodies to American soldiers in exchange for money are no longer the territory of the Korean nation or race. In this sense, the bodies of prostitutes in Itaewon territorialize the alienness of Itaewon. As such, women are outside of Korea's patriarchal norm, not able to claim civil protection and deprived of civil rights that operate only within that norm.

Those women whose sexuality does not fit traditional norms, nor preserve the honor of the nation/state, forfeit their rights as members of society (Parker et al. 1991; Yuval-Davis 1997; Narayan 1997; Kim E. S. 1994). That is the way the sexuality of women has been treated in the narrative of the modern nation-state and the reason why the rights of women working in the base camps have never been protected (Jeong H. J. 1999; Jeong U. J. 2000). The merchants of Itaewon say that men need women for recreational activity. All foreigners and tourists visiting Itaewon are represented as male; female foreigners and tourists do not acquire self-representation in Itaewon. Most

of the discourses that exist on Itaewon masculinize the foreigners in Itaewon and feminize Itaewon as a place that provides women and pleasure.

The identity of Korean women in Itaewon encounters a clash in the presence of Korean men. The owners of recreational businesses in Itaewon have asserted that Itaewon's clubs should be made into foreigner-only establishments. According to them, Korean men cannot bear feeling like they are being served worse than the foreign male customers by Korean women or watching Korean women leave their table to greet foreigners. They say that it is not hard to see drunken Koreans creating a scene and screaming that it is anti-nationalist for Korean women to provide better service to foreign men in Korea. Such behavior shows the patriarchal and male-centered idea that Korean women belong to the nation-state or are a property of Korean men. The tension around the territory of Itaewon is manifested as a struggle over who owns Korean women, rather than the direct confrontation between the American army and Korean men. Mr. Sin and Ms. Yi, both owners of recreational businesses, say that when Korean men come to a bar or club in Itaewon, the night usually ends in a brawl. This indicates an underlying competition over territory in the frontier zone, with women as the medium.

However, the deterritoriality and reterritoriality of women's bodies in recreational businesses became more complicated since the way prostitutes are defined in relation to space and clients' nationalities has changed. With the deplacement and delocalization of female prostitutes through individual and network business and migration, the direct restrictions and control over them and the meaning of territoriality of their bodies have been reorganized in various ways.

From the mid- to late 1990s, as the significance of Itaewon as a recreational district for Americans has diminished, the number of Japanese tourists in Itaewon has grown and Japanese-exclusive clubs have emerged. Also, Russian women have taken the place of many Korean women in clubs, as more Korean men look for Russian women. The different races, nationalities, and ages of women in the sex industry have begun to contest one other, deterritorializing and reterritorializing their nationalities, and creating new hierarchies and conflicts. In this transnational process, the territoriality of Korean women's bodies will not likely arise as an independent issue (Kim E. 2002).

Itaewon as a Locality Deconstructed by State-mediated Global Capitalism

The alien quality of Itaewon is represented by the bonded goods or imitation foreign brands that are made in Korea but are not Korean merchandise. These imitations did not cause trouble in terms of their illegality as long as Itaewon did not pose a threat to the territoriality of the nation-state. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the illegality or deviance of Itaewon did not incur any regulation. Furthermore, Korean society, which did not have the infrastructure to accommodate foreigners entering Korea, actually allowed or fostered the deterritoriality, illegality, and deviance of Itaewon that were attracting foreigners. The Korean government used Itaewon during the Asian Games and the Olympics. It wanted to reterritorialize it as a new tourist attraction, and began to wield control over its alienness, illegality, and deviance.

The attitude of the Korean government toward Itaewon as the alien zone for American soldiers, was to tolerate its illegality and deviance for the purpose of providing comfort space for American soldiers as well as earning dollars, while at the same time isolating and controlling it in order to minimize its influence on the rest of Korean society. In 1976, in an effort to prevent the black marketing of US dollars, the Korean government applied a 10% tax cut to Itaewon merchants' income from sales to foreigners, and in 1997 implemented a support policy of designating the area as a special zone for tourism. In 1980, it provided financial support to attract the foreign participants of international conferences to Itaewon. Because of this support by the government, the merchants of Itaewon felt they were being patriotic and believed that they were contributing to the acquisition of foreign currency. To this day, they claim that they served their country by bringing in dollars through tourism, in an “industry without a chimney” in times of industrialization, when obtaining foreign currency was central to reconstructing the state, which was true even throughout the IMF crisis. They consider themselves patriots and explain that the interests of the individual, the local, and the state all coincided in “dollar-making.” They maintain that even though they live in a border zone, they contribute to the state's interest.

But since the 1990s, when Korea entered the global economic system, tensions grew between the interests of the Itaewon area and Korean society. During the 1980s, Itaewon merchants made considerable profit by selling imitations of prestigious

foreign brands. They had the technical skills to make imitation goods that looked the same as the original but cost only one tenth as much to foreign tourists, in less than 10 hours after their first appearance in the Italian market. This was largely made possible by the Korean government's tacit approval in its blind-eye approach to the matter. But in the 1990s, when false trademarks emerged as a point of potential conflict with other countries and the Korean state's credibility on the international scene, this became more important than earning foreign money through the selling of imitation goods. So the Korean government embarked upon strict regulations and punishment of such activities, which defined a sea change in the relationship between Itaewon and the nation-state in terms of the acquisition of foreign currency, as opposed to when the interests of individual merchants were in line with those of the state. Now, the patriotism of individual agents in Itaewon has conflicted with the position of the state. A merchant, Mr. Y (case 3) who developed and sold trademark bags similar to foreign brands was sued in a trademark dispute with a foreign firm and ended up losing. Itaewon merchants and residents took this incident as proof that when individual attempts to gain profit go against the interests of the state—which lay in strengthening its reputation and credibility on the world stage—the Korean government would protect the interests of foreign powers over those of its own people. Through such lawsuits, they experienced a rift in their identification with the state, and came to realize that the local particularity of Itaewon was breaking down.

Delocalized and Deplaced: Itaewon's Gay Community in the Transnational Globalization Era

Another element that renders Itaewon an alien and extraneous space is the presence of gay and transgender bars and clubs. The appearance of gay bars in Itaewon from 1995 was related to their atmosphere of tolerance for things generally deemed socially unacceptable. The first gay bar in Itaewon was opened by a gay man who liked foreigners. But even before there were gay bars in Itaewon, some Korean gay men went to Itaewon, hoping to meet homosexuals among the American soldiers, tourists, or others. The gays that hung out in Itaewon in the early days were those who had studied or lived overseas, or dated or preferred foreigners. The chief motivation behind the

opening of gay clubs in Itaewon was comfort with foreigners' openness to gay culture.

During the modernization process, the "American dream" had the utmost importance in the gay community. The desire to meet American men and fly to America with them attracted many gays to Itaewon. Korea was poor, America was rich, and even into the early 1990s, they had great expectations and admiration for gays from the US, because Korean gays did not have experience with gay identity or lifestyle. White gays were regarded as superior and many Korean men hoped to date them. In the 1980s, when Korean society was much more oppressive than it is now, especially in respect to the gay lifestyle, Korean gays in Itaewon looked to American or European men as an attractive social option. Jobs that involved living overseas were highly valued.

The Korean gays included in the fieldwork in Itaewon compare their admiration for white men in the 1980s to that of the so-called "Western princesses" (*yanggongju*, derogatory name for American camptown prostitutes). In the mid-1990s, many Korean gay men in their 20s committed themselves in relationships with European and American men in their 30s or 40s. They then followed their partners to their home countries. But just as many of Itaewon's "Western princesses" got divorced and came back to Korea, most of the Korean gay men returned as well. As Korea's political and economic situation improved, and particularly since the 1990s, when educated Korean gays began coming out of the closet and saw that the foreign men living in Korea were beneath their expectations, the admiration for white men diminished.

Still, there is a strong white male-centrism in the gay community of Itaewon and a clear tendency to regard Southeast Asian or black men as unsuitable partners. The manager of W Bar likes to jokingly introduce himself as the "President of Comfort Men for the American Troops of the Yongsan Base." His friends often advise him that he should not joke about the Korean comfort women for Japanese army because of the controversy surrounding the issue in Korean society. However, not only the manager of W Bar, but also some gays accept their identification as partners of whites. Mr. G told a story about a friend who asked to be introduced to a man who looked like Tom Cruise but lost interest in him after hearing that he came from Uzbekistan. Even today, desire in Itaewon's gay community operates within the race/nationality hierarchy that regards the white American man as superior.

Nevertheless, as Korean society is becoming transnationalized, the gay culture that was localized in places such as Jongno and Itaewon is going through a remapping. While Jongno used to be an area of middle-aged men's culture and Itaewon was for young people to experience the West, Jongno today has “Fat Bars” for fat men and cafes for Japanese gays, showing signs of diversification, sophistication, and fractionization. When the first gay clubs appeared in Itaewon, an important agenda for gays was to have a place to gather. Itaewon was a cultural space for gays to seek out their needs, desires, and pleasures, and was considered to be the place for the gay community. But the Internet changed the environment for gay society in Korea. As the idea of community has changed from clubs to cyberspace, the gay community has become delocalized and deghettoized. This means that diversity in the gay community has increased in accordance with different tastes and lifestyles, with the boundaries of a locality-based club culture steadily being transgressed. Now, young gays are meeting each other on- and off-line in small get-togethers called *beon-gae*, which take place in heterosexual clubs. Itaewon's gay clubs are no longer solely places for meeting other gay men or confirming the existence of community, but simply for having a good time.

Mr. Shin (case 11), who is gay, says that services rendered in gay bars of the past have become superfluous. The product value of Itaewon is no longer appreciated now that the Internet is so well developed and there are many diverse clubs in various areas. Without arranging new events and amusing activities, gay clubs in Korea cannot survive. Gay establishments have the economic and cultural burden of providing a luxurious space for a night out, which requires investing a tremendous amount of capital. Those places that fail to do so are being forced to close down. The Z Bar, currently the most popular weekend spot in Itaewon, is said to owe its success to catching up with such changes. But the gay clubs in Itaewon are illegal establishments without business permits. Being located in semi-residential areas, they are not eligible to run their business. Unless the state lifts the semi-residential zone restriction from Itaewon, the entire recreational culture of Itaewon will inevitably be considered illegal.

The emergence of international networking and cyber communities has also expanded the deterritorialization and delocalization of the gay community. Gays who desire Japanese men learn Japanese and move to Japan. One web site hosted an event to arrange the meeting of Korean and Japanese gays in California, and 400 gays from both

countries turned up. Gay men have started to emigrate in pursuit of their preferences to transnational frontier zones, motivated by taste and desire. Economic and cultural abilities are the primary factors considered before emigrating, and are therefore the basis for the formation of transnational communities.

Mr. G says that according to a survey he conducted once on foreigners in Itaewon's gay clubs, most foreigners there were English teachers, with the next largest group being American soldiers. From another survey, he found out that few gay tourists had visited Itaewon during the World Cup. He explains that the gay clubs of Itaewon have not yet equipped themselves with the basic structure necessary for accommodating tourists, and have thus failed to be part of the tourism resource. Even before the infrastructure of the gay clubs had a chance to fully develop, the Korean gay community had moved on to new venues such as the Internet. In addition, many of Itaewon's merchants approve of gay bars but have to keep quiet. In 2002, a gay parade in the streets of Itaewon lasted a couple of hours. Many merchants complained to the district office that the event was loud and harmed the image of Itaewon. Mr. G notes that these merchants failed to recognize that the event could work to their advantage, and this kind of thinking is the reason why Itaewon is not a multicultural zone but a declining commercial area. Korean gays are in constant search of a space where they can reclaim their right to happiness. The transnational globalization process in which various frontier zones are created is providing new exits for gays to escape the confines of their localities.

Itaewon is a locality whose interests are subordinate to those of the state. Everything that takes place in Itaewon is fundamentally illegal. Without a business permit, the dance bars, karaoke bars, room salons, and recreational establishments of Itaewon run their business under the cover of regular restaurant businesses. Thus, the state controls the practices of foreignness and exoticism of the area.

Epilogue

This paper attempted to illuminate the political aspects of the formation of a place by observing how the concept of place in regards to the Cold War-era Itaewon, as a

consumer and recreational space for American soldiers and an alien zone in Korea, has evolved to that of today's Itaewon, which now stands at a crossroads in an age of transnational globalization. This paper, however, is not a study of place as an alternative politics. It is rather a study about how a place was able to obtain its very placeness.

Bounded and territorialized, a place is always the most crucial reference point in explaining people's identity or culture in traditional and modern societies. Traditionally, Itaewon has been regarded as a foreign or alien area because the people living there were foreign. It was a foreign area within Korean territory, as determined by Korean societal norms. After the Korean War and during the Cold War, due to the geopolitical and economic exigencies of Korea's relationship to the US, Itaewon came to be somewhat acknowledged as a foreign space within Korea. Itaewon was more of a deterritorialized or border zone than a locality within the territory of Korea. It was a space that was constructed as a function of the relationship between Korea and the US.

To Koreans, the particularity of Itaewon is connected with the particularity of the ties between the American forces and Korea under the Cold War. Itaewon was a consumer space defined by the desires and needs of American soldiers. It signified a boundary across which Koreans could access an exotic, American culture in the process of establishing a closed worldview limited to the territory of Korea under the powerful state-led modernization project. It was imagined that there were foreigners in Itaewon, and they were considered to be its subjects. But the foreigners of Itaewon were taken to be only Americans, trading money for pleasure and imitation Western brands. They were seen as transient subjects who only consumed, detached from the place itself. They became involved with the space through women and imitation goods, which were mediated by the place of Itaewon.

In contrast to these people, there are recreational business owners and merchants who base their lives on Itaewon and at the same time possess the territoriality that is Korea. Yet, their identities and culture have always been considered suspect within Korean society. They claim that their position is ambiguous. They live in Itaewon, a part of Korea, but their economic activities and day-to-day lives are more closely tied with the changes in the American army than those in the Korean society. They sold more goods during the IMF crisis, when Korean society was going through one of the hardest financial times. But since a curfew was imposed on American

soldiers after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, their nighttime recreational businesses have taken a tremendous blow.

The two subjects of Itaewon—foreigners and Koreans—depended on each other and shared interests during the Cold War, when Itaewon was the only alien space within Korea. But in the era of transnational globalization, when various exotic border zones have been created, the residents standing by their locality and the foreigners heading toward diverse alien spaces have been practicing different politics of place. In this context, the place marketing strategy of Itaewon, which tries to revive its political and economic values as an alien space, fails to see the intersecting points of the local and global, or the politics of difference that exists within a place.

The alienness of Itaewon has had a strong inclination toward the US, and has depended on the consumer market of the American soldiers. Such alienness cannot accommodate the changes in the operation of the American army after 9/11, or the influx of immigrant workers from less developed countries that have low purchasing power. The merchants of Itaewon still only regard Americans and Japanese as important customers. Itaewon, as constructed under the exigencies of the Cold War, was a strictly capitalistic, development-oriented, racist, and sexist place. With the emergence of new border zones, the alienness of the past is turning into something a bit more familiar.

Nevertheless, there are new kinds of alienness being introduced on top of that in Itaewon. There are new subjects of alien existence, including singles, gays, and new migrants who choose Itaewon as a place of residence over other parts of Korea, where the family-centered lifestyle is the norm and the basis of community building. But Itaewon has so far never questioned the nature of its own alienness or its difference from general Korean society, until new residents entered the area. Accordingly, it has never been questioned what the difference of Itaewon from the other areas of Korea signifies, or what meanings it brings to the local community, nor has it been discussed what kind of relationship different constituents of Itaewon should make. With the influx of new residents who make their social community and their personal networks using resources in Itaewon, Itaewon has become a place that is possibly able to implement a new “place politics.” How Itaewon will be transformed depends on how this place will cope with the changed situation following the withdrawal of the US Army, and on what kind of place it will be for new residents.

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