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Imagining a Nation Through Differences: Reading the Controversy Concerning the Military Service Extra Points System in South Korea*

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Building upon critical cultural studies of nation as unstable and contradictory unity, this article analyzes a sociopolitical mechanism to construct and maintain the image of nation as a territorialized political community in South Korea. For this purpose, it focuses on the public discourse on the military service extra points system that was represented in print and electronic media and generated by the government, the Constitutional Court, women's organizations, conservative public opinion, and individual citizens engaged in internet discussion during the period from mid-1998 to mid-2000. Based on the close reading of the multi-layered public discourse, this article argues that the hegemonic discursive processes within the public discourse reinscribes territorialized national unity in public mind in the following ways. The hegemonic discursive framework explicitly represents the issue as a conflict between women's equal employment and compensation for men's mandatory military service. In this discursive field, while gender differences are universalized into homogenized Woman and Man, differences among men across class in military service are obscured. This discursive field preemptively positions supporters of the elimination of the system a threat to military morale and thereby of "national security" against which the national unity is imagined. At the same time, in implicitly approaching the issue as an exclusively domestic issue, the hegemonic framework also maintains the illusion of national unity and territorial integrity, while obscuring the nation's problematic sovereignty and its porous border in terms of the military alliance with the United States.

Keywords: public discourse, territorialized unity of a nation, military service extra points system, universalization of differences, denial of differences

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1. Introduction: Rethinking the Unity of the Territorialized Nation

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, the nation has lost the aura it had in the periods of anti-imperialist colonial struggles and the reconstruction of newly decolonized societies, the aura of the modern form of political community. While many regimes around the world continue to exploit the nationalist rhetoric of a unity putatively based on a common history, common culture, and common destiny to advance their agendas, internal inequalities among and within social groups, as well as external collusions among regimes across national boundaries, have undermined the appeal of such rhetoric. In association with increasingly transnational capital in the age of economic globalization, the growing visibility of lasting social relations that spread across the boundaries of nation-states in diasporic communities challenges the normative conception of the nation bounded to geographical space (Sassen 1998; Ong and Nonini 1997; Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc 1994).

In light of this series of challenges to the hegemonic conception of nation as a natural political community tied to a given territory, this article explores the explicit and implicit ways in which the nation-state and society produce public discourse on a national issue and thereby contribute to the reinscription of such a hegemonic view of nation. In particular, this article focuses on a recent controversy concerning the “military service extra points system” (*kunbongmu kasanjŏmje*) in South Korea, which spanned a period from 1998 to 2000 but was especially intense for two months from December 23, 1999 (the date of the Constitutional Court ruling), to late February of 2000. This controversy allows us to understand the central role of discursive processes in maintaining the image of the Korean nation as a political unity bound by its territory because mandatory military service (which is generally understudied outside policy circles) is considered instrumental to the preservation of the territorial unity of the nation.

In his study of Caribbean society (1977), Stuart Hall argues that state societies tend to construct racial and ethnic differences among social groups to achieve their complex unity. In this view, social differences are not obstacles against national unity, but preconditions for it.

This insight allows us to critique the ideological nature of national unity achieved at the expense of such social minorities as women, homosexuals, racialized ethnics, and lower classes. This focus on the marginalization of social minorities in imagining a nation complements Benedict Anderson's classical study of nationalism. In his *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1991), Anderson argues that public imagination of nation as a political community unified by a common culture and history results from the mass circulation of fictional and non-fictional texts printed in vernacular language. Yet he does not delve into the extent to which the representation of national unity expressed or implied in printed texts relies on binary differences between the self and the other. More recent studies of the nation fill this lacuna by highlighting multiple ways in which the national self is constructed and maintained through its gendered, sexualized, classed, racialized and cultural differences from the other. This mechanism of imagining the nation tends to marginalize women, homosexuals, lower classes, and racialized ethnic groups in the professedly inclusive community (Kaplan, Alarcón and Moallem 1999; Kim and Choi 1998; McClintock and Mufti 1997; Parker and Russo 1992). Such marginalization contradicts the liberal norm of equality and liberty for all citizens in their disembodied abstraction and compels us to recognize *differentiated integration* into the nation of social groups deemed different from the national self. Therefore, "we are required to account, not simply for the existence of culturally distinct institutions and patterns, but also for that which secures the unity, cohesion, and stability of this social order in and through (not despite) its differences" (Hall 1977: 158).

Caren Kaplan, Norma Alarcón, and Minoo Moallem elaborate on discursive processes that regulate the construction of a nation as a natural political unit, focusing on "denial of difference" and "universalization of differences" (1999: 3). They argue that sexual and racial minorities have often been silenced from making their claims and articulating their interests, in the name of more urgent sociopolitical issues for "the people." This apparently generic category ("the people") often erases the differences that sexual and racial minorities experience. At the same time, the authors maintain, the recognition of sexual and racial differences is often reduced to static and undifferentiated sameness

within sexual and racial minorities, as seen in the official promotion of multiculturalism and pluralism in the United States (Gordon and Newfield 1996). The denial and simultaneous universalization of difference in the discourse of a nation, embedded in various institutional practices through repetition and recitation, come to produce a normative reality that shapes the common perception of a nation as a natural political unit. Yet such hegemonic processes that normalize a nation and its unity contain the possibility of counter-hegemonic discourse of the nation that can disturb those ideological maneuvers.

2. South Korea and the Military Service Extra Points System

Building upon the critique of nation as unstable and contradictory unity, this article expands the boundary of cultural studies to the analysis of social relations rooted in specific institutional processes. To analyze a sociopolitical mechanism to construct and maintain territorialized national unity, I draw upon the public discourse on the military service extra points system in South Korea that was represented in print and electronic media and generated by the government, the Constitutional Court, women's organizations, conservative public opinion, and individual citizens. Even more interesting than the newspaper materials were the individual opinions circulated on several internet discussion sites, because they revealed viscerally counter-hegemonic moments.¹ Although such counter-hegemonic messages represented less than ten percent of the several hundred messages I read on the internet, their presence was noteworthy in comparison with their virtual absence in print media.

Unlike most issues discussed in cyberspace, the issue of the extra points system did not fade away in a few days or a few weeks. There were even two specific cyberspace discussion sites created to focus

1. I refer to postings from the following cyberspace discussion sites: haitel netijün kwangjang chujet'oronshil (Hitel netizen plaza thematic discussion room); yunitel t'oronmadang (Unitel discussion yard); the Korea Women's Associations United (KWAU) website kyeship'an (bulletin board) and t'orajang (discussion room); kun'gasanjöm ch'ansöngghanün yösöngdüre moim (gathering of women supporting the extra points system); and the ssaw, internet site created to nullify the Constitutional Court ruling.

exclusively on the topic.² Based on my reading of multilayered public discourse, I argue that the hegemonic discursive processes within the public discourse reinscribe territorialized national unity by explicitly framing the issue of the military service extra points system as gender conflict and implying it as a domestic issue. This hegemonic framework within the discourse represents the issue as a conflict between the problem of employment discrimination against women and the problem of compensation for men's mandatory military service. In this discursive field, while gender differences are universalized into homogenized Woman and Man, differences among men across class are obscured. This discursive field preemptively positions supporters of the elimination of the system underminers of military morale and thereby "national security." At the same time, in implicitly approaching the issue of the military service extra points system as an exclusively domestic issue and failing to discuss the institution of mandatory military service in the larger context of the South Korea-United States military alliance, this hegemonic discursive process also maintains the illusion of national unity and territorial integrity, while obscuring the nation's problematic sovereignty and its porous border in terms of the military alliance with the United States.

1) Profile of the controversy concerning the military service extra points system

On July 21st, 1998, in a cabinet meeting at the Blue House in Seoul, a polarized confrontation broke out over the military service extra points system.³ This system involved the thirty-seven-year — old legal practice of granting (male) veterans — primarily former conscripts — additional points at the time of certain public employment tests and/or interviews; the cabinet was deliberating an ordinance to enforce legislation intended to assist veterans in employment (*chedae'guninjiwone' kwanhanpöpyul*), which was passed by the National Assembly in December of 1997, and which intended to reinforce the extra points

2. One is the *ssaw* (<http://www.ssaw.co.kr>) and the other is the meeting of women supporting the extra scores system (<http://board.cgiworld.net/view.cgi?id=ipunee01&jd>).

3. Several major newspapers — *Hangyöre Shinmun*, *Kyönghyang Shinmun*, *Han'guk Ilbo*, *Segye Ilbo*, *Seoul Shinmun* — in South Korea reported this rare scene of polarized confrontation the following day.

system by expanding its applicability (KNA 1997).

At the cabinet meeting on July 21st, ministers and other high government officials were divided. The director of the Special Council on Women (a woman), the Minister of Culture and Tourism (a woman), and the Minister of Law (a man), criticized the system as a form of “sex discrimination” that significantly hampered women’s participation in the labor market at the entry level. The Minister of Defense, the Council of Administrative Self-Government,⁴ and the director of the Office of Veterans Administration (all men), on the other hand, defended it as a minimal form of “compensation” for male conscripts, whose sacrifice is perceived to be necessary for national security. The opposing sides argued heatedly until President Kim Dae Jung (1998-2002) suggested that the directors of the Special Council on Women and the Office of Veterans Administration negotiate their differences and report a resolution. In his intervention, the President emphasized that the two issues (of women’s participation in society and of support for veterans and for soldiers’ morale) should be seen as complementary, rather than conflictual (*Hangyŏre Shinmun* July 22, 1998). The opposing sides of the Cabinet managed to accept the Enforcement Ordinance of the Veterans Support Act under the condition that the extra points system would be reassessed in the near future, and the ordinance was proclaimed in August 1998.

On October 19th, 1998, the Regulation Reform Committee (Kyujegaehyŏk wiwonhoe), formed by Kim Dae Jung’s government to democratize domestic politics, declared a draft of the Military Service Act revision to be a violation of equal employment between women and men running contrary to economic liberalization (*Seoul Shinmun* October 20, 1998). Among a series of legislative attempts to strengthen the military service extra points system, this draft went the farthest in that it aimed at penalizing even private businesses for their failure to “compensate” new employees for their military service not only with higher test scores, but also with higher pay and faster promotion (clause 3 of article 74) (OMM 1998: 34-35).

Sponsored by the Korea Women’s Associations Council (KWAC;

4. This is a government branch newly created to supervise local governance, which is an indication of the civilian regime’s effort to promote administrative democratization in South Korea.

Han'guk yŏsŏngdanch'ehyŏphoe), on October 19th, 1998, a group of five women and one man with a disability who were all preparing for civil service examinations filed a lawsuit against the extra points system at the Constitutional Court (Moon So-yŏng 1998).⁵ This class action suit claimed that the extra points system violated the plaintiffs' constitutional right to equality, to be elected or appointed to public office, and to choose their occupation (Kang, Yi, and Choe 1998). To many people's surprise, the court, upholding this argument, ruled the extra points system unconstitutional on December 23, 1999. The ruling, in turn, incited unusually vehement reactions from conservative sectors of society. Major newspapers expressed predominantly conservative views, often overtly critical of the court ruling. In early January, 2000, the Munhwa Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) and the *Chungang Ilbo* reported overwhelming public opposition to the court ruling in their internet survey, showing that 83 percent of 23,173 respondents supported the maintenance of the extra points system (<http://www3.join.co.kr/vpoll/vpol>). The Veterans Association threatened the government by announcing its plan to organize a national protest (*Hangyŏre Shinmun* December 27, 1999). Moreover, the internet home pages of the Constitutional Court, the Ministry of National Defense, and other related government branches, as well as those of women's associations, were so inundated with visceral protest messages that their computer systems were brought down for several days.⁶ The government and the ruling party were overwhelmed by these fierce reactions. On January 6th, 2000, they announced a plan to insti-

5. KWAU, another major umbrella women's organization, maintained a slightly more cautious approach to this issue, for strategic reasons. First, understanding the extra points system merely as the tip of the deeper issue of conscription, it did not want to alienate the masses of lower-class men who perform regular military service disproportionately to their upper-class counterparts. Second, issues regarding conscription were tightly interwoven with the dominant ideologies of national security and anticommunism. KWAU seems to have learned caution about dealing with sensitive military issues from its own past experience in social movements. In fact, KWAU has been aware of the centrality to the Korean women's movement of national division and the military confrontation between south and north. It started a peace unification movement and focused on the reduction of defense spending as early as 1990. However, this movement failed to draw popular attention (Yi Hyo-jae 1996: Chapters 6 & 7; Yi Mi-kyŏng 1998: 27-29).

6. See *Chungang Ilbo*, December 27, 1999; *Dong-A Ilbo*, December 27, 1999; *Hanguk Ilbo*, December 28, 1999; *Hangyŏre Shinmun*, December 29, 1999.

tute a system that would grant extra points for various forms of public service, ranging from volunteer services (mostly performed by women) to military service (mostly performed by men) (*Hangyöre Shinmun* January 6, 2000; *Kungmin Ilbo* January 8, 2000). Yet this plan was aborted because it would involve overturning the Constitutional Court ruling by Kim Dae Jung's government which has emphasized democratization and as a result the military service extra points system was eliminated.

The split among the cabinet members and the state's vacillation between the issues of women's access to equal employment and compensation for men's mandatory military service reflect the changing relationship between the nation-state and the populace in terms of employment and military service. This change is shaped by the democratization of domestic politics after the restoration of electoral democracy in 1988, of civilian rule in 1993, and the acceleration of economic globalization after the end of the Cold War. The notion of men's conscription becomes deeply problematic in a democratic society where the rhetoric of individual liberty and equality among citizens gains its political currency. The ideal of liberty is compromised in the forced nature of conscription. The ideal of equality faces, at a theoretical level, the question of who bears the duty/burden of military service and on what grounds and, at a practical level, chronic suspicion of military service irregularities among the public insofar as there are different forms of military service and exemptions from it. The acceleration of global capitalism in the post-Cold War era does not bode well for mandatory military service in South Korea, which requires long-term service with, in addition, virtually no pay. It is not accidental that conscription ceased to exist in many Western nations after the end of the Cold War (Haltiner 1998; Van Der Meulen and Manigart 1997). While the Cold War has not ended in the Korean Peninsula, still, in this context of local and global restructuring, the military service extra points system became arguably one of the most controversial and viscerally charged social issues in South Korea at the turn of the twentieth century.

Before I analyze the hegemonic discursive process that frames the extra points system explicitly as a matter of gender conflict around military service and implicitly as a domestic issue in the context of democ-

ratization, it is necessary to discuss the development of the military service extra points system.

2) The evolution of the extra points system as the symbolic marker of the nation-state's recognition of men's military service

Until the Constitutional Court ruling in late 1999, the military service extra points system had rarely drawn public attention since its introduction under the Military Relief Recipients Employment Act (*kun-sawonhodaesangja'imyongbōp*) promulgated in 1961. It is useful here to discuss briefly the legal evolution of the extra points system, because this will illuminate its increasing symbolic currency as a marker of the state's and society's recognition of men's sacrifice in performing military service. Initially, the extra points system was adopted as the core element of national compensation for veterans and their families in the area of employment, in the absence of other substantive forms of rewards. The Supreme Council for National Reconstruction, which was formed by General Park Chung Hee's military junta (1961-63), articulated a twofold rationale for establishing such an act: first, to provide a livelihood for those who had completed the "sacred duty of national defense," particularly disabled soldiers (*sang'i' kunin*) and families of soldiers killed in battle (*chōnsajau'i chikkyegajok*), and secondly, to elevate the national military's morale, undermined by the impoverishment of veterans. As a way to assist their employment, the law included an article specifying veterans' entitlement to extra points when they took public employment tests for positions in the government, public corporations, and other relevant organizations. According to article five of the Military Relief Recipients Employment Act, former conscripts were guaranteed to receive extra points worth five percent of full marks, while one family member of each disabled or deceased soldier received ten percent extra (KNA 1976; 1961).⁷

The practice of granting extra points was modified, in 1984, by the replacement of the Military Relief Recipients Employment Act with the

7. The 1961 record of the Fourteenth Regular Meeting of the Supreme Council for National Reconstruction, DOCID 002558-AA033XX-B101 0001, is available only in abstract. The entire document is not accessible to the public. This may be related to the fact that this document deals with the period of the military junta of General Park Chung Hee (1961-1963).

Honorable Treatment of Persons of National Merit Act (*kukkayugong-jayeudŭnge'kwanhanpöpyul*) (Kim Chong-söng 1997). Basically, this new law expanded the application of the extra points system in terms of which employers were required to adopt it and which types of recruitment tests it applied to. According to article 30 of this act, the category of employers included not only the public employers specified in the previous law, but also private schools and firms defined as “organizations practicing employment protection” (*ch'wiöppo-hoshilshigikwan*).⁸ Article 70 of the Honorable Treatment Act guaranteed extra points not only on written tests but also in other equivalent tests, such as job interviews and auditions. The act redefined “patriotic martyrs, patriotic fighters, and policemen and soldiers killed in the line of duty” as “persons of national merit.” Compared with the earlier term, “military relief recipient,” this euphemistic terminology seems to suggest the state’s affirmative recognition of soldiers and their bereft families. While families of such “persons of national merit” were entitled to receive an extra ten percent of full marks on any given test, veterans — both conscripts and professional soldiers — were to receive extra points ranging from three to five percent, depending upon the length of their service (KNA 1984).

What is noteworthy about the extra points system is that it was an expedient way, under military rule (1961-1987), for the authoritarian state to reward conscripted veterans. First, unlike a comprehensive national pension system or social services designed for professional soldiers, it did not require that the state secure and manage a large amount of resources. Second, it indirectly shifted the main cost of the reward to the many citizens who would compete with former conscripts for jobs to which the extra points system was applied. This cost increased as it became more and more difficult to pass lower-level state employment tests without receiving the extra points, as the competition for public employment intensified in the process of economic restructuring in the 1990s and especially following the 1997 economic

8. Specifications of business firms that fall under this category have changed over time. According to the Honorable Treatment of Persons of National Merit Act, the “organizations practicing employment protection” included private firms hiring 16 employees or more, exclusive of special manufacturing companies employing under 50 workers. See clause 2 of article 30 of the Honorable Treatment Act.

crisis, which resulted in employment insecurity in the private sector (Han'gukyösongminuhoe 1998; KIDA 1995: 40, 44; *Yösong* 1994: 16, 17). That is, in the absence of the state's active and positive commitment to guarantee social welfare for conscripted veterans, the cost of implementing the extra points system was borne by individual citizens in the labor market. Third, the immediate result of boosted scores that could enhance opportunities for employment made the extra points system a convenient policy tool with symbolic currency for maintaining the cumbersome conscription system in democratizing Korea. In fact, despite the authoritarian nature of the extra points system, it had enough advantages that the state maintained it even after the political transition to civilian rule in 1993.

The military service extra points system was reaffirmed by the Veterans Assistance Act (*chedae'kuninchiwonböp*) and its Enforcement Ordinance, passed in December 1997 and in August 1998, respectively. This act redefined the range of employers for whom it was required or recommended to adopt the extra points system.⁹ Prior to this legislative move, the practice of granting extra points to veterans on various forms of recruitment tests was prevalent among public employers and certain large private employers. According to a 1994 study of 81 private and public corporations of large (300 employees or more) and medium and small sizes (fewer than 300 employees), 100 percent of 11 banking firms and 80 percent of 31 public corporations complied with the extra points system. In contrast, only 9 percent of 11 large private firms and 0 percent of 28 medium and small firms did (KIDA 1995: 36). A 1998 study of companies in five major economic conglomerates showed that these private firms did not observe the extra points system (Kim T'ae-hong 1998: 17, 18). The difference between public and private corporations results from the fact that the extra points system required only public corporations to observe it. The difference between larger and smaller private firms stems from the fact that larger firms could afford to offer more benefits to their employees in general, and could therefore also afford to offer more benefits tied to military service.

9. According to the Veterans Assistance Act, the adoption of the extra points system is required for the government and for private and public schools. It is recommended for private firms hiring 20 employees or more at a time, with some exceptions. See T'ae-hong Kim (1998: 7-8).

However, in the face of growing popular discontent with unfair practices in conscription, following the outbreak of military service evasion scandals among political leaders and their sons throughout the 1990s, the Office of Military Manpower (OMM) attempted to strengthen the extra points system by requiring even private firms to observe it. In July, 1998, the office drafted the Military Service Law reform bill, rejected by the government, to institute the mandatory adoption not only of the extra points system, but also of the customary practices honoring military service in employment, even for private corporations. At this juncture, as mentioned above, some Cabinet members represented it as a problem of sex discrimination in employment.

In this historical sketch of the evolution of the military service extra points system, the following points deserve our attention. First, its gradual expansion over time suggests the increasing significance of military service in the labor market in the 1980s. More categories of employers were expected to adopt it, and more categories of recruitment tests were included in it. While there is no reliable data to determine the total number of beneficiaries of the extra points system, what is more important than their numerical size is the symbolic currency of the system as an expedient marker of the state's recognition for the hardship of military service. The state tried to utilize the system as a minimum reward/compensation for military service to sustain the conscription system. This symbolic significance is poignantly revealed in the OMM's extreme effort to establish the extra points system and other customary practices honoring military service in employment as mandatory practices. Between 1994 and 1995, the OMM attempted to institute these elements as obligatory practices. Yet this attempt failed in the face of fierce protests from the National Employers Association (*chŏnkyŏngryŏn*) (*Han'guk Ilbo* July 21, 1998). The OMM made the attempt again in 1998, drafting the Military Service Law revision. In a period of increasing popular discontent over mandatory military service, the office tried to use the extra points system as a means to maintain popular willingness to perform military service.

Second, while the extra points system was initially designed primarily to offer economic compensation to disabled or deceased soldiers and their families, its largest beneficiaries in practice have become a

specific category of veterans, namely male conscripts rather than professional soldiers. In the Korean military, while almost all conscripts serve as privates, professional soldiers serve as commissioned officers if they graduate from military academies, or non-commissioned officers without such diplomas. The employers who fall into the category of “organizations practicing employment protection” for veterans tend to be public corporations, and the jobs tend to be civil service and teaching positions in private and public schools. Children of disabled or deceased veterans, a primary intended beneficiary of the extra points system, have only gained a very limited degree of benefit from the system because of their small numbers and their economic positions. (Until the 1970s, a majority of these children were poor, which prevented them from gaining the educational credentials necessary to become teachers or to take employment tests in public corporations [KNA 1976: 8-12].¹⁰ While this situation has improved over time, those who pursue white-collar employment in teaching and civil service still remain a numerical minority.) Professional soldiers themselves, meanwhile, fall into two categories: low-ranking non-commissioned officers and high-ranking commissioned officers. The low-ranking professional soldiers, who are directly involved in training conscripts, tend not to apply to positions in lower-level civil service or in schools, when they are discharged after years of military service, because of the discrepancy between their military job experience and the types of white-collar employment in schools and government offices.¹¹ (Clauses specifying employment protection for professional soldiers in national compensation acts in the past and present are suggestive in this regard¹²: accord-

10. Their poverty seems to result from two factors. It is more likely for soldiers from lower classes than their upper-class counterparts to be exposed to dangerous situations, leading to injury and death. Families of disabled and killed veterans will be impoverished in the absence of working fathers.

11. In principle, the Military Service Law allows women to volunteer for military service and receive extra points on employment tests by the state and those organizations practicing employment protection. Yet they have represented a tiny fraction, since the total body of female soldiers has remained at a few thousand. When I interviewed female soldiers during the fall of 1998, some of them told me that women veterans were not given the extra points at the time of public employment tests.

12. See article 9 of the Veterans Support Law and article 10 of the Enforcement Ordinance. See Government of the R.O.K. (1998).

ing to these, jobs suitable for honorably discharged professional soldiers are security or defense-related in nature, and the Ministry of Defense has attempted to refer these veterans to such positions within and outside the military [KIDA 1995: 27]). Veterans who used to be the high-ranking professional soldiers and their children are not inclined to apply for low-level civil service and teaching either because these jobs do not carry the high social status deemed suitable for former commissioned officers and their children. This leaves the former conscripts, mostly graduates of high school or college, who commonly pursue employment in private or public corporations, including civil service and teaching positions in private and public schools, as the main actual beneficiaries of the extra points system.

Finally, it is worth discussing this seemingly esoteric system of military service extra points in a comparative manner. While it may sound peculiar to South Korea, it can be understood as one form of the kinds of incentives that every nation-state has to offer to ensure the supply of competent and willing soldiers for the smooth working of the military. The restrictive nature of military service necessitates certain forms of initiatives and rewards to attract potential recruits and/or to mitigate discontent among conscripts, depending upon the availability of resources, the perceived state of “national security,” and the form of military recruitment system. Some states grant veterans advantages in public employment and the military service extra points system implemented in South Korea can be seen as a specific version. For example, under the Veterans Preference Act (1944), honorably discharged veterans in the United States also receive additional points on federal and state employment tests.¹³

13. It is worth noting that the Korean version differs from the American version in three ways. First, as discussed above, the Korean system primarily benefits former conscripts, whereas the American system primarily serves professional soldiers. Second, the Korean version guarantees extra points indiscriminately to all honorably discharged soldiers, while the American system specifies that only those who earn certain minimum scores on the tests qualify for the extra points (*Soshik* 1998: 13). Finally, the Korean system can be accused of the problem of sex discrimination because of its military system based on the principle of universal male conscription. The American system, by contrast, is less susceptible to this problem because professional soldiering has been open to both sexes since 1973.

3. Reading the Controversy Concerning the Military Service Extra Points System

1) An explicit discursive process: Universalization of gender difference and denial of differences among men across class in conscription

As shown above in the chronological discussion of the controversy, the public discourse on the extra points system produced by the state and civil society tends to frame it primarily as a matter of gender conflict. Although the Constitutional lawsuit and the court ruling question this simplistic gender dichotomy, the hegemonic discursive process renders the questioning irrelevant. This hegemonic framing of the issue reflects a dominant understanding of mandatory military service as masculine duty in South Korea, stemming from the institution of universal male conscription that was formally introduced with the enactment of the Military Service Law (1949) and implemented since 1957 (Kang Kyŏng-hwan 1996: 68). Approximately 90 percent of Korean men perform mandatory military service,¹⁴ albeit in different forms, whereas there are only a little over 2,000 women soldiers, exclusive of nursing officers, currently serving as professional officers (*Yŏsŏng Shinmun* June 16, 2000). The hegemonic framing of the extra points system as an exclusively gender issue also reflects the democratization of domestic politics that allowed educated, middle-class women to gain some access to a policy-making mechanism through the institutionalization of “woman’s policy” (Seungsook Moon 2000).

Initially, women’s organizations viewed the extra points system exclusively as an issue of gender discrimination in employment. As soon as the first civilian government in thirty years was inaugurated, in 1993, two major umbrella women’s organizations, the Korea Women’s Associations Council and the Korea Women’s Associations United, forwarded petitions to eliminate the extra points system to the Office of the Secretary of Political Affairs (Chŏngmujangkwanshil), which was formed in 1988 to promote the nation’s women’s policy designed to promote gender equality (*Yŏsŏng* 1994: 15). By June 1994, eleven peti-

14. This information is based on the author’s conversation with a researcher at the Korea Institute of Defense Analysis in December 1998.

tions had been submitted to the Office, and in the same month, 1,931 students and 75 professors from Ewha Women's University delivered a petition directly to the President (KIDA 1995: 39). As a consequence, the Administrative Reform Council (Haengjōnggaehyōkwiwonhoe), newly created by Kim Young Sam's civilian government (1993-97) to facilitate the democratization of public administration, adopted the issue as an agenda to be deliberated in July of 1994 (KIDA 1995: 11). The course of interactions between the middle-class women and the democratizing government suggests that the military service extra points system emerged as an example of undemocratic gender discrimination in public employment when the new civilian regime attempted to establish its identity apart from authoritarian military regimes of the past.

During the second half of 1994, there was a heated debate between the Office of Political Affairs (which was against the extra points system) on the one hand, and the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of the Interior, and the Office of Veterans Administration (in support of it) on the other. In the midst of this polarization within the government, a series of meetings in the administration managed to generate a lukewarm compromise, justified as follows: first, given the paramountcy of "national security" in South Korea, it would not be desirable to abolish the extra points system entirely in the absence of an alternative method to compensate male conscripts; second, it would be appropriate to reduce the overall percentage of extra points given in order to alleviate the negative impact of the system on women's public employment.¹⁵ The compromise suggests the uneasy balance that the government had to maintain to appease the opposing sides. Although this modified version of the extra points system was never instituted, in the midst of persistent disagreement between the opposing sides (Yōsōng 1994; KIDA 1995: 39-43), the debate around it was significant because it set up the hegemonic discursive framework that shaped the controversy that was to recur later, at a broader level (no longer just inside the gov-

15. There seems to be some confusion about the specific details of the number of percentage points by which the bonuses were to be reduced, since there are a few different versions proposed by different participants of the Administrative Reform Council meetings. *Seoul Shinmun* reported somewhat different information on this (January 9, 1995).

ernment). That is, in this earlier debate, the military service extra points system was debated in terms of women's employment versus compensation for men's mandatory military service. Those who opposed the extra points system were preemptively to be labeled as undermining military morale and thereby threatening national security.

The universalized gender difference that dichotomized diverse groups of women and diverse groups of men into homogenized Woman and Man continued to shape the public discourse on the extra points system. In July, 1998, Cabinet members resumed the debate on the military service extra points system in terms of employment discrimination against women versus compensation for men's mandatory military service. Although the court ruling complicated the gender-dichotomous view on conscription by addressing the issue of men with physical or mental disability, the hegemonic framework that universalized gender difference in conscription also underlay the intense public discourse generated by civil society in response to the Constitutional Court ruling. In fact, the court's ruling in support of the elimination of the extra points system incited highly emotional responses from civil society precisely because it ignored the class difference among men in performing military service. It is necessary here to summarize the court ruling to examine this process.

After over a year of deliberation, the Constitutional Court declared the extra points system "unconstitutional," essentially on three grounds. First, the state is not required to compensate former conscripts for their military service because that service is the "justifiable duty" of male citizens in South Korea, and therefore should not be considered as a special "individual sacrifice." According to the Constitution of the Republic of Korea, the ruling maintains, while the state is required to protect conscripted veterans from disadvantageous treatment caused by military service, it is not expected to provide them with active compensation. Second, the extra points system discriminated against the following groups of people who could not perform military service, regardless of their individual choice: 1) the absolute majority of women, 2) men with disabilities or physical or mental conditions rendering them unfit for military service, and 3) men who performed supplementary military service as workers, researchers, and public interest agents (*kong'ikkŭnmuyowon*) due to the excessive supply of

prospective recruits. Extra points given to veterans had become a crucial factor in determining the success or failure on public employment tests in recent years. Therefore, the Constitutional Court upheld the claim of the class action suit against the extra points system: that it violated the constitutional right to equality, to be elected or appointed to public office, and to choose an occupation for those who, for physical or social reasons, cannot perform military service. Third, the extra points system was only able to compensate conscripted veterans by sacrificing such “social minorities” as women and men with disabilities. While the court recognized that mandatory military service should be accompanied by compensation for the loss of opportunity to prepare or search for paid employment, the compensation provided through the extra points system violated the fundamental rights of the social minorities that the Constitution explicitly orders the state to protect (Han’gukyösongyönguso 2000: Appendix).

The court ruling complicated the hegemonic discursive framework, expanding as it did the category of people discriminated against by the extra points system, beyond the universalized Woman. It reiterated social minorities as not only women but also men with disabilities. Yet this counter-hegemonic moment became overshadowed by fierce responses to the court ruling. Instead of re-channeling the public debate on the extra points system, the court ruling intensified its hegemonic framework. The conservative public seemed to find offensive the court’s rational-legal discourse, invoking individual choice and social minorities’ sacrifice, because those who perform mandatory military service did not have individual choice and sacrificed twenty-six months of their youth. With a few exceptions,¹⁶ newspaper discourse on the extra points system represented this public sentiment, stressing the negative consequences of the court ruling for veterans and current soldiers: serious damage to military morale, increase in military service evasion, and therefore a grave threat to national security.¹⁷ While pro-

16. For an example of one such exception, see *Hangyöre Shinmun*, December 29, 1999.

17. There are numerous articles on this issue during the period examined in this article. To give a few examples: *Kyönghyang Shinmun*, December 24, 1999; *Han’gukyöngje Shinmun*, December 24, 1999; *Segye Ilbo*, December 25, 1999; *Hanguk Ilbo*, December 25, 1999; *Chungang Ilbo*, December 25, 1999; *Munhwa Ilbo*, December 25, 1999.

fessedly accepting the court decision, newspaper editorials repeatedly urged the government to devise an alternative method of compensation in employment or criticized it for having eliminated the extra points system prior to making any such alternative arrangement. In doing so, these overwhelmingly conservative newspapers implicitly or explicitly challenged one element of the court ruling, namely that military service is not a special sacrifice deserving active compensation from the state. In contrast, the newspapers reasserted that the state would have to provide compensation in employment to former conscripts for their enormous sacrifice in giving away prime years of their youth for the nation.

The idea of compensation was shared even by those who actively supported the court ruling, including women's associations.¹⁸ They differed from their conservative counterparts only with respect to the specific method of compensation they supported, suggesting an array of alternatives to the extra points system: educational aid, tax benefits, substantial job training sponsored by the state, and extra pay that would reflect a period of military service. The court ruling also responded to the argument about compensation for men's military service, and it appeared to be somewhat inconsistent on this issue. At first, it argued against compensation because military service is considered "justifiable duty" for men, but in the end, it addressed a need to compensate for the loss of economic opportunity during military service.

How do we explain the centrality of the notion of compensation to the discourse on the military service extra points system? The idea of compensation implies a loss of something valuable. While the valuable loss can include an array of opportunities and qualities, the economic nature of the extra points system indicates that it is commonly understood that what is lost is the opportunity to pursue paid employment. The idea of compensation also implies an attempt to appease discontent stemming from the loss. Are conscripted veterans dissatisfied with the loss of job opportunities? Are there other causes of discontent? It is

18. This type of view was expressed in readers' opinions columns printed in major newspapers. To give a few examples: *Segye Ilbo*, December 29, 1999; *Chungang Ilbo*, December 29, 1999; *Munhwa Ilbo*, December 30, 1999.

my contention that a sense of loss during military service among conscripted veterans is amplified by the inhumane subculture of barracks life and the existence of different forms of military service for different groups of men.

The inhumane subculture of barracks life stems from the organizational identity of the military as an armed fighting machine that generates a collective ethos justifying the sacrifice of individuals for the sake of a larger goal, that is, the military security of a territorialized nation. In order to make civilians willing to accept their sacrifice, they have to be transformed into foot soldiers willing to carry out orders without critical thinking and reflection. This transformation is to be achieved through intense and repetitious physical discipline and indoctrination, as well as the daily routine of collective living in barracks. These general features of military culture are accentuated in the South Korean military as shaped by the fascistic culture of the Japanese Imperial Army. Although the Korean military resembles the U.S. military in terms of its formal organizational structure, social relations among soldiers in their quotidian interactions still reflect those in the Japanese Imperial Army (Sō 1995, vol. 2: 72; Yi Tong-hŭi 1982: 264, 265, 317). Although aspects of authoritarian culture have begun to alter in the process of democratization in the 1990s, barracks life continues to involve habitual practices of abuse, ranging from verbal humiliation to depriving subordinate soldiers of time for meals or sleep. Absolute obedience, and the requirement of such personal services as washing and ironing clothes or running errands have governed the relationship between subordinates and superiors (Kim Tōk-han 1996; Sō 1995; Kim Nam-Guk 1995; Kim Hwan-t'ae 1993).

The development of different types of military service is related to the supply of military manpower that fluctuates with demographic change. When there is an oversupply of acceptable young men, the universal conscription system comes to face the problem of surplus manpower. The size of the conscript cohort in South Korea grew throughout the 1970s and the 1980s (with the exception of a downturn immediately after the upsurges in 1982 and 1983).¹⁹ In order to absorb the extra manpower, the military designed and has maintained various categories of military service recruitment. Although these categories

have been modified and remade over the decades in response to growing popular discontent and criticism, they can be summarized in the following ways. First, there has been a secondary form of military service involving a lesser burden than regular military service. Between 1968 and 1994, conscripts performing this “supplementary service” were called “defense soldiers” (*pangwibyŏng*). This group of conscripts commuted from their own houses to local military units or government offices, as opposed to living in remote military barracks. Their service was shorter (eighteen months), and their tasks usually involved office work. Since 1995, this service has been replaced by “commuting reservists” (*sangkŭnyebiyŏk*) and “public interest service agents” (*kong’ikgŭnmuyowon*).²⁰ Second, there have been substitutes for military service altogether since 1973, when Park Chung Hee’s regime created the “military service special cases” to deal not only with the oversupply of prospective conscripts but also with the undersupply of skilled labor in strategic heavy industries. After an initial period of basic military training, conscripts in these categories are gainfully employed in lieu of military service. Consequently, while some conscripts carry out regular military service in remote barracks with little pay, others serve in offices in urban environment or are paid by civilian firms and research centers designated by the Office of Military Manpower.

The existence of the supplementary service and the substitutes for military service, along with the inhumane nature of regular barracks life, induced the upper classes to use connections and money to get their sons into the less onerous forms of military service.²¹ In addition, the wealthy or powerful can use loopholes in the military service

19. This is based on statistics compiled by the KIDA, which are not published. Indeed, many statistics on military manpower are still categorized as “classified” under the Military Secrecy Law. In reading newspaper articles on military issues in the past decades, however, I realized that this classification is often inconsistent, in that those articles contain statistical information deemed “classified” by the military.
20. In its conscription system reform bill, the Ministry of National Defense announced that by 1998, the commuting reservists would be virtually absorbed back into the general supplementary service. See *Munhwa Ilbo*, May 6, 1998.
21. According to a survey of conscripts’ perceptions conducted in 1986, 62 percent of the respondents considered the special service deflating to soldiers’ morale. Yet the higher the level of education, the more this percentage went down. See Hong (1996, 271-72).

exemption system, based on physical and psychological criteria. These unfair practices in the mandatory military service have fomented popular discontent, which became vociferous public criticism under Kim Young Sam's civilian administration. During this period, by disseminating statistical information on the completion of military service by region and socioeconomic status, the mass media confirmed the widespread public suspicion that the burden of military service had been unequally borne by sons of lower-class families. The release of such statistics on high government officials was particularly incendiary (*Kyŏnghyang Shinmun* March 26, 1998). For example, almost a third of ninety-six high government officials and a quarter of two hundred and ninety male legislators had themselves been exempted from regular military service. Similarly, four out of nine presidential candidates for the 1997 election did not complete military service, and only four of fifteen adult sons of these candidates had completed regular military service. These rates of exemption are far above the national average of approximately ten percent (Pak 1997: 24; Wi 1997).

The class difference among men in mandatory military service was obscured by the hegemonic framing of the extra points system that universalized gender difference between women and men in military service. Despite their counter-hegemonic argument that the extra points system was more than a dichotomized gender conflict, both the group of plaintiffs and the Constitutional court overlooked the class difference among men. The common perception of military service as an unequal burden among men underlies the vehemence of conservative reactions to the court ruling. The gap between the public and the court was pointed out by Kim Yong-jun, Chief Justice of the Constitutional Court, who related that public reaction to the court ruling was far more intense than the court had expected (Song Yong-hoe 2000).

The class dimension of the extra points system controversy was alluded to in internet discourse in which lower-class men expressed a strong sense of indignation and deprivation. The pervasive sense of anger at the court decision stems from unequal military service and the denial of what they consider "minimum," "ridiculously miniscule" or "justifiable" compensation for their sacrifice. Reflecting these sentiments of anger and betrayal, numerous messages on internet discus-

sion sites stress the difficulties involved in regular military service, ranging from personal humiliation and psychological distress to physical hardship, and show resentment towards the military, upper classes, or women, depending upon the level of analysis that a writer of such a message can draw from the elimination of the extra points system. The following remarks reflect the typical tone of protest and anger commonly observed in the internet discourse, with unusually radical criticism of the military.

If the extra points system compensating for the twenty-six months of military service completed by 80 percent of Korean men is unconstitutional, I want to point out that the military is unconstitutional in the first place. Its unconstitutionality lies in the unjustifiable exploitation of labor and illegal incarceration, violence and beating, and unjustifiable wages. What kind of healthy young men in their twenties on earth are willing to work for a few hundred won a day?

(<http://board5.free.cgiserver.net/Crazyww...num=66&page=3&db=roots2202b&backdepth=14> January 8, 2000)

The sense of indignation is compounded by the thorny problem of equity in mandatory military service, stemming from the presence of its different forms and its exemption. It is quite common for participants of internet discussions to deplore their lack of money and social connections. These men direct their criticism toward the upper classes and perceive themselves as powerless vis-a-vis those who can avoid regular military service. One who identifies himself as “a poor person drafted for military service because he did not have power and was ignorant” writes,

[T]he moneyed are exempted, and so they can make more money. Scum-like National Assembly members were also exempted, and so they can enjoy such powerful positions. They live off taxes paid by citizens, including the poor and foolish drafted to the military. I wish there were no more poor and foolish young men like myself in this land.

(<http://board.cgiworld.net/view.cgi?id=ipunee01&jd=-30&now=1&no=346> March 16, 2000)

Despite the underlying tone that opposes the elimination of the extra points system, the above messages contain counter-hegemonic elements in directing their critique to the military, unequal conscription, and political and economic elites. Yet this type of message makes up less than ten percent of several hundred messages posted on the internet. This type of critical messages also draws far less responses from other internet participants than sensationalistic messages critical of women and women's organizations. Although it is not clear who the authors of such counter-hegemonic messages in anonymous internet space were, it is likely that they were a group of angry men come from lower classes because those men have performed a disproportionate share of the regular military service and therefore feel disempowered. There is a critical discrepancy between this self-perception, shared among conscripted veterans, and the Constitutional Court's implicitly homogenizing view of men who completed military service as a social majority (seen in contrast with such social minorities as women and disabled men).

However, the viscerally counter-hegemonic moments in the internet discourse are contained by the hegemonic framework of the public discourse of the extra points system. While highlighting the hardship of regular military service, most contributors to the internet discourse are silent about the unequal burden of military service across class. Instead, viewing the controversy as a war of sexes, participants of internet discussion groups tend to denounce women in general and women's associations in particular. They interpret the elimination of the extra points system as a problem caused by women or women's associations "callous" or "ungrateful" towards men's enormous sacrifice for national defense. In the name of absolute equality, they enjoy chastising women for their "selfishness" and proposing women's conscription. The following remarks convey such a view.

Why do we have to die for such an entity [women who oppose the extra points system]? ... Who on earth decided that only men

go to the military, and why is this not a form of inequality? The constitutional definition of citizen does not mean only men. Women are demanding equality, but why do they think that this does not apply to the military? ... What infuriates us men is that women shout for sexual equality if it serves them well, and demand favorable treatment if it doesn't.

(<http://board5.free.cgiserver.net/Crazyww...&num=96&page=1&db=roots2202b&backdepth=2> May 3, 2000)

Another participant expresses hostility toward women's associations, but without resorting to the abusive and degrading language that is common in this type of emotional message.

I am a man, married and somewhat old.... It seems to me that there is a problem, not with all women but with women leaders. Women's associations actively welcome the abolition of the extra points system as an indicator that women's status has moved a step upward. Isn't this an attack on all men? If extra points given to men are a form of inequality, the world should have absolute equality.... Women, you are much better off if you do not demand absolute equality since it is disadvantageous to you later.

(unitel > t'oronmadang > kwagöt'oron yöramshil December 29, 1999)

It is noteworthy that both comments quoted above argue (one explicitly and the other implicitly) that women should be subjected to mandatory military service if they want to demand gender equality. This argument is very common among the messages denouncing women and women's associations and is used to delegitimize women's demand for equality in employment. This type of argument assumes that the demand for equal employment means a demand for "absolute equality," construed as women's sameness with men, to be achieved through women's emulation of men, including mandatory military ser-

22. I have discussed the problem of equality versus difference in feminist theorizing elsewhere. See Seungsook Moon (2002).

vice.²² This argument for women's compulsory military service deflects public attention from the deeper problem of the institution of men's conscription in democratizing Korea and such thorny problems as the class-based inequality in conscription and the inhumane military sub-culture of barrack life. At the same time, it functions as a powerful gag to silence women in the internet discourse, which goes a long way towards explaining why internet discourse on the extra points system does not question the conscription system as often as it deploys the rhetoric about women being subjected to compulsory service. The pervasiveness of blame directed at women and women's associations is also an indication that this avenue of attack is easier than tackling the powerful and impersonal military system. (Women's associations are easily identifiable; they are also not powerful enough to punish those who attack them.)

In my critical reading of the hegemonic framing of the discourse of the extra points system, I do not intend to ignore the seriousness of the problem of employment among women. While lower-class women have been subject to labor and sexual exploitation in factories and sweat shops, educated middle-class women have suffered from the lack of long-term employment opportunities comparable with their education (Brinton and Lee 2001). By the mid-1990s, the extra points system had become a serious obstacle to women's public employment, one of just a few viable employment opportunities. Hence, women's associations were legitimately concerned about the negative implications for women's employment of a series of legislative attempts to increase employment benefits based on military service.²³ Without overlooking the seriousness of women's equal access to employment, however, it is my contention that the public debate on the military service extra points system contributes to the reinscription of territorialized national unity by universalizing gender difference and denying class difference among men in conscription. Framing the issue as a conflict between women's access to equal employment and compensation for men's military service, the hegemonic discursive process conjures up the territorialized image of a nation that *all* men are supposed to defend to

23. See Han'gukyösongminuhoe (1998); *Hangyöre Shinmun* (September 9, 1998); *Seoul Shinmun* (May 13, 1998); Kang Ki-won (1998).

death; in practice, though, some men bear a heavier duty than other men. In this discursive field, counter-hegemonic voices become hostage to the rhetoric of national security and national defense. In its failure to recognize the class difference among men in military service, the hegemonic discursive process dichotomizes members of the nation into feminized citizens who undermine the territorial integrity of a nation and masculinized citizens who protect it. These armed defenders of the nation and their supporters imagine national unity against the feminized Others who oppose the extra points system.

2) An implicit discursive process: Framing the controversy concerning the military service extra points system as an exclusively domestic issue

The hegemonic framing of the controversy, produced by the state and civil society and circulated via print and electronic media, represents the issue of the extra points system implicitly as a domestic issue. It is conspicuously silent about the place of conscription in the overall equation of military relations between South Korea and the United States, which originated in the Cold War strategic alliance. In the Korean Peninsula, where the specter of the Cold War lingers on, the United States has played the role of nuclear deterrent against North Korea, while South Korea has provided a mass of military manpower through the conscription system. Within the framework of the U.S.-R.O.K. Mutual Defense Treaty (1953), the United States has been permitted to exercise operational control over the South Korean armed forces (Gills 1996: 80). Under its containment (of communism) policy in Northeast Asia, the United States introduced nuclear artillery and nuclear-tipped tactical missiles in South Korea as early as 1957 and displayed them during a military review in the following year, which violated the 1953 armistice agreement (Hart-Landsberg 1998: 158; Cumings 1988: 105).

With the election of Ronald Reagan and other conservative leaders in Western countries in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Cold War militarism escalated throughout the world. The United States stepped up its “deterrence-science militarism” (Mann 1984) by adopting a novel military strategy of “horizontal escalation,” according to which the

United States would offset Soviet attack on one area in the Western hemisphere by counter-attacking another area in the Soviet bloc. Under this scheme, it chose North Korea as a major target (Hart-Landsberg 1998: 159-160). In its acceleration of the nuclear arms race with the Soviet Union, the United States exhibited a willingness to engage in full-fledged nuclear war, as opposed to “limited” nuclear confrontation, by launching the “star wars” initiative to build a shield against nuclear attacks (Cumings 1988: 105).

In highlighting the unequal military alliance between South Korea and the United States, I do not intend to portray monolithic U.S. imperialism. Understanding the ideological currency of anticommunism and national security doctrine, Park Chung Hee’s regime made active efforts to maintain and reinforce the U.S. military commitment. In fact, the U.S. position on its military involvement in the Korean Peninsula was by no means consistent. In 1969, for instance, Nixon made the first attempt to withdraw the U.S. troops stationed in South Korea, under the Nixon Doctrine which called for “Asia for the Asians.” As a result, the Seventh Division was removed by 1971 and in return, the United States provided loans for South Korea to purchase U.S.-produced weapons and to maintain the existing military system (Kim Chin-kyun 1996: 296). After Watergate, however, Ford reaffirmed the U.S. military commitment during his visit to South Korea. Renewed direct American military involvement was materialized in Team Spirit, annual joint military exercises that started in 1976, which often involved the maneuvering of the largest number of troops in the world accompanied by nuclear-ready aircraft and aircraft carriers (David Kang 1998: 254). Carter, during his election campaign, again announced a pledge for the additional withdrawal of U.S. troops from South Korea, but in response, the South Korean government, with support from the U.S. military and intelligence establishment, successfully lobbied in the U.S. Congress to reverse this plan (Ibid., 159; Gills 1996: 200). This reversal was followed by a further strengthening of the bilateral strategic alliance. In 1978, both countries created the U.S.-R.O.K. Combined Forces Command and the U.S. congress approved \$1.2 billion for the Military Assistance Program (Gills 1996: 197, 200).

The bilateral strategic alliance between South Korea and the United

States has undergone significant change since the early 1990s. Over the decade, the United States has continuously pressured South Korea to increase its share of costs for the maintenance of U.S. forces. Disagreement on how much South Korea should contribute has generated tension in the military alliance between the two unequal parties.²⁴ Consequently, conflict has grown in the strategic relationship between South Korea and the United States. In response, the South Korean leadership has, since the late 1980s, attempted to form a multilateral military alliance with other Asian countries. What is significant, in the mutual but unequal military alliance, to the controversy concerning the military service extra points system, is that to secure the U.S. military commitment, the ruling regimes in South Korea have made serious concessions to the United States that violate the normative conception of a nation as a sovereign political entity. For decades, the Korean military, commonly understood as the instrument of “national security” that protects the nation’s territorial integrity, has been under the direct control of the United States. In addition, the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), initially designed in 1966 to regulate the relationship between South Korea and the American military stationed in South Korea, has continued to provide the American military with extraterritoriality. That is, the Korean criminal justice system cannot prosecute American soldiers, military personnel, or their families who commit crimes against Korean citizens on Korean territory.²⁵ In 2001, clause 22 of the SOFA was revised to allow the Korean justice system to investigate and prosecute American soldiers, military personnel, and their families for such

24. In 1993, for instance, the Korean government paid a direct cost of \$220 million, but according to the 1993 Report on Allied Contribution to the Common Defense submitted by the U.S. Secretary of Defense to the U.S. Congress, the South Korean share soars to \$2.41 billion if the indirect costs of free military bases, facilities, and personnel provided for the U.S. troops are included. This means that South Korea is responsible for 78 percent of the total expenses for stationing the U.S. military there. This portion is far greater than that of Japan or Germany, where a larger number of U.S. troops are deployed and whose economies are much bigger than that of South Korea (Yi Chang-hŭi 1998: 7, 11).

25. The most recent case in point is the homicide of two teenage girls in Kyŏnggi Province during an American military training exercise on June 13, 2002. The two junior high-school students were run over and killed by an armored vehicle driven by two American soldiers. The United States command rejected the Korean government’s request to hand over the two sergeants involved in the apparent accident for investigation by the Korean Criminal Justice system. See Son (2002) and the *New York Times* (September 14, 2002, A5).

serious crimes as murder, rape, abduction, and drug dealing. Yet the revision maintains that the American military retain its jurisdiction over American soldiers who commit any crime on duty-and during the half century of American military presence in South Korea, there has been no prosecution of such soldiers by the American military (Han 2002; Kim So-hŭi 2002; Son 2002). The grassroots movement for peace has also taken on the issue of the unequal military alliance.²⁶ Nevertheless, the silence around the mutual but unequal military alliance between South Korea and the United States in the public discourse on the extra points system obscures the problematic political unity of the Korean nation and its porous border, and thereby maintains the image of national unity and sovereignty.

4. Conclusion

This article has examined the ways in which the hegemonic discursive processes in the controversy over the extra points system reinscribe the image of a nation as a territorialized political unity. The working of the hegemonic discursive framework demonstrates that national unity rests on the production and management of differences among and within social groups, rather than on the arduous accomplishment of a substantial alleviation of power differences. The use of difference by the nation-state and society involves the simultaneous process of universalizing gender difference and denying class difference among men. National unity is imagined through the discursive representation of those who oppose to the military service extra points system as a menace to “national security.” At the same time, this hegemonic framing of the issue of the military service extra points system does not allow for the discussion of the thorny problem of conscription in democratizing Korea. In particular, it obscures the problem of Korea’s national sovereignty in the military alliance between South Korea and

26. This movement has focused on the issues of environmental destruction around American military bases and the crimes against Koreans committed by American soldiers. Koreans living around the military bases have suffered from water pollution, heavy metal poisoning, soil erosion, severe noise, and frequent accidents related to routine military exercises (Kim So-hŭi 2001; Cho 2000; Shin-Yun 2000).

the United States by failing to discuss the relationship between the system of male conscription and the military alliance. As a result, the government adopted a superficial compromise to appease the opposing sides of the debate. The Constitutional Court announced a ruling that progressively supported social minorities, but failed to address class difference among men in conscription. Deeply agitated by this ruling, civil society tended to misdirect its criticism towards women and women's associations and argued for women's conscription in the name of "absolute equality."

To interrogate the hegemonic conception of a nation as a territorialized political unity does not mean the denial of the global geopolitical reality composed of territorialized nation-states and of the importance of sovereign territory for a people in the current system of nation-states. Rather, it is an effort to illuminate the ways in which such a fundamental condition of human life is intertwined with ideological maneuvers that maintain the established order of things. Analyses of the ideological maneuvers that produce the image of territorialized political unity can work to reveal the core contradiction in the concept of nation: such unity is achieved by simultaneously denying differences within a social group and universalizing differences between social groups. Such analyses would be an effort to guard against the destructive dynamic of nation-states, because wars are fought in the name of creating, defending, recovering, or expanding territorialized nations. If I question the hegemonic conception of a nation, it is out of a desire to envision a new political community that can embrace differences rather than manage them.

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