

Proud of Myself as LGBTQ: *The Seoul Pride Parade, Homonationalism, and Queer Developmental Citizenship*

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Abstract

This paper examines the Seoul Pride Parades of 2016 and 2017 to understand how Pride organizers and participants negotiate nationalism, developmentalism, and global human rights discourses to reconstruct citizenship and queerness in Korea. In particular, I focus on how self-affirmations of LGBTQ inadvertently intersect with, collude with, and traverse international liberal politics and Korean developmentalism in LGBTQ Koreans' interactions with Euro-American embassies, antigay protesters, and the Korean government. Euro-American embassies have engaged with Korean LGBTQ movements by participating in recent celebrations of Seoul Pride. By contrast, antigay protesters have interrupted the parades by arguing that homosexuality ruins national development. For its part, the government has been reluctant to support LGBTQ rights. In this context, by relying on "proud of myself as LGBTQ" and using the embassies' support, organizers not only oppose heteronormative nationalism but also produce what I call queer developmental citizenship. Through this form of citizenship, LGBTQ Koreans seek to cultivate the self and others to catch up with and align with Euro-American citizenship models, but they are less critical of liberal politics and developmental hierarchies between Korea and Western countries. I also consider how LGBTQ Koreans can nevertheless disrupt liberal developmental hierarchies by creating social relationalities and coalitions.

Keywords: The Seoul Pride parade, Korea, queerness, citizenship, homonationalism, developmentalism, pride, collective

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Introduction

This paper examines the Seoul Pride Parade to better understand how Pride organizers and participants negotiate nationalism, developmentalism, and global human rights discourses which, in the process, configure queerness and citizenship in present-day South Korea (hereafter, Korea). The paper presents the discourses and practices produced during Pride parades, which are marked by tensions between various actors, including Korean Pride participants and organizers, Euro-American embassies, antigay protesters, as well as the national and the city governments. In particular, I interrogate both the limitations and possibilities of these negotiations, advancing what it means for self-affirmations as queer for Pride organizers in Korea.

The Seoul Pride (SP) parade is one program of the Korea Queer Culture Festival (KQCF), which comprises a week-long series of events, including a film festival, exhibition, and party. The festival began in 2000 as a small-scale event with an exhibition and a forum; at that time, the parade attracted less than 100 participants. Since its beginning, the festival has aimed to “inspire ‘queer’ people’s pride” and “raise human rights issues through cultural forms” (KQCF, n.d.). Although it has never been easy for organizers to secure public space for the parade, no public protests plagued organizers until 2013. For the first time in 2014, evangelical anti-Pride protests mounted.¹ In that year, a diverse set of evangelical groups organized antigay protests and blocked the march for five hours in Seoul’s Sinchon neighborhood. Such protests continued to be organized at Seoul Square in 2015, 2016, and 2017, with the aim of disrupting the parade’s opening and closing performances, booth events, and the parade march. The protesters condemned Pride as ruinous to the Korean nation-state. Under pressure

1. Since the late 2000s, conservative megachurches and a constellation of small but extremely conservative Christian advocacy groups began to use shame and hatred of gay people to mobilize lay believers and resolve splits within the national umbrella group Christian Council of Korea. In particular, the World Council of Churches (progressive international Christian gathering), held in South Korea in 2013 and which declared its solidarity with LGBTQ people, drove conservative church organizations to organize their first anti-Pride protests in 2014 (J. Han 2017).

from conservative evangelical churches, which exerted their influence over evangelical politicians and mobilized antigay protests, the national and municipal governments hesitated to support LGBTQ rights, to say nothing of Seoul Pride.² They have also been reluctant to allow the use of Seoul Square and boulevards surrounding the square for the march.

The context for supporters of the SP parade shifted in 2014 when, for the first time, anti-Pride protests were announced beforehand. SP organizers and LGBTQ activists actively sought support from social movement organizations, residents of the Seodaemun district where the parade was planned, and Tokyo Rainbow Pride. At the same time, the embassies of the United States, France, and Germany, invoking support for the human rights of LGBTQ Koreans, contacted SP organizers and began to participate in the parade. In 2015, fifteen Euro-American embassies (including those of the US, the EU Delegation, Canada, and France) and those of Brazil and Argentina³ gave supportive speeches on stage. Thirteen Euro-American embassies out of 15 also installed booths at the square. Since 2014, participation by Korean LGBTQ people and their allies has also ballooned from an estimated 15,000 in 2014 to 30,000 in 2015, 50,000 in 2016, and 80,000 in 2017. Supporters have gathered to counter the claims of fundamentalist evangelical groups that homosexuality arrests national development, and to criticize the government's ignorance of basic human rights. Meanwhile, Pride participants have enthusiastically welcomed and appreciated the parade-day speeches of Euro-American embassies in support of LGBTQ Koreans' rights.

This paper asks how SP organizers' and attendees' self-affirmations as

2. In Korea, there is no law which punishes same-sex act (except in the military). Nor do Korea laws prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. There are various forms of discrimination against LGBTQ people in Korea. The "Nationwide Guideline for Sex Education Standards in School" developed by the Ministry of Education in 2015 excluded content on LGBTI people. According to a report by National Human Rights Commission in Korea, 44.9% of lesbians, gays, and bisexual respondents and 64% of transgender respondents experienced discrimination (e.g., sexual harassment, mocking) at the workplace (SOGI LAW 2016).

3. After 2015, only Euro-American embassies continued to participate in the SP parade.

LGBTQ⁴ articulate national belonging, national development, and global gay membership. In particular, I focus on how such affirmations of LGBTQ pride inadvertently intersect and even collude with—while, at the same time, appropriate—international liberal politics and Korean developmentalism. In doing so, this paper explores how LGBTQ Koreans navigate the boundaries of citizenship. By “citizenship,” I mean “full and equal membership in a polity” (Choo 2016, 6). Citizenship is not a state or possession, but rather a modality of belonging to a community that includes a nation-state—a modality that entails rights and duties that must be achieved through everyday practices (Muehlebach 2012, 18). For example, I refer to global gay citizenship as membership in an imagined global gay community. I address how SP organizers and attendees constitute themselves as members of that larger polity, and what they are expected to do in the community. Here, it should be noted that the resources available for the practices of achieving citizenship are unevenly distributed among people along unequal axes of power (Isin and Wood 1999). Because the imagined gay community is constructed along the axes of race, gender, and class, on the one hand, and because Korean citizenship has been constructed in a heteronormative way, on the other, it is difficult for LGBTQ Koreans to fully achieve either form of citizenship. As queer scholars point out, it is undeniable that “most of the easily available and visible gay world is a predominantly white and male commercialized zone” (Muñoz 1999, 111). Korean citizenship has been historically constructed in ways that privilege men who fulfill their military duty (e.g., benefiting in the job market) and relegate women to the domestic sphere, even though women traverse both the public and the domestic sphere (Moon 2005). This gendered ideology of citizenship has constituted, and has been constituted by, heterosexual family laws, a gender-

4. Here, I use the terms “LGBTQ” and “queer” rather than “sexual minority” to indicate people who perform non-normative gender and sexual practices in Korea. This usage stems from my fieldwork observations: SP organizers interpellated Pride participants as LGBTQ or queer rather than as a sexual minority. Organizers believe that the term “sexual minority,” which suggests a “political subject” that opposes heteronormativity, might make some participants uncomfortable identifying with it. Meanwhile, the terms “LGBTQ” and “queer,” which can be combined with terms such as culture and film, are deemed more approachable (SP parade organizer Lee, interview by author, October 2016).

binary identification system, and the military (Na 2014). In this context, when SP organizers and attendees affirm themselves as LGBTQ with the support of Euro-American embassies in the heteronormative public space of Seoul, they navigate the boundaries of national belonging and global gay citizenship. In what follows, I examine how SP organizers construct what I call queer developmental citizenship. With this term, I refer to a negotiated form of citizenship whose boundaries are constantly contested and reconfigured in relation to sexual politics, national development, and self-development.

The paper is built on participant observations of the preparation, staging, and assessment of SP parade-related events, as well as interviews with sixteen parade organizers, other LGBTQ activists, and labor movement activists between February and October 2016 and between January and August 2017. Participant observation of the KQCF organizing board allowed me to understand meanings and experience events in a way proximate to LGBTQ organizers themselves (Burawoy 1991). The parade team was comprised of fifteen organizers in 2016 and ten in 2017. One executive officer and one director of the KQCF also worked for Seoul Pride as well as for other events. Except for this executive officer, all organizers were unpaid volunteers. Apart from three veteran organizers in their forties who had overseen the SP parade since its second year in 2001, most SP organizers were in their twenties and identified themselves more as organizers than as activists. As a semi-organizer in 2016 and a low-ranking organizer in 2017, I participated in weekly meetings to organize the parade, training sessions for organizers, meetings to assess the entire event, after-parties, encounters with antigay protesters, other LGBTQ related events, and festival events themselves, which took place between June 11 and 19, 2016, and between July 14 and 23, 2017.

The Complexities of Pride

One inspiration for the establishment of the SP parade was the now iconic Stonewall Riots in Greenwich Village, New York, where queer people

collectively protested against police forces during a raid of the Stonewall Bar in June 1969. On the anniversary in the following year, queer people in cities such as New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles took to the streets again to celebrate that resistance and to combat the public invisibility of queer people. Since then, Pride parades have spread nationally and internationally, now extending to sites in Europe, Latin America, Asia, and Africa (Bruce 2016).

Previous studies of pride parades can be categorized according to three analytical tendencies. The first tendency sees pride parades as actively oppositional to the heteronormative principle of liberalism, which marks homosexual bodies as always overly sexual and disallows their public display, while rendering as natural the presence of heterosexuals in public space (Brickell 2000). By challenging prohibitions and showcasing homosexual bodies in various forms (e.g., flamboyant costumes and near-naked embodiment), Pride events transgress everyday heteronormative rhythms and the boundaries between the public and private spheres (Enguix 2009; Kate and Belk 2001).

Second, academics and activists have criticized pride parades for having become depoliticized and hyper-commercialized in recent decades (Chasin 2000; Muñoz 1999). For example, Chasin (2000, 213) suggested that pride parades in big cities such as Boston and Chicago confused “economic gains for some with political gains for all.” The promotion of LGBTQ visibility in pride conceals ulterior political motives and social oppression, thereby masking LGBTQ people’s insufficient political and social status (Luongo 2002; Markwell 2002). For example, as Puar (2007) has argued, Israel’s active advocacy of Pride is an example of “pink-washing” in the service of justifying Israel’s occupation of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. In this case, the Israeli government uses Pride to package Israel as a gay-friendly nation promoting the liberation of Palestinian LGBTQ people from an “oppressive” Islamic religion, while masking Israel’s own political oppression of the Palestinians. This strategy indicates that promoting LGBTQ pride is not always transgressive, but it can be politically problematic in certain contexts.

A third perspective on Pride recognizes that not all parades experience commercialization and political cooptation in the same ways. Some scholars

argue that such events represent a mixture or hybrid of queer resistance and (neo) liberal assimilation, thus departing from a distinct either/or analysis (Ammaturo 2016; Holt and Griffin 2003). Many scholars point out that the two main tendencies of depoliticization and subversion are based primarily on observations anchored in North America, Western Europe, and Australia. The question, therefore, remains: how do people in non-Western, colonized, developing, or postsocialist states produce their own pride parades in the face of explicit antigay movements and a lack of institutional protections for LGBTQ people?

Studies that respond to this question reflect how LGBTQ people negotiate their sense of self and national belonging in the context of religious opposition, national development, and LGBTQ human rights discourses (Bilic 2016). In one example, Mikuš (2011) showed how Serbian parade organizers and participants challenged the Orthodox Church, which advanced a dichotomy between the restoration of “traditional Serbian values” that used to be dismissed under a socialist regime and pride organizers’ pursuit of “European values.” Contrasting an “underdeveloped” Serbia with a “developed” EU, pride participants instead aspired to join the latter.

Although drawing on studies from the first two categories, I situate my research project within the third paradigm, considering queer selfhood and citizenship in the context of hegemonic discourses of Korean developmentalism, antigay movements, and Euro-American embassies’ participation in the SP. Drawing on the literature discussed above, I examine how pride events are constructed as contested and complex sites, rather than as singular and homogenous. Instead of presuming that the Seoul Pride parade was either oppositional or commercialized/depoliticized, I discuss its complexity in specific Korean contexts. Indeed, the binary opposition of oppression versus resistance obscures the ways in which power productively operates to construct certain subjects, and the ways in which agents negotiate power structures (Foucault 1993; Mahmood 2005). While bearing in mind the transgressive and subversive possibilities of the SP, I, nonetheless, uncover the thin line between resistance and assimilation, exploring other ways of political possibility that are not reducible to the binary of resistance and assimilation.

Queer Liberalism and Homonationalism

I draw on the concepts of homonationalism and queer liberalism to understand Euro-American embassies' participation in the SP and their interventions in Korean LGBTQ movements. Because the term queer has been redefined by academics and activists as one that rejects a "minoritizing logic of toleration or simple political interest-representation in favor of a more thorough resistance to regimes of the normal" (Warner 1993, xxvi, as cited in Eng, Halberstam, and Muñoz 2005, 1), the term "queer liberalism" seems like an oxymoron. However, as some scholars have argued, queer is "a political metaphor without a fixed referent" (Eng, Halberstam, and Muñoz 2005, 1) whose signification is contingent upon specific contexts. In this regard, we can understand that queer and liberalism can combine with one another. Formulated as always norm-transgressive and subversive, queer paradoxically assumes the liberal binary of external norms versus autonomous subjects (Puar 2007). In other words, queer, defined as always fluid, mobile, or detached from norms, can paradoxically align with liberal humanist authorizations of "the fully self-possessed speaking subject" who is perceived as "untethered by hegemony or false consciousness" and "rationally choosing modern individualism" (Puar 2007, 23). Moreover, such a fetishized notion of queer creates as "others" those who cannot fully detach themselves from norms (e.g., a lesbian of color worker who must rely on family given a lack of social welfare), thus paradoxically reinforcing the model of autonomous white, male, middle-class subjects.

Puar (2007) suggests the notion of homonationalism to explain how nation-state formations exercise queer liberalism as governing technologies and thereby reconfigure themselves. Homonationalism refers to the governing strategies of Euro-American nation-states that maintain their sovereignty and global domination by incorporating some homosexuals into the nation-state and by framing homosexuality as a measure to advance human rights. In the wake of the national and economic crises following 9/11, the US government not only sought to re-entrench heteronormativity, but also aimed to reconfigure the relationship between emergent normative gay subjects and the nation. Under the guise of "war on terrorism,"

homonationalism created categories of “deviant” and racialized populations to be excluded from symbolic and national boundaries, while temporarily sanctioning some homosexuals through gendered, racial and class sanitizing.

Homonationalism also works transnationally, as in the case of Israeli pink-washing, by producing “gay-friendly and not gay-friendly nations” (Puar 2007, xiv). In this formulation, postsocialist states in Europe and many African and Asian countries, including South Korea, all of which lack anti-discrimination laws, are positioned as not gay-friendly nations. More recently, Euro-American governments have actively engaged with LGBTQ movements in those allegedly not gay-friendly states in addition to triumphantly celebrating their own nations as gay-friendly. In some sense, such homonational engagements resonate with the humanitarian interventions of North American and Western European nations, and which have ultimately served their strategies of militarism and imperialism. However, while past instances of humanitarian intervention tended to dismiss movements by local activists, a key characteristic of recent transnational homonationalism is cooperation with local NGOs and sometimes with local governments. These transnational connections are carried out by the officials of Euro-American states who, in the case of LGBT policy, are often themselves LGBTQ-identified. These Euro-American governments seek to expand and reinforce their sovereign power in global politics through foreign policies which encourage the governments and activists of purportedly not gay-friendly countries to pursue a Euro-American model of LGBTQ rights. For example, during the Obama administration, the US government sought to provide institutional guarantees for LGBTQ rights (e.g., same-sex marriage) at the domestic level and began to actively engage with LGBTQ movements at the international level. In a *Presidential Memorandum* dated December 2011, the Obama administration urged “all agencies engaged abroad to ensure that US diplomacy and foreign assistance promote and protect the human rights of LGBT persons.” In 2016, the special Envoy for the Human Rights of LGBTI Persons, Randy Berry, pronounced that the US government was committed to advancing the human rights of LGBTI persons “because it’s a moral

necessity . . . but also because it's a strategic imperative for the United States.”⁵ In fact, these liberal guarantees were not yet established in the US, but nonetheless they were being used to promote America's national image. In this way, the homonational strategies of Euro-American governments serve to reinforce their sovereignty in the world.

Here, we can consider how such engagements, what I call “transnational homonationalism,” are intertwined with local discourses and practices and how they affect local people's sense of individual self and their sentiments of national belonging. Rexhepi (2017, 244) illustrates how the US government, in cooperation with LGBTQ organizations, sought to prompt neoliberal social reform in Kosovo “by registering homophobia as a consequence of either the socialist past or Islamic present.” In this intervention, the US government encouraged LGBTQ people to perceive Kosovo as already homophobic and backward and as a site from which LGBTQ people should escape.

Here, rather than seeing transnational homonational policy as “smoothly incorporated into the logic of domestic political structure” (Bilic 2016, 5), I focus on how SP organizers negotiate tensions occurring between transnational homonationalism and local heteronationalism and how their sense of self as queer and their practices of national belonging are reconfigured. In an analysis of the name change from the Hungarian Pride parade to Dignity parade, Renkin argues that this transformation resulted from negotiations between national belonging and claims to universal, international human rights. Through a “dignity” discourse, parade organizers were able to actively associate themselves with global human rights discourses as well as with Western models of civil society-building and thereby advance EU accession (Renkin 2015, 420). At the same time, by moving toward “dignity,” organizers could avoid the Right wing's criticism of “pride” as “arrogant” and “libertine,” and instead they claim national belonging. Analyzing this maneuver, Renkin argues that the Hungarian queer parade not only reinforces but can also reconfigure boundaries of national and transnational norms, creating various political possibilities in

5. US Department of State, accessed April 28, 2017, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2016/04/256425.htm>.

the process. In many ways, Korean society's transformation and its desires to "catch up" with "advanced" Euro-American countries mirror the experiences of post-socialist countries. Against the backdrop of these factors, the next section analyzes how SP organizers and participants interacted with various actors and articulated their national belonging and membership in the global gay community.

Proud of Myself as LGBTQ

SP organizers regularly underscore the notion of "being myself." Their emphasis on "being proud of oneself as LGBTQ" in Korea is partially, if not entirely, constituted by and contributes to the operation of transnational homonationalism. Yet at the same time, organizers use the Euro-American embassies' strategy of homonationalism to criticize antigay movements and the Korean government's ignorance of LGBTQ rights. To some extent, efforts to support the SP parade and self-affirmation of LGBTQ pride emerged in response to fierce opposition that, as mentioned above, grew in 2014. In June of 2014, approximately 1,000 evangelical antigay protesters began to interrupt the SP parade by making loud noise and seeking to intrude on the performance zone. Stating that "homosexuality causes AIDS and is harmful to youth," antigay protesters argued that homosexuality not only arrests national development, but would also lead to the collapse of the nation-state. For example, right-wing and conservative evangelical groups even employed the Sewol ferry sinking, which led to hundreds of deaths in April 2014 and accusations of government negligence, to suggest that the parade was a distraction from genuine national priorities. Disparaging LGBTQ people as pursuing personal and inappropriate pleasures in the face of a national crisis, these evangelical, right-wing, antigay groups sought to lead popular opinion against LGBTQ people. Similarly, when the MERS (Middle East Respiratory Syndrome) became a pandemic in 2015, resulting in the deaths of 38 people in Korea amid accusations of governmental mistreatment of patients with MERS, antigay Christians opportunistically employed this national crisis to oppose the parade. As they spuriously claimed, "The MERS virus will

combine with HIV and then become a ‘super-virus,’ which will result in a national disaster. Therefore, we must prevent the parade.”⁶

During my fieldwork in 2016 and 2017, I encountered approximately 30,000 antigay people surrounding Seoul Square. Waving Korean flags, singing the national anthem, beating traditional drums, and wearing Korean traditional clothes, anti-parade protesters repeatedly chanted, “Homosexuality ruins our nation and national development built through our blood and sweat.” “No homosexuality! Pure Korea!”⁷ Even before the parade performance stage and booths were installed on the morning of parade day in 2016, antigay individuals had illegally occupied the square. Meanwhile, parade organizers, unsure about whether the Seoul municipal and national governments would remove antigay people from the square, arrived at 3 a.m. on parade day. I observed that organizers criticized government bodies for failing to actively intervene in the occupation.

Parade organizers were already disappointed with government officials. In December of 2014, Seoul’s mayor, the former pro-democracy activist Park Won-soon, withdrew his support of LGBTQ rights by refusing to accept the Seoul Charter of Human Rights, which included a prohibition of discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. In 2016 and 2017, Seoul city officials, under pressure from antigay movements, were reluctant to permit the SP’s use of Seoul Square, and they prohibited Pride participants from selling goods, even though the government had tolerated the commercial activities of participants who had used the square for other, nonqueer events. Parade participants thus criticized the Seoul government for complicity with evangelical antigay forces, ignorance of LGBTQ rights in Korea, and a failure to embrace basic liberal values (e.g., human rights).

Harboring distrust of the government and facing critiques from evangelical antigay people, pride organizers’ agenda of “being myself as

6. Shin Yoon Dong-wook, “Hyeomo, jeohang-eul kkaeuda” (Hate Awakens Resistance), *Hangyoreh* 21, June 26, 2015, accessed April 28, 2018, http://h21.hani.co.kr/arti/society/society_general/39789.html.

7. Unless otherwise noted, my account of SP parade events is based on fieldnotes I created from observations between the dates of June 11 and November 4, 2016, and January 31 and August 25, 2017.

LGBTQ” became their prime touchstone. Emphasizing the existence and dignity of the self as LGBTQ, the official slogan of the 2016 festival was “Queer I am, Kudos to who we are.” The official t-shirt reads “Queer I am, near I am, here I am, dear I am.” The festival organizers installed a big photo-zone in Seoul Square. The photo-zone reads “The world where I can exist as myself.” Participants photographed themselves and wrote statements about how “I can exist as myself” or declarations that “I am myself.” Here, pre- and post-parade performers, such as singers and dancers, chanted “I feel good because you are queer and so am I” and exclaimed “I am happy because I am gay” on the stage, receiving enthusiastic applause from participants. In 2017, an emcee at the KQCF opening night (July 14), a gay man, stated, “I came out two years ago on the same stage when we held the parade here at Seoul Square for the first time. This festival made me find the *real me*.” The emcees of the post-parade celebration performance in 2017 also shouted, “I hope that I am always a hero of my life beyond the limited time and place of pride.”

In the face of fierce opposition to holding a pride parade in Korea, for many participants self-affirmation as queer served as a novel political demonstration. For example, labor movement activist Ju-young⁸ argued that antigay protests provoked the participation of diverse groups of people in the parade and thereby redefined the pride parade as an event in which solidarity was formed. By the same token, though never having participated in SP parades before 2014 nor considering them interesting or important compared to Euro-American pride parades, three participants joined the organizing board in 2016. Driven by this external political context, they decided to “do good things,” and demanded that the government and other Korean citizens recognized the “rights to be myself.”⁹ One newly-joined organizer in 2017 also said “the antigay protesters’ disturbance of 2014 was so annoying” that it “fueled me to do something practical for LGBTQ people.”¹⁰ For them, antigay protests paradoxically showed that the public celebration of being queer can be disruptive of heteronormative public space.

8. Ju-young (Labor movement activist), interview by author, Seoul, August 2017. All personal names used in this paper, except those of ambassadors, are pseudonyms.

9. Jin (SP parade organizer), interview by author, Seoul, August 2017.

10. Kim (SP parade organizer), interview by author, Seoul, August 2017.

Transnational Homonationalism in Seoul Pride

SP organizers and participants demanded institutional guarantees from the Korean government for their efforts at “being myself,” including anti-discrimination laws for LGBTQ people. They chanted slogans during the parade march and enthusiastically applauded speakers who argued for LGBTQ rights. In particular, SP organizers actively relied on and appropriated the support of Euro-American embassies for LGBTQ rights and global human right discourses.

Since 2014, Euro-American embassies, including those of the US, France, and Germany, have participated in the SP parade by hosting booths at the event. From 2015, fifteen Euro-American embassies participated by giving supportive speeches on the pre-parade stage. These embassies actively contacted the KQCF organizing board in a way that exercised their agency over transnational homonational politics. In 2013, for example, a newly appointed Assistant Cultural Affairs Officer to the US Embassy in Korea, a gay man, first contacted the Center for Military Human Rights Korea, whose director was a veteran gay activist, to understand the relationship between the Korean military and Korean gay men. He was subsequently introduced to the KQCF organizing board and other LGBTQ movement organizations. With the help of the Center, the US Embassy hosted a booth at the 2014 SP event. In 2014, the gay staff at the French Embassy also contacted the KQCF organizing board “by noting that they wanted to engage with LGBT issues in Korea because France had faced (and resolved) similar issues in 2013.”¹¹ The French government legalized same-sex marriage in May 2013. One month later, the EU’s “Guidelines to Promote and Protect the Enjoyment of All Human Rights by Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersexual (LGBTI) Persons” also came into effect. Following these Guidelines (that declare EU member states’ commitments to protecting the human rights of LGBTQ people in non-EU member states), the French Embassy sought to “promote the visibility of local organizations promoting the human rights of

11. Sung (SP parade organizer), informal discussion with author, Seoul, June 2017, from author’s fieldnotes.

LGBTI persons [. . .] e.g., by endorsing cultural events” in Korea (European Union 2013, 7).

In managing Euro-American embassies’ participation, SP organizers reconfigured nationhood and selfhood. I discuss two levels at which participants and organizers used transnational homonationalism to their own advantage: 1) Organizers instrumentalized the embassies’ participation to guarantee their own events; and 2) LGBTQ Koreans, drawing on the legitimating power of the international community, reaffirmed LGBTQ rights as universal and global, human rights, as opposed to the narrow, obsolete perception of LGBTQ status that antigay people and local governments had held. Given the embassies’ participation, Seoul city officials and police officers could not simply ignore the parade events, and they ended up seeking cooperation with the organizing board. In a meeting to discuss the SP’s use of Seoul Square, one city official acknowledged the prestige embassy participation gave to the pride parade, describing it as “an important, international event that ambassadors attend.”¹² Police responsible for the security of the square asked organizers to provide lists of ambassadors who would participate in the parade and to minimize any potential physical collision between pride participants and antigay protesters in order to protect ambassadors. Organizers thus employed ambassadors’ presence to defend parade participants from antigay protesters’ potential physical abuse and interruptions, thereby securing their right to use this public space. As organizer Ji-min stated,

I sent a text message to the police’s official number, “US ambassador arrives soon at the square for the speech, but I cannot guide him because of noise that antigay people produced.” And then, the noise suddenly decreased. So, we need to send those texts at next year’s parade day.¹³

12. A city government official, statement made in meeting with SP organizers, Seoul, March 2017, from author’s fieldnotes.

13. Ji-min (SP parade organizer), statement made in assessment meeting, Yangpyeong, July 2016, from author’s fieldnotes.

The embassy participation was also very helpful in augmenting the tight budget of the pride parade. Given a lack of sponsorship by Korean corporations and the government, organizers asked embassies to pay booth participation fees higher than those of Korean social movement organizations. For example, fees charged to 7 booths that 13 Euro-American embassies shared made up one-fifth of the entire amount of participation fees charged to 102 booths at the 2017 parade.

In addition to the pragmatic deployment of international actors, organizers also sought to pressure the municipal and national governments by invoking a global human rights standard. For example, as SP organizer Ye-rim argues:

We need their [embassies'] participation because we can appeal to city government officials by saying "Don't waver anymore depending on the domestic political situation. Look broadly. Aren't you ashamed of yourself in the global age?" Their participation is also refreshing for parade participants.¹⁴

In fact, Euro-American embassies not only actively intervened in the KQCF but also in Korean LGBTQ movements more broadly. By forming cooperative relationships with LGBTQ organizations, embassies attempted to shape these groups' characteristics. In what follows, I will illustrate how the embassies exercised transnational homonationalism and how Pride organizers navigated such liberal politics in their imagination of the LGBTQ community.

In addition to the embassies of France and the US, those of Canada and the EU Delegation have actively striven to engage with Korean LGBTQ movements. These embassies invite activists from LGBTQ organizations with large memberships and from older, experienced organizations (ranging from leftist to moderate) to their embassies at least once a year. The embassy staff, or sometimes ambassadors themselves, have met with Korean activists to grasp what is at stake for LGBTQ people in Korea. They

14. Ye-rim (SP parade organizer), interview by author, Seoul, October 2016.

inquire about how Korean organizations want the embassy to help and advise Korean organizations what to do to improve LGBTQ Koreans' rights (e.g., bottom-up organizing and encouraging celebrities' coming-out). In their meetings, the embassy staff recommends queer films to be screened at the Korea Queer Film Festival, suggest casts for pre- and post-parade stage performances and speeches, and demonstrates willingness to help cast those candidates. For example, US Embassy staff recommended a Korean-American drag queen performer Kim Chi, and the Canadian Embassy recommended the participation of the Québec director, Xavier Dolan. The Canadian embassy also financially supported the Korea Queer Film Festival in return for the festival's screening of films that portray queer people's lives in Canada. In shaping a friendly partnership with the embassies, it became customary for the parade organizers to email an invitation to pride events to embassies in advance.

For its part, the US Embassy provided LGBTQ movement organizations with a diverse set of resources. Seeking to shape cooperative and friendly relations with Korean LGBTQ activists, the American Embassy invited activists to the US in late 2014 through the International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP). The embassy gave financial support to LGBTQ activists for the expansion of a Korean LGBTQ parent group into a PFLAG Korea chapter, which now welcomes approximately 50 participants at its regular meetings. In 2016, the embassy even financially supported a small college LGBTQ group when the group screened the film *If These Walls Could Talk 2* at Korea University. This film portrays issues of concern to the white lesbian community in the US, including the topics of pregnancy and butch-phobia.

In 2014, IVLP participants included SP organizers along with other LGBTQ activists from Solidarity for LGBT Human Rights of Korea (a left-oriented organization), Jogakbo (a transgender organization), and other organizations. The program consisted of local tourism (e.g., the White House and a Jazz club in New Orleans) and visiting mostly moderate, liberal LGBTQ movement organizations (e.g., Human Rights Campaign, a Republican gay politician in Utah, and lawyers engaging in same-sex marriage lawsuits).

This program encouraged Korean activists to learn and pursue the

liberal LGBTQ politics of the program's sponsors. For example, although Korean activists were able to share how they experienced and fought against discrimination at home, they were expected to learn from their US counterparts, rather than fully discuss and provide contextualized understandings of LGBTQ movements in Korea. For example, many US activists emphasized coming out strategies, the role of media representation, and legal battles for same-sex marriage. Describing the success of related efforts, they suggested that such efforts could be applied in South Korea, too (Osori 2015). Largely absent in this program, however, were opportunities to interact with progressive and radical queer movement organizations, like the Audre Lorde Project and Queers for Economic Justice, and with activists of color. By not fostering engagement with activists who critically consider how to address the intersections of race, class, and gender of transgender people of color, this program urged IVLP participants to adopt a simple notion of universal rights that obscures complex power relations. For example, stating that she learned that transgender women of color are in jeopardy and frequently murdered in the US (unlike in Korea), IVLP participant Seulgi expressed the necessity of recovering fundamental and abstract human rights for all LGBTQ people. By promoting strategies that do not challenge American sovereignty and its liberal norms, the US government influence serves to shape Korean LGBTQ movements and LGBTQ people in a way that expands American power over Korea, while discouraging Korean activists from questioning the liberal and self-referential aspects of these transnational politics.

These strategies may desensitize LGBTQ Koreans to the operation of homonationalism through its discourse and advocacy of a global gay community. The interpellation of LGBTQ Koreans as members of an imagined global gay community—constituents with the same and equal human rights as other members regardless of race, gender, and class—serves this purpose. In their supportive speeches on stage, for example, ambassadors encouraged Korean participants to envision one LGBTQ community. Declaring “Wherever you are, we side with you” in his speech on the pre-parade stage, then US ambassador, Mark Lippert, positioned himself as an ally of LGBTQ people around the world by expressing

solidarity with LGBTQ Koreans. His brief speech allowed LGBTQ Koreans to envision themselves and the US government (and, by extension, LGBTQ Americans and LGBTQ human rights institutions) as standing equally by side one another (W. Han 2017). Similarly, at the opening ceremony of the 2017 parade, the ambassador of the EU Delegation, Michael Reiterer, declared that “Your actions have brought positive change. Much remains to be done. Rest assured the European Union stands with you. Because Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Trans, Inter-sex, Straight—we all share the same dreams!” In introducing Euro-American ambassadors’ speeches in 2017, the emcee even stated that “Their support led me to realize that we are not the abandoned and feel re-assured that I made supportive friends.” Following the ambassadors’ speeches in 2016, the pre-parade stage emcee half-jokingly said “We [parade participants] should consult the Euro-American embassies to escape ‘Hell Korea’ and emigrate.”

These examples illustrate how LGBTQ Koreans aspired for a place in an imagined global LGBTQ community and the citizenship status of Western nations. Remarkably, parade participants even waved small Canadian flags (rather than Korean flags) that substituted the flag’s original red colors with rainbow colors, which the Canadian Embassy had distributed. In 2016, parade participants also carried bags featuring a rainbow-colored US map distributed by the US Embassy, and they photographed themselves with a life-size poster of the Obamas in front of a booth hosted by the US Embassy (W. Han 2017). These practices suggest that in criticizing the Korean government, some LGBTQ Koreans aspired to at least temporarily and partially align with LGBTQ citizenship, which Western embassies promoted as comparatively advanced.

However, such seemingly benign forms of global alignment can obscure the depoliticizing effects of transnational homonationalism. In an effort to sustain an imagined community and develop global gay citizenship, parade organizers sought to prevent the activities of participants that might disrupt that project. During the 2016 event, for example, one anti-imperialist activist picketed the US embassy booth in opposition to the American government’s exercise of military power over Korea. When this activist held a sign that read “Yankees, Go home!,” organizers immediately discouraged such forms

of protest. One parade organizer whom I interviewed even stated, “It is not appropriate or right for participants to oppose an organization that paid a booth fee in support of our event.”¹⁵ Although a few considered this picketing freedom of expression, many organizers understood the word “Yankee” as a form of hate speech. The word “Yankees,” common in discourses of anti-US imperialism and anti-US militarism, reminded organizers of the historical and hierarchal relations between Korea and the US, which thereby seemed to disrupt an imagined community. This incident did not produce further political discussions among festival organizers on how to approach the embassies’ participation and Euro-American nation-states’ governance. Instead, organizers emphasized the creation of a safe space where no participant should be offended.

With this example, I do not mean that pride organizers simply complied with Euro-American homonational logics. Rather, I suggest that they moved back and forth between pursuing belonging to a global gay community and instrumentalizing Euro-American embassies’ intervention as a legitimating force. Organizer Ye-rim clarified that the embassies’ participation is contingent upon the specific contexts of Korea now: “I do not think we will need the embassies in the future. . . . I also wanted to say, ‘take care of LGBTQ people in your country first.’”¹⁶

Moreover, in their traversal between these poles, pride organizers also found themselves unable to fully identify with homonational notions of global LGBTQ citizenship because of the imperial and racist limitations of queer liberal politics. For example, in his speech at the 2016 event, the chair of the UN’s Commission of Inquiry into Human Rights in North Korea compared North and South Korea, stating that human rights are not guaranteed by both governments. In obscuring different contexts that “oppress” North and South Korean human rights, this narrative overlooked how sexuality intersects with the nation-state, race, gender, and imperialism in South Korea and, instead, constructed a racist signifier of the oppressiveness of the Korean peninsula (W. Han 2017).

15. Su-bin (SP parade organizer), interview by author, Seoul, February 2017.

16. Ye-rim (SP parade organizer), interview by author, Seoul, October 2016.

Queer Developmental Citizenship: Negotiating Queer Liberalism and Korean Developmentalism

As discussed above, LGBTQ Koreans cannot fully identify with global norms of LGBTQ citizenship. Nor is it easy for LGBTQ Koreans to align with Korean norms of citizenship that do not yet recognize the basic human rights of LGBTQ people. In negotiating queer liberalism and Korean citizenship, some parade organizers construct what I call “queer developmental citizenship,” while others explore collective projects to make sense of queerness. In this section, I focus on addressing queer developmental citizenship. The conclusion of this paper will illustrate the collective practices of sense-making for LGBTQ Koreans. I also note that the two seemingly different tendencies are not mutually exclusive.

By queer developmental citizenship, I mean practices that LGBTQ Koreans engage in 1) to align with the model of citizenship in Euro-American countries through self-development and immigration; and 2) to develop a local model of Korean citizenship through moral self-development, but one that also corresponds to global standards of human rights. Without critically intervening in homonational hierarchies between Korea and Euro-American countries, such practices tend to fall short of fully confronting imperialism, developmentalism, and the neoliberal ethos that are embedded in and articulated with queer liberalism and heteronational models of Korean citizenship.

Let me begin with developmentalism and developmental citizenship. Developmentalism refers to a rationality that promotes a nation’s political, economic, and moral development to catch up with the perceived modernity of Western countries (Choi 2012; Jun 2012). Developmental citizenship refers to “a *de facto* political contract between citizenry and the state,” by which, for example, Korean people agree to pursue individual material interests through national economic development (Chang 2012, 188). However, the 1997 Asian financial crisis demonstrated that not all Korean citizens could enjoy its trickle-down effects. Here, the government sought to articulate developmental citizenship with the neoliberal ethos of self-development, transforming it into a (neo) liberal form of developmental

citizenship—self-development for national development (Cho 2008). Aligned with a (neo) liberal ethos, Koreans are encouraged to achieve national membership through moral self-development—for example, by embracing multiculturalism to catch up with the perceived advanced moral status of Western states (Jun 2012).

Meanwhile, evangelical churches and organizations have actively sought to articulate Korean heteronormativity by employing developmental discourses of citizenship. This is because developmental discourses served as a vehicle to support the evangelical tenet of material prosperity and the role of the heteronormative family as the fundamental unit of Christian reproduction (J. Han 2011). Here, the developmental state has provided institutional benefits (e.g., tax exemptions) as compensation for the churches' embrace and promotion of developmentalism. In the face of neoliberal restructuring, evangelical churches began to participate in the social welfare system through a partnership between GOs and NGOs that replaces government-driven social programs (Song 2009). In this way, churches have had a significant impact on civil society and municipal administration (W. Han 2017).

In response to shifting discourses of national development, self-development, and citizenship, evangelical churches have sought to reinforce heteronational citizenship, whereas pride organizers strive to reconfigure heteronormative citizenship. To examine queer developmental citizenship, I present two responses that SP organizers and participants showed in their engagement with developmentalism, homonationalism, and liberalism. First, to counter heteronormative alliances and their vision of developmental citizenship, some pride organizers declined to align with state developmentalism and instead affirmatively emphasized “being myself.” By accepting the tenets of self-government and self-development, some LGBTQ Koreans relied on “universalizing norms defined . . . by markets, neoliberal values, or human rights” and the pursuit of flexible citizenship in advanced countries (Ong 2006, 500). Meanwhile, other LGBTQ Koreans directed liberal developmental discourses at the Korean government and at non-LGBTQ Koreans whom they consider ignorant, whom they urged to develop tolerance toward LGBTQ Koreans.

Pursuing Flexible Citizenship through Self-Development

Pride participants and organizers pursued flexible citizenship in their embrace of immigration with less of a concern over national development. Although subtle, this engagement differs from Ong's (2006) formulation of flexible citizenship in Asia where those who seek nonterritorial citizenship strive to align their own development with that of the nation. According to the *Key Results South Korean LGBTI Community Social Needs Assessment Survey* (Chingusai 2014) over 90 percent of LGBTI respondents believed that Korea is not a good place for them to live. Indeed, most parade organizers I interviewed envisioned emigrating overseas, albeit not in a specific way, and dreamed of living a happy life with loved ones without fear of femicide¹⁷ or punishment for being gay in the military (W. Han 2017). Moreover, the normalization of temporary jobs and low-wages in Korea has made young LGBTQ people dream of migrating to countries that not only guarantee LGBTQ rights, but also provide stable working conditions and a pleasurable life.¹⁸

This impulse was frequently evident during my fieldwork. Parade organizer Eun-seo who was preparing to immigrate to country X¹⁹ at the time of our interview, said:

Of course, it is important for me that country X guarantees same-sex partnerships and provides same-sex couples with the rights of adoption. . . . I also chose that country because it will compensate me according to how much I work, unlike in Korea which did not properly compensate me.²⁰

17. In 2016, a misogynic man murdered a young woman in her twenties in downtown Seoul, which led many young women to feel resentment and fear of living in Korea

18. According to a survey conducted in 2017, more than 70 percent of Korean respondents aspire to emigrate overseas because of a highly competitive lifestyle and poor working conditions (Yi 2017).

19. Country X is one of these Euro-American countries. In order to retain the research participant's privacy, I anonymized the country's name.

20. Eun-seo (SP parade organizer), interview by the author, Seoul, November 2016.

To acquire citizenship in country X and work as a “white-collar” and “middle-class” worker who enjoys an “urban life,” Eun-seo was planning to attend graduate school and become a CPA. She was well aware that the government provides an immigrant with a CPA higher points needed to achieve citizenship status. Like Eun-seo, many LGBTQ Koreans strive to construct themselves as competent enough to become a citizen of another country, rather than focusing on the limitations of Korean citizenship. In addition to Eun-seo, four other parade organizers I met in 2016 and 2017 were also planning to emigrate to and/or study in Western countries, such as Germany, the UK, and Canada.

At the pride parades of 2016 and 2017, many Korean participants received brochures containing information about migration, mostly from Euro-American embassies that sought to demonstrate how they are protecting LGBTQ rights and are gay-friendly. Many consulted embassy officials about immigration, study abroad, or at least visits to their countries. In this way, LGBTQ Koreans’ effort to achieve flexible citizenship can resonate with the premise of Euro-American homonationalism.

Ethics of Self-Development for National Development

Other LGBTQ organizers, who have fewer resources for emigration or do not want to use emigration to attain foreign citizenship, seek to develop Korea as a gay-friendly nation-state but in ways that follow a developmental hierarchy. In these cases, they often emphasized personal change and achievement, thus inadvertently transforming LGBTQ politics into ethical and individual practices of self-development. Self-development in this case was directed at the majority population which, in their view, needed to become more tolerant of LGBTQ people. For example, the aforementioned Chingusai report stated that most LGBTQ people seek to change Korean society by raising people’s awareness of LGBTQ issues through personal communication (53.4%) and personal achievement (47.6%). Far fewer respondents chose to support collective activities through donations (23%) and engage with human rights organizations (16.5%).

Advocating personal achievement to change the public’s perception of

LGBTQ people coincides with liberal developmental ethics, but it is directed outwardly toward the non-LGBTQ world, rather than inwardly toward themselves. Such advocacy often takes the form of enlightening “ignorant” Korean people by improving Korean people’s ethical and civil practices and “tolerance” on a personal level. This focus on personal change re-orientes LGBTQ concerns away from politics, and toward personal dimensions of knowledge, enlightenment, and ignorance. This is reflected in efforts to change people’s perception through “my” (an LGBTQ individual’s) achievement and development as a “decent” person. For example, a lesbian Youtuber teaching TOEIC (English exam used for upwardly-mobile job opportunities) at a private institute jokingly emphasized on the stage of Pride 2016 that she was the person who improved the TOEIC scores of the antigay people’s children. In underscoring her competence, she sought to identify antigay people as failing to appreciate her decency, while enlightening “ignorant” antigay Koreans.

Such ethics of self-development often fail to critically engage with the developmentalist narrative of homonationalism, and instead reproduce it. For example, LGBTQ people who advocate for ethical practices of self-development reveal that the Korean government and people have not yet reached the advanced level of LGBTQ rights as compared to their Euro-American counterparts. Although such perceptions of Korea(ns) as backward could provoke SP organizers’ and participants’ anger against the government and encourage them to work collectively, such reactions can also inadvertently collude with the teleological narrative. As mentioned above, Euro-American ambassadors emphasized a temporal gap between South Korea and their own country in their speeches on the pre-parade stage. A representative from the Irish Embassy, for example, proudly stated at the opening ceremony in 2017: “Twenty four years ago, homosexual activity was decriminalized in Ireland, and the lives of Irish people changed.” This teleological narrative, in which dominant Western support of LGBTQ rights places Korea in a “backward” position, produces a “geopolitics of time” that locates the West in the future and Korea in the past (Rexhepi 2017, 246). Such developmental assessments based only on gay-friendliness fail to challenge global hierarchies and developmentalism. They even tend

to reinforce queerness as embodying a fixed, stable, and singular identity, rather than embodying and navigating tensions and dynamics among diverse norms, hierarchies, forces, and techniques.

By Way of Conclusion: Queer Collective Possibilities

As the alliances and interactions of SP organizers with local and international actors have demonstrated, LGBTQ Koreans traverse liberal discourses and developmentalism, criticizing the government and antigay protesters, but at the same time relying on homonationalism and developmental ethics. This does not mean that LGBTQ Koreans' practices fail to create conditions of possibility for queer politics. Their practices might not be considered as radical resistance or opposition. However, I argue that in negotiating between attachment to and detachment from universal human rights discourses and developmental ethics, LGBTQ Koreans create possibilities for constructing a queer subject that is not reducible to a stable, liberal, or developmental subject (Mahmood 2005; Muñoz 1999).

Through the case of Eun-seo and local LGBTQ activists, I consider the possibilities offered by the practices of LGBTQ people who navigate liberal and developmental norms and power relations while also transgressing the liberal developmental narrative through relationality and coalition. As discussed above, Eun-seo decided to emigrate not only because of her lesbian identity, but also because she grasped social and political conditions that made her precarious. Eun-seo also planned to engage with a movement organization for feminists of color in country X. Aware of her precarious position as a lesbian of color immigrant worker and reflecting on how she was supported by an organization during her previous stay in that country, she decided to contribute to such movements. Considered in this way, the production of neoliberal subjects only partially explains Eun-seo's simultaneous decision to emigrate to country X and to engage in feminist movements with local women of color. That is, rather than simply following a queer liberal politics that advances a unified LGBTQ identity and a self-containing subject, Eun-seo navigates and embraces her complex and

contradictory position—one that is overdetermined by racial, gendered, and geopolitical hierarchies and ideologies of developmentalism and liberalism. In doing so, she strives to reconstruct her queerness by positioning herself in new social relations which she helps to construct (Liu 2015). This understanding of Eun-seo encourages us to further examine how LGBTQ Koreans navigate the boundaries between the ethics of self-development and what I would like to call “an ethics of ourselves” that can lead to collective relationality (Muñoz 2009).

Korean LGBTQ activists also seek to create queer politics through interactions with other social movements. These interactions might prevent LGBTQ activists from moving forward, but they also can create possibilities for coalitional politics. For example, I observed how members of Solidarity for LGBT Human Rights of Korea, although not themselves SP organizers, began to discuss the connection between imperialism and sexual politics through engagements with other movements. By holding a talk with a pacifist activist a few weeks before Pride 2017, some LGBTQ activists began to consider how imperialism and militarism are embedded in queer people’s everyday life, including in the Pride parade itself. When the pacifist criticized and objected to the military, attendees felt confused because the talk seemed to contradict current efforts by Korean LGBTQ movement organizations to include LGBTQ people in the military. Moreover, this talk occurred just two months after the Korean military had punished gay officers for sodomy. At the same time, however, this confusion encouraged the attendees to consider how to draw the boundaries of LGBTQ politics and movements. In the process, attendees expressed their confusion about whether Korean LGBTQ movement organizations would receive grants from the US Embassy even when opposing deployment of the US Army’s Terminal High-Altitude Area Defence (THAAD) system in South Korea. They further discussed how to create LGBTQ people’s collective voices against the US imperialism and pink-washing, but without dismissing US activists’ fights for LGBTQ rights. Recognizing that there is no easy answer but instead more questions, attendees were forced think about how various axes of power continue to be articulated in relation to one another in ongoing struggles for equality and social belonging (Eng 2010, x). Likewise, building solidarity with labor

activists and feminists who have actively participated in pride parades since 2015 and who are also perceived as interrupting national development by capitalist and patriarchal norms, LGBTQ activists may reconfigure citizenship and queerness in ways that can critique both queer liberalism and developmentalism.

Further discussions on queer politics, queerness, and queer subjectivity in Korea can be extended by studying the precarious circumstances of a diverse population of LGBTQ people and their affective interactions with other socially marginalized actors. I hope that my research contributes to producing nuanced contemplations of Korean queerness, subjectivity, and citizenship that are not reducible to either/or logics.

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