



Battles in Seattle *Redux*: Transnational Resistance to a Neoliberal Trade Agreement

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Abstract: This paper examines the possibilities and complexities of transnationalism through an analysis of political protests organized in Seattle against the Korea–US Free Trade Agreement, arguably the most significant bilateral trade negotiations involving the US state today. By studying the political practices of the Korean farmers’ movement through participant research in Seattle from 4 to 9 September 2006, and revisiting the analysis of the 1999 “battles of Seattle” in recent work by Hardt and Negri, we argue that the concept “transnationalism” is potentially applicable to activists and subaltern social groups as much as states and elites, although these groups do not transnationalize through the same practices or in the same spaces. Our analysis of the protests aims to clarify the essentially spatial nature of political articulation (in Laclau’s sense) that make the transnationalization of social movements possible.

Keywords: Korea, Seattle, transnationalism, demonstration, trade

Introduction

When the Director General of the World Trade Organization (WTO) unexpectedly announced the “indefinite suspension” of the Doha round of trade negotiations on 24 July 2006, many economists and trade analysts criticized the US and European governments for failing to reduce their agricultural subsidies, thus derailing this important agreement. Some observers interpreted the sudden collapse of the Doha round as a setback for global integration and economic development (Sutherland 2006; Weisman and Barrioneuvo 2006). But not everyone was displeased with the result. On 28 July, farmers’ groups celebrated the failure of the Doha round by marching through the streets of Geneva to the WTO headquarters, calling for the complete removal of agricultural policy from the WTO’s purview (Via Campesina 2006). In the heart of the march, peasant leaders hauled a conspicuous wooden coffin,

festooned in brightly colored ribbons in the style of an elaborate funeral in rural Korea.¹ This coffin ostensibly symbolized the death of the Doha round, but it also demonstrated a curious fact: today, the face and leadership of the transnational farmers' movement against neoliberalism is predominantly *Korean*. From the streets of Cancún, Mexico, in 2003, to Hong Kong in 2005, the resistance to the WTO negotiations was led by Korean farmers: not only in terms of their numerical dominance among the protesters, but also through their extraordinary discipline, ideological commitment, and assertive media work.

With the decline of the Doha round, the most significant trade negotiations in the US today concern the proposed Korea–US Free Trade Agreement, or “KUSFTA” (see Office of the United States Trade Representative 2007). Arguing that the KUSFTA would reduce labor rights and job security, and also weaken environmental and health regulations, numerous organizations in Korea and the US united in 2006 to oppose the agreement. According to the US Congressional Research Service, the most politically sensitive issue in the negotiations is the demand by the Korean farmers' movement that Korean farmers “be protected from trade liberalization” (Cooper and Manyin 2006:26; also see Kiyota and Stern 2007). The Korean farmers' movement has sworn to defeat the KUSFTA in order to protect their rice-farming communities. Thus on 4 September 2006, 56 Korean protesters stepped off an Asiana Air flight at SEA-TAC airport and made their way toward downtown Seattle, where they executed a week of demonstrations against KUSFTA in close collaboration with their counterparts from US labor organizations.²

This situation is familiar to geographers: a social group crosses spatial barriers (often territorial) to broaden their social networks and enact some particular socio-spatial practice. In the literature, this sort of extension beyond and across national boundaries is often called “transnationalism”. In this paper, we examine transnationalism as a process effected by political practices, such as the protests organized against the KUSFTA negotiations in Seattle. States and elites are often the focus of literature on transnationalism, but they are not the only transnational actors: subaltern social groups and social movements may transnationalize as well. Our starting point is to recognize that while the concept “transnationalism” is potentially applicable to activists and subaltern social groups as much as states and elites, they do not transnationalize through the same *practices* or in the same *spaces*.³ This is not only because they typically reflect the positions of different social classes, but also because the “nation” they transcend, so to speak, also differs. Moreover, the practice of transnationalism varies spatially and in ways that reflect different global–local articulations. This gives rise to three thorny questions that, we suggest, critical geographers are well positioned to answer. First, in what ways do the particular

historical–geographical qualities and practices of a given social movement influence the ways in which it may become transnational (Glassman 2002; Jie 2001)? Second, exactly how is the “nation” transcended by different transnational actors (ie states and activists) different? How does this difference affect practices of transnationalism by the state and activists? Third, exactly how has the extension of neoliberalism contributed to, and been checked by, transnational resistance practices (Jackson, Crang and Dwyer 2004; Jessop 2002; Keck and Sikkink 1998; Peck and Tickell 2006; Piper and Uhlin, 2004; Wainwright and Ortiz 2006)?

To answer these questions, we analyze the protests organized against the KUSFTA agreement in Seattle. Our findings are based in part on participatory research conducted in Seattle from 4 to 9 September 2006. One of the authors (Kim, who is fluent in Korean and English) was present for all the protests. To situate our analysis of these protests, we interpret them against the backdrop of the 1999 protests over trade in Seattle (at which Wainwright was present). Our paper examines the 2006 protests in three steps: first, we examine how the Korean farmers’ movement has transnationalized; we then consider the 1999 and 2006 protests in Seattle; third, we analyze the socio-spatial dynamics of the 2006 protests in closer detail.

Transnationalism and the Korean Farmers’ Movement

We speak of the process through which social movements extend spatially and transform themselves as “transnationalism”, and not “globalization” (as in Peck and Tickell 2002), for several reasons. First, we contend that “transnationalism” is more conceptually precise: however much social movements (like the Korean farmers’ movement) transcend national territorial borders and the terrain of national political struggles, they remain everywhere tied to certain territorial spaces and national identities more than others. Thus, they are more or less transnational, not more or less “global”. Second, as the literature on transnationalism demonstrates, traits associated with anti-neoliberal social movements may be found in a number of social arenas. In human geography today, transnationalism is a concept most often associated with migration; Gordon and Breach, to take one example, define transnationalism as “the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement” (Basch et al. 1993:7; see also Jackson, Crang and Dwyer 2004). By contrast, some Marxists have used “transnationalism” to speak of the ties binding capitalists and state elites (Sklair 2001). This latter use is no doubt closer to that intended by Marxist economic geographers writing on “internationalization” (or “transnationalization”) of the capitalist state (see especially

Glassman 1999). Glassman defines the internationalization of the capitalist state as a process through which the state “becomes increasingly oriented towards facilitating capital accumulation for the most internationalized investors, regardless of their nationality. This process is a dimension of broader internationalization tendencies which, while not erasing national boundaries . . . has nonetheless created a set of elite-based transnational alliances which strengthen the possibilities for internationalized capital accumulation based less on national priorities than on shared transnational class interests” (673).⁴ Such a view, we argue, is essential for an analysis of the US and Korean states in the period after the 1980s, given the deepening of elite-based transnational alliances and the hegemony of neoliberal (as opposed to developmentalist) policies.

Our point is that the term transnationalism, as applied to resistance networks, underscores the fact that social movements are doing something at once like, and unlike, migrants and elites. Consider the transnationalization of the Korean farmers’ movement. The formation in 1990 of the Korean Peasants League (KPL) signaled the emergence of a more disciplined and united farmers’ movement. Its emergence was sparked by the Uruguay Round negotiations that went on to create the WTO, as well as pressure from the US state to open Korea’s rice market (cf. Abelmann 1996). That year, farmers mounted protests against agricultural trade liberalization notable for their nationalist rhetoric and their anti-American tone. Yet although Korean farmers started to resist the liberalization of agriculture markets in the early to mid 1990s, they nevertheless remained inside Korea, and their protests still targeted the Korean state. Yet the Korean farmers’ movement underwent a decisive shift in the late 1990s, a fundamental scalar shift in discursive and political practices. No longer were Korean farmers targeting Korean institutions exclusively, or even mainly; no longer, moreover, were Korean farmers speaking *as* Korean farmers per se.

In a word, the farmers’ movement *transnationalized*. Here our use of the concept goes beyond the two meanings outlined above. When we say that the Korean farmers’ movement transnationalized, we mean several things. First, the farmers’ movement reoriented and rearticulated around different sorts of claims. The prioritized theme of farmers’ organization statements in 1987 was *democracy*; 10 years later, it was *trade liberalization* (C-K Kim 2006). Prior to the financial crisis in 1997–1998, there was a clear connection made by the Korean public linking the Uruguay Round negotiations, the WTO, rice, and Korean farmers. In other words, “globalization” as defined by the GATT/WTO was thought to influence mainly agriculture and farmers. As a result, protests related to agriculture tend to appeal to nationalist sentiments (S-J Kim 2006). With the establishment of the WTO in 1995 and the Korean financial crisis in 1997–1998, Korean social movements

were forced to change. They recognized that the domestic problems they were facing—including job insecurity, threatened livelihoods and deteriorating human rights—were closely related to, if not caused by, neoliberal globalization. They therefore decided to extend their focus on building an anti-neoliberal, anti-globalization movement [interview with C-G Lee and Ju 2006; Korean People's Action against FTAs & WTO (KoPA) 2006]. Our emphasis on this is partly inspired by Kojin Karatani's writings on transnationalism and transcritique (Karatani 2001, 2003). In his statement of principles for the New Association Movement (or NAM), Karatani writes:

[O]ur starting point is a thorough scrutiny of associationism itself—why it has thus far been so ineffectual. *NAM intends to be transnational*. Thus we address the principles of our movement to the people of the world who struggle in various situations with the intention to abolish capitalism = nation = state, for a transnational solidarity and association (2001, our italics).

The complexity of this statement derives from the fact that “transnational” is used by Karatani both in its conventional sense (involving “the peoples of the world . . . in various situations”) and yet also, insofar as nation is equated with state and capital, indicates that the nation must be overcome and cannot serve as a basis for interlinking social struggles. This complexity cannot be papered over conceptually. It is an aporia at the heart of contemporary social struggles.

In the second place, the Korean farmers' movement transnationalized by targeting new objects and challenges. As the post-developmental Korean state was promoting bilateral trade and investment treaties with the US and Japan that contained clauses threatening workers and farmers, Korean social movements moved to strengthen solidarity with organizations and movements across the globe. When mobilizing against the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) in 1998, the need for international solidarity was deepened, leading a few Korean organizations to form a network of groups opposing the agreements (KoPA 2006). Arguably the turning point came in November 1999, when a delegation of Korean farmers and activists traveled to Seattle to protest at the Third Ministerial of the WTO (the Korean delegation's September 2006 arrival in Seattle therefore marked a literal return after seven years). After the November 1999 Seattle protests, the small group of organizations was broadened to form the Korean People's Action against FTAs & WTO (KoPA) in January 2000. KoPA initiated struggles against neoliberal globalization, focusing on bilateral investment and free trade agreements as well as the WTO, IMF, and World Bank. In 2001 and 2004, KoPA launched its campaigns against the Korea–Japan Bilateral Investment Treaty in solidarity with movements in Japan. In 2003, KoPA was responsible for mobilizing the “Korean Delegation for

the Cancún Struggle” which mobilized a team of 180 farmers, workers, and activists to Cancún to participate in the demonstrations against the Fifth WTO ministerial (KoPA 2006).

The mobilization for Cancún brings us to a third sense in which the movement transnationalized. Over time, the character of the movement has changed as its essentially Korean nationalist qualities have encountered the challenges of transnational mobilization. And, no doubt, the Korean farmer’s movement has faced these challenges and broadened the scales of its activities. Korean farmers’ activism against the WTO has aimed at extending their networks, reshaping power relations and gaining broader support. We can see this in the life and thought of Kyung Hae Lee, who became a martyr for the global farmers’ movement after his self-immolation at the head of a protest during the 2003 WTO ministerial in Cancún. In a text written shortly before his death, Lee elaborates how his struggles as a farmer from South Korea led him to identify with farmers from other parts of the world in opposition to the WTO and agricultural liberalization:

I am 56 years old, a farmer from South Korea who has strived to solve our problems with the great hope in the ways to organize farmers’ union. But I have mostly failed, as many other farm leaders elsewhere have failed . . . We cannot seem to do anything to stop the waves that have destroyed our communities where we have been settled for hundreds of years. To make myself brave, I have tried to find the real reason and the force behind those waves. And I have reached the conclusion, here in front of the gates of the WTO. I am crying out my words to you, that have for so long boiled in my body . . . Take agriculture out of the WTO.

Lee’s text concludes:

[U]ncontrolled multinational corporations and a small number of big WTO members are leading an undesirable globalization that is inhumane, environmentally degrading, farmer-killing, and undemocratic. It should be stopped immediately. Otherwise the false logic of neoliberalism will wipe out the diversity of global agriculture (K-H Lee 2003)

Lee’s determination inspired farmers’ groups from across the global south to rally against the Doha round and the liberalization of agricultural trade (Feffer 2006; Hernández 2003; Wainwright 2006).

These three changes are all exemplified in the recent struggles against KUSFTA, considered by many in Korea as the greatest threat facing Korea’s subaltern classes. The KUSFTA is understood by Korean social movements as a US-driven attempt to achieve, within a bilateral framework, what it has failed to win through the WTO’s multilateral negotiations. Thus, a new organization, called the Korean Alliance against the KUSFTA (KoA) was formed on 27 March 2006, to contend

solely with the KUSFTA. KoA is a coalition of 282 organizations, including trade unions, political parties, farmers' organizations, NGOs. As KUSFTA affects all the sectors and regions in Korea, KoA consists of 14 countermeasure committees organized by sector and 13 regional joint countermeasure committees. KoA's aim is to stop the KUSFTA by conducting research, networking with international groups, and mobilizing subaltern groups in Korea (KoA 2006). It was the KoA that organized the trip of the activists to Seattle.

The protests in Seattle of 5–10 September 2006 were an outcome of Korean activists' efforts to build transnational solidarity after the 1999 Seattle protests, especially between Korean and US labor unions. The coordination between the KoA and US unions for the 2006 protest was based on the already established connection between the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU, a member of the AFL-CIO) and the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU). Based on a mutual understanding that the KUSFTA will threaten the rights and livelihood of workers, AFL-CIO and KCTU issued a joint statement in June 2006, condemning the accord. The ILWU helped Korean farmers and activists organize protests against the KUSFTA in Seattle as a local host. The critical forms of logistical coordination for the protests—permits, protest marching routes, charter buses, parking spaces, as well as education about local protest practices—were arranged by the ILWU. The ILWU also provided space in Seattle's famous Labor Temple for press conferences, an international forum, meetings, orientation, and a farewell party. Throughout the week of activities, the coordination between ILWU and Korean protesters was carefully balanced to allow for genuinely collaborative decision-making, not only politically but also concerning practical matters, such as the Korean delegates' accommodations.

Korean transnationalism in Seattle came partly through the emergence of a small but crucial group of young Korean–American activists. This relatively small group—culturally and linguistically at home in Korea and the USA, and ideologically committed to the left—played a key role in the Seattle protests.⁵ Emerging from several grassroots organizations based in New York and Los Angeles which focused on particular issues related to Koreans, including immigrant workers and national reunification, these Korean–American activists broadened their work to include labor issues, racism, war, and imperialism [Koreatown Immigrant Workers Alliance (KIWA) 2006; interview with J-Y Kim 2006]. Joint protests by Koreans and Korean–Americans began during the first round of talks in Washington DC, in June 2006. These joint protests were made possible through the formation of Korean–Americans Against War and Neoliberalism (KAWAN), a network formed in April 2006, in response to the announcement of the KUSFTA negotiations. A coalition of six progressive Korean–American

organizations, KAWAN is dedicated to struggling against the military and economic violence caused by the US state and corporations around the world. KAWAN collaborated with KoA and other organizations to oppose the KUSFTA as well as the expansion of US military base in Pyongtaek, Korea. Through KAWAN, Korean–American activists from LA, San Antonio, San Francisco, New York, Washington DC and Seattle played a critical role in organizing the Seattle protests. Korean–American activists accommodated Korean protesters by obtaining protest permits, provided translation and security, and teaching Korean activists about US protest regulations.⁶

Multitudinousness in Seattle

Radical geographers have recently analyzed the socio-spatial practices through which transnational social movements have performed resistance—from Seattle (Wainwright, Prudham and Glassman 2000) to Bangkok, Thailand (Glassman 2002), Miami (Wainwright and Ortiz 2006), and Cancún, Mexico (Wainwright 2006). In different ways, these studies have contributed to geographical knowledge by mapping out the “spaces of mobilization” (Miller 2004) through which diverse social groups articulate novel forms of dissent (see also Blomley 2007; Chatterton 2006; Evans 2005; Mitchell and Staeheli 2005; Piper and Uhlin 2004; Sundberg 2007; Wright 2005).

Notwithstanding the growing interest among geographers in transnational politics, arguably the best known theoretical account of the emergence and nature of global resistance movements is that offered by Hardt and Negri in *Empire* (2000) and *Multitude* (2004). Indeed, any discussion of trade politics and resistance to it immediately brings to mind the now famous Seattle demonstrations of 29–30 November 1999. Revisiting Hardt and Negri is due here not only because the Korean activists’ actions in Seattle should be heard as a refrain, since the participation of Korean farmers in 1999 sowed the seeds for the demonstrations of 2006, but also because certain parallels between the Seattle protests of 1999 and 2006 are striking: both occasions saw disputes over trade, state power, and uneven economic development; each time, transnational activist networks “touched down” and briefly transformed the streets around Seattle’s Convention Center from a conventional urban space into a stage for resisting “neoliberal globalization”.⁷ More importantly, it demonstrates how a microscopic analysis emphasizing socio-spatial practices is crucial in analyses of transnational social movements. We first reexamine Hardt and Negri, and then turn to our analysis of Korean activists’ resistance practices.

Although a lot of ink has been spilled about these books, a brief discussion of these texts is warranted, for (to our knowledge) none of

the critics of Hardt and Negri have examined the importance of the 1999 Seattle protests for their argument. Particularly in *Multitude*, the “battle in Seattle” serves—along with the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas—as the signal illustration of the emergence and political character of the multitude. Calling the Seattle protests “the coming out party” of the multitude’s “new cycle of struggles” (2004:215), Hardt and Negri celebrate the new subjects that sang in “a chorus that spoke in common against the world system” (288). In Seattle, at long last, the “old oppositions” that have divided the multitude “seemed suddenly to melt away” (287).⁸

Without elaborating a thorough critique of Hardt and Negri (see Amin 2005; Balakrishnan 2003; Coleman and Agnew 2007; Laclau 2001; Zizek 2005), a comment on their interpretations of the “battle in Seattle” is in order. Consider again the place of this event in their conception of multitude. In a 2002 discussion with Samir Amin, Michael Hardt links multitude and Seattle in this way:

This is what Toni Negri and I try to grasp with the term “multitude” . . . [M]ultiplicity remains in an unreduced fashion in a common project. The network seems to be a good metaphor for this. A distributed network in one way never poses contradictions between different points, since there is always a means of triangulation. This was one of the things that seemed most puzzling about Seattle. Here are groups that we thought objectively in contradiction with each other—trade unionists and environmentalists, but also anarchists, church groups, lesbian groups, and so on. Yet, they functioned together in a way that the contradiction did not play out. All contradictions were displaced within this network structure (Amin et al 2002:5).

The “battle of Seattle” arguably comprises *the* key metaphor for multitude because they find it reflects a fundamentally new political situation—one in which contradictions were displaced, with multiplicity left unreduced, by life-affirming, network-based organizing.

Would that it were so. To this argument we register three geographical comments. First, the micro-geographies of resistance *within* Seattle during the 1999 protests were much more nuanced, complex, and uneven than imagined by Hardt and Negri. Different subgroups protested through different practices, toward different ends, in different spaces (see Heyman 2004; Wainwright 2006; Wainwright, Prudham and Glassman 2000). These distinctions were not only readily apparent at the time to those present (and noted in many press accounts); they were perhaps the major point of contention in post-“battle” debates on the left about who succeeded and who failed to do their part (cf Cockburn and St Clair 2000).

Second, we should remember that the macro-geographies of involvement in the battles of Seattle were profoundly shaped by globally

uneven dispensations of power and wealth. The distinct groups that Hardt celebrates for functioning together so smoothly—“trade unionists and environmentalists, but also anarchists, church groups, lesbian groups”—were mainly white citizens of the US and Canada, that is, relatively privileged proletarians in the world system. Without denying the important ideological differences between, say, a 20-something white male anarchist from Eugene, Oregon, and a 30-something, male blue-collar worker from Vancouver, or a female student environmentalist from the University of Washington (to take three of the archetype subject positions of the “battle”), the key geographical observation is that nearly all of the activists came from, and identify with the politics of, the host country and its wealthy northern neighbor. Here we must bear in mind that the key issues debated in the WTO in Seattle set the so-called “Quad”, including the US and Canada, against the global south. And the dominant demand of the groups present in Seattle—to reform the WTO so as to incorporate labor and environmental standards—reflects their global position.⁹ The really difficult left politics surrounding the WTO concern not differences between US-based “anarchists, church groups, [and] lesbian groups” but those between subaltern groups in the global south and those of the capitalist, democratic states of the global north. On this point Hardt and Negri have nothing to say vis-à-vis Seattle, yet the geographical nature of these conflicts were readily apparent to those who followed the events there (Lal Das 2003).¹⁰

This point leads to our third criticism. What is perhaps most remarkable about their use of the metaphor of the “battle in Seattle” is their failure to note that the Seattle Ministerial *resumed* after the multitude shook the streets on 30 November 1999. It bears repeating that a full-scale, four-day Ministerial took place in the subsequent days, replete with a visit by President Bill Clinton, the usual arm-twisting by the Quad, and an all-night green room session that nearly produced what later came to be known as the Doha round. The ultimate unraveling of the Seattle Ministerial was caused from conflicts *within the WTO Ministerial* among divided state elites—divided along north–south lines (see Lal Das 2003). In Seattle, the global south refused the agreement offered by the US and the Quad. Perhaps Hardt and Negri’s failure to comment on the role of these conflicts between capitalist states in bringing down the WTO Ministerial reflects their anti-Leninist, anti-vanguardist tone: it is hardly pro-multitudinous, but nevertheless correct, to recognize that certain state elites contributed fundamentally to the battles in Seattle.

Hardt and Negri are hardly alone in misattributing the collapse of the WTO talks to an unreduced, spatially undifferentiated multitude. But the prominence of their arguments, and the importance of Seattle as a metaphor in their works, makes theirs an especially significant mistake.

With this said, we may now return to Seattle with the Korean protesters. To restate our central argument in different terms: just as it mattered enormously that different social groups demonstrated and resisted in different spaces in Seattle in 1999, so too does it matter that the anti-KUSFTA protests occurred in Seattle, where they were regulated by particular spatial practices and inherited geographies. The 2006 Seattle protests suggest how particular social movements may or may not transnationalize: by recoding and rearticulating specific historical–geographical processes that are ostensibly “national”, and in so doing, producing spatial practices of resistance that are taken to be transnational. And these spatial practices, we argue, are part of what produces the *capacity to be multitudinous*. In framing the argument in this way, we extend one of Laclau’s criticisms of Hardt and Negri where Laclau argues that “multitudes are never spontaneously multitudinarian; they can only become so through political action” (Laclau 2001:10). Here we turn to consider the political actions that enabled the “multitudinarianism” and transnationalization of the Korean farmer’s movement, that is, the conditions of possibility of the transnational qualities of the September 2006 protests in Seattle.

Seattle in 2006: Transcending Nationalism

In the course of increasing the degree of transnationalization in pursuit of free trade and economic integration, states commonly rely upon certain spatial strategies and practices that are predominantly territorial, ie, *geopolitical*. In Seattle, the US state exercised control over its sovereign territory against potential Korean activists so that only those (ostensibly nationally oriented) elites could travel to Seattle, to negotiate the KUSFTA.¹¹ The state’s exercise of control over entrance into its sovereign territory through border and immigration restrictions may prove to be a severe limitation to transnational social movement. Although more than a hundred Korean activists had planned to travel to Seattle to protest against the KUSFTA, many were denied entry. Compared to the 900 Korean farmers and workers who came to the anti-WTO protest in Hong Kong in 2005, and the 150 Korean protesters who came to Washington DC to protest in the first round of KUSFTA negotiation, the 56 Korean protesters in Seattle were felt to be shamefully few in number. (The elites who comprised the Korean official delegation did not, of course, face such difficulties; 218 Korean representatives—from 26 government offices and 13 government-sponsored research institutes—traveled to Seattle without difficulties.)

The US state’s practices for regulating the spaces of dissent (police tactics, regulations on protest, and so forth) influenced the protests by Korean farmers and activists in Seattle. Korean protesters were relatively dispirited and restrained, for they had been told that they

would face serious legal problems if arrested by the Seattle police. They studied American laws before departure and tried to protest legally and peacefully in the US. During the protest, Korean protest leaders advised protestors not to give their full name to anyone to prevent leaks of personal information to the US state. Compared to the relative gentleness and kindness of the Hong Kong police, Seattle police were ready to use physical force, including tear gas, tazers, and clubs. The inferiority in weaponry and numbers resulted in great frustration by Korean activists. They could not risk employing direct action to prohibit Korean delegates from entering the Convention Center. Considering the militant protest practices of Korean social movements, the turnout size as well as the protest tactics practiced in Seattle suggest that Korean protesters were influenced by state strategies.

Despite the state's legal monopoly over regulating spaces of dissent, Korean farmers and activists demonstrated a number of nonviolent, creative and festival-like practices, at once Korean yet intended to gesture beyond Korean nationalism. On 6 September, Koreans led around 750 US workers and activists in a rally and march from Westlake Park downtown to the Convention Center. The march was focused and brief, lasting only two hours. Two leaders led the group in chant and song in two languages (Korean protesters chanted in English, but not the other way around). When the activists arrived at Seattle's Convention and Trade Center, after some shouting and whistling to the Center, the group stopped at the arch of the Convention Center so that Korean protesters could perform *Pung-mul*, a Korean folk tradition involving drumming, dancing and singing. *Pung-mul* served as an important part of the Korean protest, for it attracted the public's attention while inspiring the energy of the protesters. *Pung-mul* is rooted in the Dure collective labor farming culture, and was originally played during farm work, or on rural holidays, and at village community-building events. Today it articulates a tradition of the common in rural life with political protest and folk performance, blurring the boundaries between performers and audience, as audience members may enthusiastically sing along and join in the step of the dance.

Just as in Hong Kong and Geneva, Korean activists also carried materials to conduct a traditional Korean funeral in Seattle. They built a colorfully decorated bier and dressed in Korean funeral clothing in front of the Federal Building at 1 pm on 9 September. Ki-Kap Kang, a member of National Assembly played the role of chief mourner in front, and several Korean activists dressed in Korean funeral clothing carried the bier on their shoulders. The mass followed in the back. They walked through large crowds at Pike Place Market and Victor Steinbrueck Park singing a bier-carriers' song in low tones. Their performance dramatized the effect the KUSFTA would have on subaltern classes in both Korea and the USA, especially workers and farmers.

Three Steps, One Bow

Korean protesters also performed a distinctive march called *Sam-bo Il-bae*, which means “three steps, one bow” on the afternoon of 8 September 2006. The march, involving more than a hundred participants, started at the Convention Center, circled Westlake Plaza, then returning to the Convention Center—a distance of 1.5 km. Korean activists led the march, with a few Seattleites following them. Unlike typical marches that are often performed in protests, *Sam-bo Il-bae* is physically painful because it involves bowing down upon one’s knees to the ground (Figure 1). And whereas the “spirit” of most political marches in the US today is conventionally measured by the collective volume of the multitude, this march is carried out in strict silence. We read the bow and silence as gestures of not only prayerful introspection, but also resistance to the inevitable representation of the practice of *Sam-bo Il-bae*. Whereas the point of a conventional political march in the US today is precisely to deliver a point (the model here would be that of a single message, chanted in unison by all), *Sam-bo Il-bae* resists interpretation even as it registers as an act of active resistance.¹²

We stress that the “nation” that Korean activists transcended in Seattle is not simply territorial or state centered. To elaborate, we consider the case of the *Sam-bo Il-bae* march. The practice has its roots in the ascetic values of Korea’s Buddhist tradition. Each of the three steps is said to register a specific lesson. During the first step, one is said to destroy



Figure 1: *Sam-bo Il-bae* march. On 8 September 2006, over 100 people participated in *Sam-bo Il-bae* march in downtown Seattle, to demonstrate against the proposed KUSFTA. Here, a demonstrator (one of the authors) bows

selfishness and avarice; through the second, one abandons the tainted lack of mindfulness associated with secular living; and through the third step, one wipes away prior disgraces. Taken together, we could say that the performance of the three steps and bow is a form of penance, understood here in Buddhist (not Christian) terms. Through the formal, collective reiteration of the pattern, one repents the selfish and thoughtless acts one has done, eases toward an enlightened mindfulness, and pledges oneself to help all the world's beings.

Sam-bo Il-bae's arrival in the USA during the 2006 Seattle protests follows a recent pattern, in which Korean activists have incorporated the march into their ensemble of resistance practices. Even in Korea, *Sam-bo Il-bae* is of recent provenance. It was first performed on 28 March 2003, by trio of spiritual figures—a Buddhist monk, a Protestant pastor, and a Catholic priest—in a restoration movement against the reclamation of SaeManGum located in Jeonbuk province which increased environment degradation (Korean Federation for Environmental Movement 2007). Although rooted in Buddhist practices, these three different religious leaders reconstituted the practice as a way of protesting against land degradation. They started *Sam-bo Il-bae* in Buan, a town in Jeonbuk province on Korea's west coast, and proceeded 303 km to Seoul. Their journey took 65 days. By their arrival in Seoul, they had been joined by more than 1000 participants.

We could interpret the performance of *Sam-bo Il-bae* in Seattle as “transnational” in the narrow, conventional sense; that is, as the mere extension of a cultural practice from one place to another in order to draw out a particular socio-spatial connection. While this reading would not be incorrect, it would fail to grasp a deeper implication of the *Sam-bo Il-bae* march: that it is not “traditionally Korean”, for it is neither ancient, nor traditional, nor “Korean” in a conventional sense. Although practiced by Koreans, *Sam-bo Il-bae* is “Korean” in a way that transcends, indeed resists, narrow and conservative interpretations of what it is to be Korean. To put this differently: *Sam-bo Il-bae* is essentially *trans*-national insofar as it *transcends* the nation and, in so doing, *transforms* our conception of that very nation. The “Korea” that *Sam-bo Il-bae* performs is neither the narrowly defined Korea of Korean nationalism, nor the capitalist, “transnational Korea” represented by the elite representatives of the Korean state who were in Seattle to negotiate the KUSFTA. It is transformative insofar as it reworks Korean practices in a socio-spatial form that resists, yet remains identifiable as “Korean”. We would claim that they were transnational not only by virtue of the fact that they were “protests” against the Korean state executed in the territory of the USA, but because they were intended to produce a crisis of Koreanness—and also Americanism. It is therefore a citational practice in Judith Butler's sense (1993:9–16), one that reiterates “Koreanness” differently and thus calls into question the nation as such.

Of course, this problematized “Koreanness” may be widely and differently interpreted by the observers of a *Sam-bo Il-bae* march. Geography matters for the interpretation of political practices. Take, for instance, the performance of *Sam-bo Il-bae* by hundreds of Korean farmers on 15 December 2005, during the Sixth Ministerial of the WTO in Hong Kong. As the silent march wound slowly through Wan Chai, Hong Kong, thousands of Hong Kongese watched reverentially from the sidewalks, palpably amazed at the discipline and unity executed by the farmers. In the Hong Kong media, *Sam-bo Il-bae* was subsequently interpreted as a *Confucian* practice; some suggested that the strong effect of this particular march on the Hong Kongese reflected their appreciation of a specifically *pan-Asian* form of demonstrating resistance. Remarkably, the Chinese state even allowed news coverage of the march—which closed off Wan Chai district for several hours—to be rebroadcast in south China, something that “local Chinese governments do not generally do” (Loong-Yu 2007:129). Thus the purportedly transnational (ie border-crossing) quality of this “Korean” act not only resonated in Hong Kong, generating sympathy towards the Korean farmers, but also opened new space for communicating resistance—that is, *demonstrating*—in mainland China. Although a Korean historian might point out that the Chinese and Hong Kongese misinterpreted the origins of *Sam-bo Il-bae* as Confucian, not Buddhist, our point is that the multiple and felicitous potential readings of *Sam-bo Il-bae* suggest something powerful about its potential as a transnational socio-spatial practice. Again, the “Korea” represented through *Sam-bo Il-bae* is no longer “national”, but potentially “pan-Asian”—or something other entirely.

By contrast, when the Korean activists performed *Sam-bo Il-bae* in Seattle on 8 September 2006, the response from the urban public was altogether different from Hong Kong. To Seattleites, *Sam-bo Il-bae* seemed to be read as authentically Korean, not to mention a strange thing to do in the middle of the city. The Seattleites who observed this cultural practice on the street did not seem to understand what was happening. Certainly, a deep bow upon one’s knees is not familiar gesture to most Americans. The slow, silent march seemed unconventional in a way that produced confusion and discomfort more than reverence. The march thus interrupted the mundane urban engagements in Seattle, albeit in a way different from Hong Kong. Some bystanders photographed the *Sam-bo Il-bae* march as though it were just another urban spectacle or cultural parade.

Conclusion

We conclude by drawing out two arguments from our analysis. The first concerns the essential spatiality of articulation and underscores

the geographical dimension of the criticism leveled by Ernesto Laclau against Hardt and Negri. Laclau presupposes that society as such is always already internally, and fundamentally, divided. Therefore he argues that “the *volonté générale*”, or “general will”, a concept of Rousseau’s, “requires representation as its primary terrain of emergence” (2001:6). Such representation always implies articulation, the forging of disparate positions into effective discourse. As Laclau explains:

This means that any “multitude” is constructed through political action—which presupposes antagonism and hegemony. Hardt and Negri do not even pose this question, because for them the unity of the multitude results from the spontaneous aggregation of a plurality of actions which do not need to be articulated with one another (2001:6).

We stress that the labor of articulation always involves linking of subjects and discourses, signs and bodies in and through particular spaces. Every such articulation entails spacing, a space within which to assemble contingently. It follows from this that the particularity of spatial practices matters for the ways that certain articulations may or may not come to be thematized *as* protest, or *as* political. This is why—returning again to Seattle—the stakes are so high with Hardt and Negri’s claim that the 1999 Seattle protests comprised “the coming out party” of the multitude. Although they ask us to understand multitude as a general, global category, surely we must be able to see multitude acting *somewhere* in particular. Upon reflection, however, the streets of Seattle were not the becoming-space of the multitude—neither in 1999, nor 2006. Rather, Seattle served as an uneven stage upon which certain political performances could and did play out.

Urban spaces (like the streets of downtown Seattle) may well be constitutive of political performances, but they are not equally conducive to all struggles and positions. Protest performances unfold through spaces, and it is partly through the spacing of protest that we can see the regulation of dissent most clearly. The iteration of demonstration practices in Seattle is effective partly because demonstrating, like all social practices, is patterned by pervasive (if not clearly understood) social norms. In the case of demonstrations performed in the contemporary USA, for instance, the crucial norms operate upon the urban space and the body, serving to regulate the relations between these in ways that are immediately recognizable to urban dwellers. These norms may well be unsettled by difference in the iteration of protest performance (as we have suggested of *Sam-bo Il-bae*); yet this only underscores the hegemonic quality of the regulation of dissent.

Although we have argued that the Korean activists were relatively successful in transnationalizing their movement from Seoul to Seattle,

whence Cancún, Hong Kong, and back to Seattle, the very fact of their (no doubt extraordinary) globe-trotting should not obscure the limitations of their transnationalization. On one hand, their movements must confront territorializing power (eg state strategies that circumscribe movement); on the other, the costs of their expeditionary protests comprise a real burden for a movement of workers and farmers. State and capital need not openly repress dissent in order for transnational protests (or, protests that aim to construct multitude) to be spatially normalized. To reiterate our first conclusion in slightly different terms: transnational mobilization—the difficult work of travel, coordination, translation, negotiation, mobilization, alliance building, etc—hinges crucially upon the labor of articulation. And the complex spatiality of this special sort of labor matters for whether and how it takes place, and to what effects.

Our second conclusion concerns the nation and transnationalism, and their relation with the Marxist tradition. We begin by returning to a passage in the *Manifesto* where Marx and Engels discuss nationalism:

The Communists are further reproached with desiring to abolish countries and nationality. The working men have no country. We cannot take from them what they have not got. Since the proletariat must first of all acquire political supremacy, must rise to be the leading class of the nation, must constitute itself the nation, it is so far, itself national, though not in the bourgeois sense of the word (1994 [1848]:174).

Marx and Engels thus pose communism contra nationalism, “in the bourgeois sense of the word”, that is, as it actually existed in Europe in the mid-nineteenth century, and they argue for overthrowing capitalism *and* nationalism. But curiously, to accomplish its historical purposes they contend that “the proletariat must first of all acquire political supremacy”, must become the hegemonic class, “must constitute itself the nation”. In this sense the proletariat would become “the nation”, but not the nation we associate with European nationalism and its essential ontopology (see Derrida 1994:82–83). As nation, the proletariat must somehow transcend the boundaries of nations and reconstitute disparate groups into an encompassing (not to say totalizing) ensemble. By our reading, in the *Manifesto* Marx and Engels affirm a communist ethics of transnationalism, or more precisely, they affirm the struggle of subaltern groups to articulate transnational communism as a counterpower to nationalist capitalism.

This reading is suggested by a distinction that Marx and Engels draw in the *Manifesto*:

National differences and antagonism between peoples are daily more and more vanishing, owing to the development of the bourgeoisie, to freedom of commerce, to the world market, to uniformity in the mode of production and in the conditions of life corresponding thereto (1994 [1848]:174).¹³

Marx and Engels thus claim that some of the conditions for the moment when the proletariat may “constitute itself the nation” are, ironically, facilitated by what we today call “globalization”, as “the development of the bourgeoisie . . . freedom of commerce” and “the world market” reduce the distance and antagonisms between peoples. Yet this does not mean that this process has been motivated by some moral or rational principle. On the contrary. As Kojin Karatani reminds us, “the movement of capital, the hoarding drive, that unwittingly has been forming the globalization of ‘humanity’ in the world, does not have a rational motivation” (2003:211). Yet it persists.

Our second conclusion is therefore that the protests in Seattle bear out Marx and Engels on this point. Transnationalism in Karatani’s sense of “the globalization of humanity” has indeed advanced as a consequence of the long-term global extension of capitalist social relations. This is how we interpret the Seattle protests, both of 1999 and 2006: as efforts, however partial or limited, to overcome national differences and antagonisms through struggle against the liberalization of capital by workers, farmers, and subaltern groups. Though the diverse groups that protested in Seattle did not call themselves “communist”, they may be interpreted as advancing the critique of nationalism found in the *Manifesto*.

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Endnotes

¹ Though our paper concerns only *South* Korea, we refer throughout to “Korea” and “Korean activists”. We do so for sake of brevity, and following the norms of Korean academic discourse.

² The first round of negotiations took place in Washington DC on 5–9 June 2006, the second round in Seoul on 10–14 July 2006, and the third round in Seattle on 6–9 September 2006. There were large demonstrations against the KUSFTA outside these conference locations.

³ Neither globalization nor neoliberalism is entirely anti-statist. Although both neoliberalism and globalization are often associated with the decline of state power, both have been facilitated by and are in turn transforming state practices and institutions (Glassman 1999; Jessop 2002).

⁴ We agree with Glassman that “transnationalization” is preferable to internationalization as a conceptual term (Glassman 2006, personal communication).

⁵ This marked a substantive change from the past. During expeditionary protests in Hong Kong (2005) and Cancún (2003), Korean activists received no support from Koreans who lived in Hong Kong and Cancún. Rather, the general public in Hong Kong and Hong Kong People’s Alliance on WTO helped organize the material support needed for the protests (Lyoong-Yu 2007:128–129). Likewise, the groundwork for the Cancún protests was laid by a network of Mexican leftists.

⁶ Since the interests of KAWAN and individual Korean–American activists are not limited to “Korean issues”, they aimed to broaden the solidarity through the Seattle protests by facilitating diverse participation. For instance, the Korean–American activists involved in KAWAN coordinated a performance where Latino musicians sang an anti-FTA song; Philippine–American speakers criticized imperialism and read poems; a Mexican activist spoke about maquiladoras, etc. KAWAN also pursued cooperation among diverse groups by organizing an international forum on free trade.

⁷ Some of the same actors were involved in both events. We dedicate this paper to one of these key activist-intellectuals who participated in both “battles of Seattle”, JFK Brier. Brier collaborated with us in our participatory research in 1999 and 2006.

⁸ Hardt and Negri have little to say about how this unity and success was achieved—who provided the leadership, for instance, or who paid for the activist training camps—which suits their reading of Seattle as a quasi-spontaneous emergence, but weakens our ability to learn from this event. Fundamental divisions—on tactics; on anarchism-versus-state-centrism; on reform-versus-elimination of the WTO; on emphasis of protection of US workers versus labor internationalism—divided the “multitude” in Seattle. We heard no “chorus that spoke in common” in Seattle, but saw rather different strands of opposition to the WTO, spatially separated in ways not well characterized by the network metaphor.

⁹ As well as their willingness and capacities to resist far from home. Notably few of the Seattle battle veterans turned up at the subsequent WTO Ministerials in Doha (2001), Cancún (2003), and Hong Kong (2005).

¹⁰ The international peasant movement network, *La Via Campesina*, staged its first US-based press conference in Seattle, where they condemned the WTO and called for the removal of agriculture *tout court* from the WTO’s purview. There were very few in attendance (rather remarkably, of the few was the late US Senator from Minnesota, Paul Wellstone).

¹¹ We say “ostensibly” because the elites negotiating the KUSFTA are “transnationals” in Sklair’s sense, and also because the KUSFTA would only increase the relatively transnationality of their respective states.

¹² This is not to deny that our reading is precisely an interpretation. We draw from participation observation in Hong Kong (2005) and Seattle (2006) as well as an interview with C-H Lee [Director of ChamGyoYook Research Institute, Korean Teachers & Educational Workers’ Union (or KTU), an affiliate to the KCTU) in 2006. The three most distinctive politico-spatial practices enacted by the Korean demonstrators in Seattle (*Pung-mul*, the *Sam-bo Il-bae* march, and the funeral march) shared something notable in common: they were performed with a disciplined emphasis on breathing, steps, mindset, and character.

¹³ Marx and Engels conclude their line of argument about transnationalism with an Eurocentric comment: “The supremacy of the proletariat will cause [national differences and antagonism between peoples] to vanish still faster. United action, of the leading civilized countries at least, is one of the first conditions for the emancipation of the proletariat”. The “globalization” of the bourgeoisie may have created certain conditions for the decline of national divisions, but only the hegemony of the proletariat will complete this process. Yet, Marx and Engels are limited in their view of how this could

be possible. This is implied by their parenthetical comment that action “of the *leading civilized* countries” is necessary for the emancipation of the proletariat.

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