

South Korea: Waging a two-front war: against the president Park Geun Hye and against gender discrimination

Sunday 4 March 2018, by [PARK Ji-ah](#), [SHIM Taeun](#) (Date first published: 30 November 2016).

Parkhayeohaeng was created by feminists and social movement female activists to call for President Park Geun Hye's resignation while also fighting the misogyny and gender discrimination that has emerged in the protests against President Park. At the heart of the organization are a dozen activists and over a hundred members. Park Ji-ah is an activist and one of its organizers. On Nov. 23, Shim Taeun interviewed her at the Sister's Little Library, a project of the Seoul Woman's Association.

Shim Taeun - What have your organizing efforts calling for President Park's resignation looked like? What are the objectives? Any visible achievements?

Park Ji-ah - We post articles and images online and participate in weekly protests to call for President Park's resignation. In our fight against gender discrimination, we also write and post articles on the internet breaking down sexist or discriminatory comments and behavior. That is to say, we aim to give other women (and feminists) who find such comments uncomfortable a "language" to engage others with. Another important aspect of our activities is shaping the genuine democracy after President Park's resignation. Exclusion and discrimination against women and sexual minorities and the disabled is not a democracy we want to be a part of.

As regards achievements, we think it is important to let people know that we will monitor discriminatory comments at the protests. When you announce you will call out misogynistic comments, it makes people more conscious about their comments. Afterwards, we share the results from our monitoring and urge the protest organizers to make corrections. For instance, one of the MCs for the Nov. 5 protest made a derogatory remark against women on stage. We immediately called it out online and delivered it to the protest organizer. Minutes later, the MC apologized for his remark. Many women who had found such comments uncomfortable welcomed our efforts and joined our group.

What has been people's reaction?

During our activities, we realized that many people are critical of discriminatory remarks. Many people have signed up to become members and have liked our Facebook page. Now we have both men and women who say they will actively participate in our activities. Also, we see more and more people realizing the need to educate themselves and to actively resolve the problem of gender discrimination in the protests.

However, there is always opposition to our movement. For example, a Facebook page called Kimchinyeo 2 [1] posted photos of women participating in the protests with comments such as “those bitches have previously been in favor of President Park, but they came to the protest out of opportunism,” or “they previously worshiped Park.” They posted so many discriminatory and derogatory remarks on the page, so we reported it to Facebook Korea. At first, Facebook Korea turned down our request because the page did not breach any rules set by the company, but in the end, the page was deleted.

Some ask us why we are bringing up misogyny right now. But as we see it, this has been deeply rooted in Korean society and social movement for a long time. It is simply rising to the surface at the moment. Lodging official complaints against the misogyny facilitates more discussions on future democracy. This can be an important step forward for all of us.

Did you have any memorable events during your campaign?

During our street outreach campaigns, we saw how much people wanted President Park’s resignation and to be a part of the movement. While flyering, people actively approached us for flyers. Many were willing to sign our petition and donate money.

In one instance, there was this high school student. She listened to our explanation and agreed to our objectives. However, when it came to joining, she wavered. As it turned out, she had skipped her cram school that day and was not sure if she could participate in the protest the following week. Though she didn’t sign up, we were deeply moved by her showing up to protest despite the great pressure and competition to achieve good grades in high school.

Also, we really appreciate all those that share with us, “this kind of activity is really necessary,” or “I was never aware of this issue before Parkhayeohaeng.”

There were many testimonies related to sexual assaults at the Nov. 12 protest. How has Parkhayeohaeng reacted to the issue?

We first focused on spreading the news. One testimony from a female participant on the Nov. 12 protest was particularly heartbreaking: “Although I was sexually assaulted on Nov. 12, I will still be part of the protest next week. However, I will not go there alone anymore.” We discussed this with other feminist groups and agreed that female participants should have a safe place. So, a “femi-zone” was created at the Nov. 19 protest.

Even before the Choi Soon-sil scandal, there were people against President Park’s government. Of course now the rallies and marches are specifically calling for her resignation; were women against President Park’s government before? If so, why?

President Park has been immersed in a lot of controversy in terms of how she presented herself as a woman ever since she was a presidential candidate. Among the many intersecting identities a woman can have (e.g. a mother, a worker, a daughter, a teacher, a wife, a single mother) she has emphasized her identity as an unmarried daughter. This “unmarried daughter and political heir of Park Chung-hee” appealed to conservative Koreans. A married male political heir does not appeal to people as much as an unmarried woman because man can create his own family and establish his own regime. However, an unmarried woman can fully commit herself to follow her father’s will. Also recently, Park’s lawyer used gender to shield President Park from prosecution/or indictment regarding her whereabouts during the 7 hours following the Sewol ferry tragedy. Without any explanation, her lawyer simply stated, “She is a woman before being the president, and as a woman, her privacy should be protected” This clearly shows that she is using her gender to cover up her

crimes and avoid prosecution. And her position implies that women should be protected by men. That is not what we want to achieve. We want gender equality.

The Park administration's labor policy towards women is one other reason we opposed her. Under the pretext of work-life balance for "women," her administration introduced part-time jobs geared towards women. However, at the end of the day, they were low-wage jobs, and on top of that, the policy was devised to address the low birthrate. In other words, the government is trying to control women's reproductive rights while portraying full time mothers as "mothers undedicated to their families." Parkhayeohaeng is writing an article on why feminists call for President Park's resignation.

Anything you would like to comment on or share with feminists or female activists in other countries?

On Nov. 25, there will be an announcement of women's strike globally. We are going to participate as well. Globally, there is a new wave of feminism and we are thinking about how to be a part of it. I want to ask feminists and female activists in other countries to understand the unique situation Korean women are in.

Neo-liberalism worsens the plight of women in many underdeveloped and developing countries given the greater interconnection between the world. In particular, the US has great influence on South Korea. While US foreign policies may bother its citizens, its impact might be greater to those abroad such as Koreans, especially Korean women.

To overcome this situation, women should carry out two types of movements: against neoliberalism and against gender discrimination. Even now, we call for the resignation of President Park, and raise our voice against gender discrimination in the anti-Park movement. So, we need solidarity among all women in the world. Solidarity that acknowledges similarities and differences of feminist movements in other countries.

I hope feminists around the world would understand that Korean women have never stopped fighting against government oppression, anti-female policies, and the crisis of democracy caused by the daughter of a dictator becoming president. I also hope our struggle might energize and empower others.

P.S.

* November 30, 2016:

<http://iscenter.or.kr/english/2016/11/30/waging-a-two-front-war-against-the-president-and-gender-discrimination/>

Footnotes

[1] Kimchinyeo is a derogatory term for Korean woman