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# "In war, and after it, a prisoner always": reading past the paradigm of redress in the life stories of the Filipino comfort women

Katharina Ramo Mendoza  
*University of Iowa*

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“IN WAR, AND AFTER IT, A PRISONER ALWAYS”:  
READING PAST THE PARADIGM OF REDRESS IN THE LIFE STORIES OF  
THE FILIPINO COMFORT WOMEN

by

Katharina Ramo Mendoza

An Abstract

Of a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree  
in Women’s Studies in the Graduate College of  
The University of Iowa

May 2011

Thesis Supervisor: Associate Professor Rosemarie Scullion

## ABSTRACT

This dissertation problematizes the ways in which the experiences of the survivors of the “comfort system,” the Japanese military’s Asia Pacific War/World War II system of sexual slavery, have been articulated and narrativized, with particular attention to texts by and about the Filipino comfort system survivors, or “Lolas.” The juridical contexts in which the former comfort women have so frequently been asked to speak of their experiences have resulted in a paradigmatic comfort women narrative, one that has proven expedient and politically useful in the short term for generating public interest and support for the cause, but is inherently problematic. This juridical unconscious, whose influence extends to extrajudicial contexts, has reduced the survivors’ stories to spectacles of broken, violated bodies, and the survivors themselves to figures of eternal victimhood—representations that ultimately replicate the sexist, racist, and imperialist attitudes that made the institutionalization of wartime sexual violence possible in the first place.

I argue, however, that the comfort women’s stories resist containment, and that a careful reader can look past the paradigm of redress to see these narratives as rich sites of knowledge and remembrance whose meanings extend beyond the pursuit of reparations and the promise of closure. With the intent of delving deeper than the paradigm of redress allows, I look to texts by and about Filipinas, whose specific experiences of military sexual enslavement have often been overlooked in international public discourses on the comfort women issue. In the autobiographical texts *Comfort Woman: Slave of Destiny* by Maria Rosa Henson and *The Hidden Battle of Leyte: The Picture Diary of a Girl Taken by the Japanese Military* by Remedios Felias, the survivors/authors counter the affect- and context-divesting language of the courtroom by fleshing out the familial, cultural, and political contexts that inflected their sexual enslavement during the Japanese occupation of the Philippines. Both authors also employ multiple languages, including the visual, as they chip away at the limitations of the paradigmatic narrative as they remember their traumatic pasts and work to reconstruct socially legitimate selves. In the aftermath

of a different kind of wartime sexual violence, the eponymous *Women of Mapanique: Untold Crimes of War* by Nena Gajudo, Gina Alunan, and Susan Macabuag, adopt and adapt the rhetoric of the comfort women redress movement in order to make their own voices heard. In so doing, they reveal uncomfortable truths about the limits of our ability to comprehend and act upon sexual violence against men during wartime. Finally, I discuss three poems: Ruth Elynia S. Mabanglo's "*Balada ni Lola Amonita*" ("The Ballad of Lola Amonita"), Joi Barrios' "*Inasawang Hapon*" ("Taken to Wife"), and Bino A. Realuyo's "Pantom: Comfort Woman." I find that by drawing upon the signs, symbols, and rituals of precolonial indigenous and religious Filipino culture, and by superimposing the metaphorical landscape of memory onto the literal landscape of the archipelago, these poems can offer what the paradigmatic comfort women cannot. The change of narrative region these poems provide allow us—readers, scholars, rubbernecks—to break out of our voyeuristic consumption of trauma and share cultural space with the victims and survivors. By actively looking beyond the paradigmatic narrative and its teleology of justice and closure, readers can begin to understand the Lolos' collective experience as something that extends into the nooks and crannies of Filipino culture and that will continue to resonate in the continuing fight against militarism and sexual violence.

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Graduate College  
The University of Iowa  
Iowa City, Iowa

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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PH.D. THESIS

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This is to certify that the Ph. D. thesis of

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has been approved by the Examining Committee  
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To the Lolas



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## INTRODUCTION BEYOND THE PARADIGM OF REDRESS

The military comfort women have thus become the site for several different battles over the future. Their sad stories have galvanised and shaped an array of contemporary and competing visions of citizenship, race, gender and human rights throughout the world. For them, it must be a bitter irony. Once considered so unimportant that they could be sold off and enslaved without fear of consequence, today their memories cast huge shadows, both reaching back into history and forward into the future.

Laura Hein, "Savage Irony: The Imaginative Power of the 'Military Comfort Women' in the 1990s"

I was in tears as I told my story. It was very difficult for me to relate what I had been through. But it was also a great relief. I felt like a heavy weight had been removed from my shoulders, as if thorns had been pulled out of my grieving heart. I felt I had recovered my long-lost strength and self-esteem.

Maria Rosa Henson, *Comfort Woman: Slave of Destiny*

Not too long ago, someone asked me how I had first heard of the comfort women. As a graduate student I have become used to fielding questions about my research, to the point of having perfected a minute-long summary describing the general shape of my dissertation. This question, however, was new to me, and I was truly stymied. I cannot recall when or how I learned of the comfort women. What I do remember is that prior to doing research on the subject for a graduate seminar paper, I was certain that the comfort women had been World War II camp followers and prostitutes. I was wrong, of course, and a good number of those who ask about my research are either similarly mistaken or completely unaware of the actual history of the comfort system.

This all too common confusion among laypersons persists despite the last twenty-odd years of activism by and on behalf of the victims of the comfort system. Of late, the comfort women have been invoked in uncritical and problematic ways even in peer-reviewed venues. For example, the September 2007 issue of the journal *Violence Against*

*Women* featured two articles that used the term “modern-day comfort women” to refer collectively to present day South Korean sex workers, Filipina migrant sex workers at U.S. military bases in South Korea, and other Asian women who are being trafficked from Korea to massage parlors in the United States (Hansen; Hughes, Chon, and Ellerman). Such careless usage conflates the issues of military sexual slavery, prostitution, migration, and trafficking, lumping women together as “victims of trafficking” without taking into account historical context or issues of agency. As Sealing Cheng noted in a talk delivered at the University of Iowa on September 28, 2007, this erasure of specificity is characteristic of South Korean human trafficking policy, which in turn affects the rights and day-to-day lives of sex workers (Cheng).

The way that the historically specific term “comfort women” can be misunderstood as a generic term for sex workers and victims of human trafficking calls to mind international discourses on this issue, in which the phrase “the comfort women” more often than not refers to the circumstances and experiences of Koreans, who comprised the majority but not the entirety of the thousands of Asian women recruited, conscripted, abducted, or sold into sexual slavery for the Japanese Imperial Army. Scholars have pointed to the Americanization of the supposedly transnational discourse on the comfort women issue, but I have noticed that even critics of this Americanization fail to problematize the way that the figure of the comfort woman in Asian Americanist discourse is almost always identified as, or is assumed to be, Korean (Chuh; Kang; Schulterman). The category “comfort woman” encompasses a wide range of experiences, as demonstrated by the many survivor testimonies collected in the last two decades. From these testimonies, a careful reader can get a sense of how a woman’s

experience of the comfort system varied depending upon many factors, including her age, ethnicity, and her family situation, and, if the testimony extends that far, how those same factors shaped life after the comfort station. Even chronology—that is, the point in time during the war at which she was “recruited”—made a difference in defining this experience. Particularly in juridically oriented discourses about the comfort women issue, where reparations are the order of the day, these diverse circumstances are often elided. Indeed, the many faces of the comfort women—their vulnerabilities and their strengths, their despair and fortitude, the small, essential details of their lives—are at risk of being flattened out into a politically expedient representation of a victim of wartime sexual violence that replicates the racist and imperialist attitudes that created the comfort system in the first place.

In writing this dissertation I began with, and have repeatedly returned to, the conviction that the “comfort woman” as an identity category is much more open and flexible than it initially seems. The comfort woman has been interviewed, documented, cross-examined, fictionalized, cinematized, appropriated, and, many times, by many groups, denied her truths. She is a polyvalent figure, a site of knowledge and remembrance whose meanings reach beyond the pursuit of reparations for the victimization she suffered. The life stories of comfort women will resonate for years to come, not only in the continued development of international definitions of and standards for human rights abuses, sexual violence, and war crimes, but also with those people and nations who have the responsibility and the privilege of claiming them as part of their past, present, and future.

As a feminist scholar and a Filipina it is my privilege and responsibility to not only seek justice for the Lolas, the Filipina survivors of the Japanese comfort system, but to seek to *do* justice to their long-suppressed narratives. The Lolas, despite continuing to seek justice as they and their advocates have defined it, have been worryingly absent from the recent conversations stirred up by North American governments' calls for the Japanese state to acknowledge its responsibility for the crimes of comfort system. Survivor's testimonials have previously been used to great effect to convince the public (if not the courts) that, in the matter of the comfort system, justice must be served. Without minimizing the importance of material and symbolic redress, I choose to approach the matter differently. Rather than looking to the Lolas' narratives as the means to a desired legal end, I read them as texts that, despite the influence of juridical forces, are always finding ways of exceeding the limits of the language of the courts.

### **On the Teleology of Redress**

I use variations of the phrase "paradigm of redress" frequently throughout this dissertation. As told in the politico-judicial context, the comfort woman story is a solidly teleological tale in which survivors offer their testimony as means to an anticipated end, that end being the Japanese government's issuance of an official apology and material reparations to the victims, or the families of victims, of the comfort system. Soh points out that the notion that the comfort system was a deep dark secret until the sudden revelation in the 1990s is actually false. Despite the fact that knowledge about the comfort system was common in popular public memory in Japan and Korea (Soh *Comfort Women*, 146), the construct of the secret long kept continues to be a common element of the paradigmatic comfort women narrative. The history of the comfort women

that emerged in the 1990s was not so much a revelation as it was an international dissemination and politicization of knowledge and memory. The teleology of redress that informs much of comfort women discourse emerges out of a twentieth century phenomenon that Shoshana Felman has named the juridical unconscious, a concept I discuss in detail in Chapter II. Briefly, in the juridical unconscious justice serves not just as a means of punishing those who perpetrate crimes. It also provides “a marked symbolic exit from the injuries of a traumatic history: [it is a] liberation from violence itself” (Felman *Juridical Unconscious*, 1). The U.S. House of Representatives’ Resolution 121, “Protecting the Human Rights of Comfort Women,” which passed on July 30, 2007, is the most recent high-profile manifestation of how the juridical unconscious influences comfort women issue discourse.<sup>1</sup>

In discussing Resolution 121, its author, California Congressman Michael M. Honda, cited past Resolutions on compensation for Japanese-Americans as precedent to, and proof of the need for, this Resolution. According to Congressman Honda, H.R. 442 (“The Japanese-American Reparation Act of 1988”), “lifted the burden of guilt off the shoulders of our generation and provided the remedy, if you will, to close the wounds that existed in the community” (“Protecting the Human Rights of Comfort Women” 14). In making this statement the Congressman promised, in effect, another happy ending to

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<sup>1</sup> According to the statement given by Congressman Eni F. H. Faleomavaega at the Hearing, H.R. 121 was intended to coincide with, and presumably fill the gap left by, the expiration of the Asian Women’s Fund (AWF). The AWF, which the Japanese government established in 1995, had been intended to distribute “atonement money” (funded by private citizens and not the government) to the surviving comfort women. As of the date of the Hearing, “only 285 women have received payments from the Asian Women’s Fund” (“Protecting the Human Rights of Comfort Women” 3). The proceedings of the Hearing before the Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific, and the Global Environment of the Committee on Foreign Affairs House of Representatives One Hundred Tenth Congress, “Protecting the Human Rights of Comfort Women,” are available online at <<http://www.foreignaffairs.house.gov/>>



yet another wartime saga, one that would provide healing, happiness, and an unburdened future. In and of itself, H.R. 121, which calls on the Japanese government to apologize to the comfort women and include information about the comfort system in the Japanese school curriculum, could not, and did not, deliver the kind of closure Honda dangled so tantalizingly before the comfort system's victims. Nevertheless, if only briefly, the promise of closure grabbed the imaginations of the comfort women activist community almost as tightly as the Women's International War Crimes Tribunal on Japan's Military Sexual Slavery had in 2001.<sup>2</sup> The thought of embracing the possibility of closure and giving myself and my work over to the teleology of redress is quite tempting. After all, the alternative would mean bearing the weight of the knowledge that no apology, however sincere, could truly salve wounded spirits, and no amount of money could truly compensate for all that the comfort women lost in the stations.

However enticing the notion of closure may seem, I find myself stumbling into the pitfalls that obstruct the path to closure dictated by the juridical unconscious. The survivors who testify to the atrocities of the comfort system do so within the linguistic limitations of the redress paradigm. I refer not only to the inadequacy of words to describe the extremes of pain and torture (the so-called paradox of having to speak the unspeakable), but also to what we are and are not prepared or willing to hear. The latter limitations were demonstrated during the Hearing for H.R. 121, when survivors were interrupted a few times while giving their testimony. One former comfort woman, who was describing in detail her long and difficult journey to a comfort station, was interrupted by the Chairman of the Subcommittee, who said,

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<sup>2</sup> I discuss this Tribunal in detail in Chapter II.

If I could ask the translator . . . I realize that our witnesses have traveled quite a distance to come and to testify and I am sure [some] of the members here on the committee will also like to ask questions[,] but if she could summarize maybe for the next two minutes some of the highlights (“Protecting the Human Rights of Comfort Women” 18).

Knowing exactly what the Congressman meant by “highlights,” the survivor proceeded to describe being beaten, tied up, and electroshocked by Japanese soldiers (18).

Not many would hesitate to describe what the comfort women went through as traumatic. But the juridical requirement to articulate and, in a sense, relive the most violent moments of the events in the courtroom or on the page—the “highlights,” as it were—arguably inflicts trauma upon trauma. In addition to the difficulties they face in speaking about what is unspeakable, the Lolos of the comfort women movement grapple with another paradox. In the pursuit of punitive justice, many have had to tell the most brutal and lurid aspects of their stories in the language of the law, a highly constructed and encoded language whose “Just the facts, Ma’am” orientation would tend to divest such narratives of affect and context. However, the survivors’ testimonies have demonstrated time and again that the language of the law cannot fully contain these narratives. More accurately, the language of the law cannot fully contain the violence to female bodies about which the survivors speak. As Anne-Marie Hilsdon explains in her work on gender and militarism, “[t]he body as a concept provides an anchor for analysis. Male or female, individual or social, it is the terrain of militarized violence” (2). Outside the courtroom, the Lolos’s stories are freer to range beyond the fact of the bruised, violated female body, encompassing past and future, family and community. In its turn, this broadening of narrative terrain reveals other, cultural, modes of narrative

containment, which the texts I study do not always successfully escape. Hilsdon describes how Filipina women

have been subjected to historical idealizations of virginity and chaste motherhood, have internalized Madonna-whore iconography, and have been instructed in Christian martyrdom. Subjectivities have been constructed through gestures, bodies, discourses, and desires ... With respect to gender and sexuality, hegemonic assumptions help construct men's and women's practices, for example the out-of-control sexual incontinence of men in which women are objectified. Related to that incontinence is the casting of women primarily in marginalized or stigmatized roles such as mistress, whore and Eve, and passive roles such as wife, virgin and Mary. Hence female bodies become 'docile' bodies (24, 29).

In the pursuit of redress, survivors and their advocates reject certain of these idealizations and iconographies while using others to their advantage, and part of the work I do in this dissertation is to sift through these seemingly contradictory practices. What exigencies drive these rhetorical choices? What ground is gained, and what opportunities lost, by casting the Lolas as the eternal victims of military male sexual incontinence?

Ultimately, my goal for this dissertation is to open the comfort women narrative to interrogation, reading testimonial and literary texts by and about the Filipina comfort women in a way that recognizes and resists the limitations of the redress paradigm that has long dominated not only how we think and write about the comfort women, but the very testimony by which we have come to know them. Since the first stirrings of comfort women advocacy in the early 1990s, scholars and activists have concerned themselves with seeking out comfort station survivors, recording their testimony, and deploying that testimony in pursuit of redress. Only in recent years have we begun to make the necessary move from collecting the survivors' stories to reflecting upon what they say and how they say it. My contribution to comfort women scholarship to date is twofold:

first, I am studying an admittedly small but no less significant group of texts by and about Filipina comfort women, whose testimony can be found in collections like Dolgopol and Paranjape's United Nations International Commission of Jurists Report *Comfort Women: An Unfinished Ordeal*, but who have otherwise been written out of scholarship on the subject. Second, I am reading these texts about the Lolas not only with the intent of looking past the "highlights," as it were, but also to study how Filipina survivors of the comfort system use narrative conventions to reconstruct a sense of self and reconnect to their communities in the wake of sexual violation. What cultural stores and stories do the Lolas dip into as they attempt to make sense of traumatic events? In what ways can literary texts expand or even change the narrative regions occupied by the paradigmatic comfort women story,<sup>3</sup> thereby opening the closed categories of victim, perpetrator, bystander, and collaborator to further investigation? In the broadest sense, my work on the Lolas' narratives is part of an ongoing cross-disciplinary effort to examine issues of memory and witnessing, particularly the remembrance of traumatic historical events of the twentieth century, which is often spoken of as *the* most trauma-laden century in human history.

### **Chapter Descriptions**

To grasp the particularities of the Filipino comfort women's experiences, which all too often are only perfunctorily mentioned or completely left out of academic and legal conversations on the subject, I begin at the beginning and look at the comfort system itself. Chapter I, "On 'Silence Broken,' the Institutionalization of Sexual

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<sup>3</sup> Throughout this dissertation I pluralize the word "women" in the label "paradigmatic comfort women narrative" or "paradigmatic comfort women story" in order to indicate that many survivors' testimonies hit the same notes and consistently emphasize the same details.

Violence, and the Conditions of Possibility for the Comfort Women Redress Movement,” traces the particular configurations of power and patriarchy that led to the military institutionalization of rape, which depended upon a redefinition of male access to sex as a necessary component of Japanese imperial expansion. Women’s *and* men’s bodies were closely regulated, and I argue that the routine that governed sex within the comfort system contributed to the survivors’ feelings of violation at having been raped and shame at having been prostitutes. These feelings contributed to, but were not the sole reason for, the decades during which the comfort women seemed to have been erased from public memory of World War II. In light of this long public silence, the transnational comfort women redress movement’s emergence in the early 1990s seemed sudden, and so Chapter I asks the question, “Why comfort women’s stories, and why now?,” and goes on to consider the conditions of possibility that brought the comfort women’s testimony into being toward the end of the twentieth century. The answer, I argue, is a confluence of phenomena, from the increasing cultural preoccupation with trauma, testimony, and memory, to the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II, and to the rise of Asian feminisms, all of which finally made it possible not only for the survivors of the comfort system to speak about wartime sexual slavery, but also for the public to hear their voices.

The second chapter, “‘I Do Not Want to Die the Ghost of a Virgin’: Theorizing the Testimonial Narratives of the Comfort Women,” unpacks the trope of “silence broken” further. The notion of a silence that has been broken is an inherently problematic way of understanding the Lolas’ narrativizations of their personal traumas. It does not begin to account for the fraught nature of the public articulation of violations so intimate to the body and self. I begin by exploring the relationship between language and trauma,

considering the ways in which the already difficult work of re-membering one's personal pain is further hindered by the absence of a language in which the comfort station survivors could enunciate the experience of sexual enslavement in a way that lifted the stigma of wartime prostitution that the postwar era had attached to them. In recent years, the genre of the trauma narrative has emerged as one way of reconstituting a socially legitimate self. However, I remain unconvinced that the narrative forms to which we now have access—and the juridical contexts that disproportionately influence them—do in fact provide effective means of freeing the Lolas from the grasp of victimization. The chapter goes on to demonstrate that these discursive structures are at work even in the Lolas' extrajudicial narratives: what evidentiary structures do inside the courtroom, the culture of confession does outside of it. By bringing into critical relief how what Shoshana Felman calls the juridical unconscious shapes the survivors' narratives, I call attention to the voyeuristic impulses this testimony stirs in us, their audience (Felman *Juridical Unconscious*). I ask what responsibilities we, as feminist scholars and teachers, have towards the Lolas and their stories, and how do we avoid falling into the voyeuristic trap? In search of answers, I turn to literature, arguing that adopting a more literary approach to comfort women texts allows us to study the ways that figures of speech operate within narratives of atrocity. Any attempt to cross the chasm between what is known and what can be said about the comfort women experience relies upon an awareness of the metaphorical intrusions, silences, pointed omissions, and unexpected offerings found in the Lolas' life stories, and it is these kinds of narrative moments to which I attend in the chapters that follow.

Chapter III is entitled “The Girl Taken, the Slave of Destiny, and the Grandmother Freed: Obligation, Collaboration, and Betrayal in the Life Stories of Filipina Comfort Women,” and takes as its focus the autobiographical narratives of two Lolos of the comfort women movement and the testimony of the female survivors of a Japanese military raid on the town of Mapanique, Pampanga. All three texts encompass literal and figurative terrain extending far beyond what the paradigmatic comfort women narrative usually covers, employing multiple languages in the effort to, as Culbertson puts it, “render body memories tellable” (178). The Lolos take on the narrative work of re-membering the past, fleshing out the political and cultural contexts that inflected their experiences of sexual enslavement. In so doing, the Lolos are able to refine the necessarily broad-stroke rhetoric of blame and accountability that characterizes redress movement discourses. They explore not only victim-perpetrator relationships, but also the various betrayals committed by the comfort women’s family and community members.

In the fourth chapter, “On Being a Woman in a Time of War: The Filipino Comfort Woman in Poetry,” I turn my attention to poetic articulations of the unspeakable. Art by and about the comfort women has been described by some as the necessary counterbalance to the language of law that continues to dominate international discourses on the subject. Of course, comfort women literature is much more than just one more tool to be used in the pursuit of redress, and the poems I discuss in this chapter provide opportunities for readers to be more than voyeurs and consumers of trauma narratives. Recast in poetic language, the comfort women story breaks out of the teleological arc that begins with the act of giving testimony and promises closure. These poems by Ruth Elynia S. Mabanglo, Joi Barrios, and Bino A. Realuyo offer us the chance

to do more than stand by and watch the Lolas' stories unfold—in small but powerful ways, readers are able to share cultural space with the victims and survivors. In a time when more and more survivors are succumbing to age and the long-term effects of the physical abuses of the comfort system, these texts are a clear indication that the Lolas have succeeded in writing themselves into our memories.



CHAPTER I  
ON “SILENCE BROKEN,”  
THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE,  
AND THE CONDITIONS OF POSSIBILITY FOR  
THE COMFORT WOMEN REDRESS MOVEMENT

Maita Gomez’s collection of Filipino comfort women’s testimonial narratives, *From the Depths of Silence* (2000), is typical in the way that it offers an origin story of the transnational comfort women redress movement<sup>4</sup> that begins, too late, at the moment of coming to voice. As Gomez states in her Introduction: “the issue [of comfort stations] ... was brought to the attention of the international community by the survivors and advocates” (Gomez iii). Some pages later she explains that during and after the Asia Pacific Conflict,<sup>5</sup> the many violations suffered by the comfort women were

misperceived and misinterpreted—by the victims themselves, by other women who were fortunate enough not to have suffered a similar fate, and no less by the male-dominated hierarchy that prosecuted war crimes after World War II. In the 1990’s [sic], Asian women survivors of rape, sexual slavery and other inhumane treatment have boldly raised their voices against the crimes committed against them and those who did not survive (Gomez vi-vii).

Gomez glosses over the decades of misperceptions and misinterpretations that preceded the survivors’ coming to voice in the 1990s, focusing only on the testimony given within the context of the redress movement. This testimony was geared towards cataloguing the many atrocities of the comfort system, establishing the comfort women’s credibility as war crimes victims, and building their legal case against the Japanese state.

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<sup>4</sup> I have adopted and adapted Lisa Yoneyama’s very useful term, “redress activists.” It appears in her article, “Traveling Memories, Contagious Justice” in the *Journal of Asian American Studies* special issue on comfort women.

<sup>5</sup> The labels “Asia Pacific Conflict” and “Asia Pacific War,” used interchangeably in this dissertation, cover the years 1931 to 1945 and take into account that Japan’s imperialist adventures in Asia had been going on for some time already before that nation officially entered the World War.

The sense of urgency around recording and publishing the survivors' testimony about the comfort system is understandable, but there are some significant details that can be missed in our rush towards testimony. It has only recently become possible to publicly articulate and define what happened in the comfort stations *as* institutionalized sexual violence in a conflict zone, and it is therefore problematic to refer to the act of giving testimony simply as "breaking the silence," as many redress activists are wont to do. This trope, popular within the redress movement, implies that we had always understood that the comfort system was made possible by the patriarchal, racist, and classist pillars of empire—that it had simply been covered up and had now been brought to light. But what happened to the women and girls in Japanese garrisons and comfort stations was never truly a secret. Those living in Japanese-occupied territories knew that female relatives and neighbors were being abducted and raped. Some local leaders and war collaborators even helped the Japanese recruit girls and women for the comfort stations. As for the Allied Forces, the heroes of World War II, they also knew about the comfort system. As Yuki Tanaka details in his book, *Japan's Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery and Prostitution During World War II and the U.S. Occupation*, there were comfort stations established specifically for the American troops that occupied Japan after the latter's surrender. The "silence" of the postwar decades should not be taken to mean that there was a lack of information about what had happened to the women in the comfort stations. Rather, it refers to how the *comprehension* of the atrocities of the comfort stations as state-sponsored and institutionalized sexual violence has only recently become possible.

So, why comfort women's stories, why *now*? Many survivors have admitted to keeping the secret of the comfort stations in order to protect themselves and their loved

ones from the stigma of rape; others were silenced by the very loved ones from whom they sought succor. What changed in the late twentieth century that made it possible not only for the survivors to break their personal silences, but for the public at large to hear what they had to say? What facilitated the transition from private shame to public memory? In this chapter I take the necessary first step of my larger project by looking at the convergence of factors that made comfort women activism finally possible in the 1990s. I will examine how the comfort system shaped female identity in ways that contributed to the suppression of the victims' voices and inquire into the conditions—social, political, local, global—that made it possible for the survivors to finally speak of the unspeakable. With regards to my specific project, I will also consider how these conditions have influenced the narration and deployment of the Filipino comfort women's stories.

I begin with the development and administration of the comfort system. It is not possible to adequately discuss the conditions of possibility for contemporary comfort women activism without first tracing the matrices of power and patriarchy that identified women's bodies as necessary objects (I use the word "objects" deliberately). I must also mark the slippage from women's work, to sex work, to sex *slavery*, that facilitated the Japanese military's institutionalization of sex for the purposes of waging war and expanding its empire. I reread the origin stories of the comfort women movement with the understanding that "breaking the silence" did not happen in a moment, but rather was the result of years of change and the convergence of many factors enabling the survivors' identity to shift from "wartime prostitutes" to "war crimes victims." In the late 1980s, changes in human rights law and advocacy, the growth of women's movements and

activism around sex trafficking in Asia, and the rise of memory, testimony, and trauma as fields of academic study made testimonial narratives not only possible, but *central to* comfort women advocacy.

**Rape as an Apparatus of the Imperialist State:  
The Comfort System**

Cynthia Enloe has pointed out that "[t]he militarization of women has been necessary for the militarization of men" (3). While recent years have seen the reluctant acceptance of women into some military forces, soldiering is only the latest development in the militarization of women. Women have long been militarized as soldiers' mothers, wives, nurses, and camp followers, providing the reproductive labor necessary to creating and maintaining a male military force. Women have also been militarized as rape victims. Their bodies become sites of struggle between male combatants because in a militarist paradigm, to rape a woman who "belongs" to the enemy is the ultimate insult and assertion of dominance (Copelon; Dolgopol and Paranjape; Enloe). However, as You-Me Park points out,

the violence against comfort women does not possess this kind of significance. The object to be procured is not within the subject being violated (as in the act of torture), or the public sign to be constructed from the act of violation ... It lies rather in the functional use of the women's bodies for men's "comfort"! (207).

How does a military force institutionalize and systematize sexual violence? How do government and military elites arrive at the conclusion that women's bodies—and only their bodies—are among the supplies essential to the forcible expansion of empire? How does rape become comfort, and what differentiates the comfort system from other forms

of sexual violence in wartime?<sup>6</sup>

In January of 1992, activist and historian Yoshimi Yoshiaki entered the Japanese Self-Defense Agency archives, and emerged with military documents pertaining to the military comfort stations: memos, orders, lists of regulations, and other materials that were thought to have been destroyed when the Japanese surrendered to the Allied Forces in 1945. Until these documents came to light, the Japanese government's official position was that the nation-state was not responsible for making reparations to the comfort women because the comfort stations had been civilian-run brothels supplied by private recruiters (Dolgopol and Paranjape; O'Brien). The publication of the recovered documents in 1992 caused the Japanese government to finally admit to military involvement in the stations and to issue a controversial apology to the former comfort women of Korea.<sup>7</sup> In the decades since, the combined efforts of comfort station survivors, redress activists, and scholars have given us a coherent, if not entirely complete, picture of the system of sexual slavery developed and managed by the Japanese Imperial Army during the Asia Pacific War. Here I bring together several accounts of

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<sup>6</sup> In her book *Maneuvers*, Enloe enumerates three forms of militarized rape:

(1) "recreational rape" as the alleged outcome of not supplying male soldiers with "adequately accessible" militarized prostitution; (2) "national security rape" as an instrument for bolstering a nervous state; and (3) "systematic mass rape" as an instrument of open warfare (111).

The comfort women appear in this enumeration only obliquely, as the victims of the Japanese military's attempt to provide soldiers with "adequately accessible" militarized prostitution," and they are quick to correct anyone who mistakenly conflates them with other categories of sex work. However, the survivors and their advocates seem more willing to blur those lines when it comes to fellow victims of sexual violence. In Chapter III I will discuss a group of Filipino survivors of "systematic mass rape" as an instrument of open warfare," and how they have allied themselves with the comfort women redress movement.

<sup>7</sup> You-Me Park discusses this "non-apology" in her article, "Comforting the Nation."

how rape came to be redefined as “comfort.” Some of the texts I consider are passionate and even polemic,

while others are cold and detached; some meticulously comb through military documents, while others give priority to the voices of former comfort women and former soldiers.

Yoshimi’s *Comfort Women*, first published in 1995, is considered one of the most comprehensive and authoritative tomes on the comfort system. It contains a wealth of information culled from the testimony of former comfort women and from soldiers’ diaries and memoirs, but relies most heavily upon the documents Yoshimi found in Japan’s Self-Defense Archives. He has been both praised for his diligent search for documentary proof of the comfort system, and criticized for what has been perceived as his privileging of those same documents. Ueno, who identifies as a feminist revisionist rather than as a historian, points out the problems of such a positivist historical approach to the comfort women issue in her article, “The Politics of Memory”:

The biggest problem with positivism is that it denies the viability of the victims' own testimony as evidence ... Private notes, diaries, memoirs and oral testimony are considered to have only secondary value ... However, the privileged “documentary sources” are just another name for the sources declared orthodox by the authorities, the documents of the dominant side (136).

Yoshimi, Suzuki Yuko, and other comfort system historians have taken offense at Ueno’s depiction of their work as unwitting endorsements of “a naive positivist view of history and privileged documentary sources” (Yamamoto xx). For his part, Yoshimi explains his attention to official documents with the reminder that one of the redress movement’s primary goals is to get the Japanese government to take legal responsibility for the comfort system as a war crime. Such a goal requires material that conforms to current legal definitions and hierarchies of evidence, as government and military documents do.

My brief sketch of this argument between scholars belies the animosity of the exchange, which nevertheless has had the positive result of highlighting issues regarding the status of testimony, and the challenges faced by comfort women activists as they negotiate “how to appreciate the varying and productive nature of survivors’ testimonies without undermining their power and coherence” (O’Brien 15).

In this study I draw from Japanese government and military documents, diaries, and the testimonies of former soldiers interviewed when the comfort women movement began. I also pull from compilations of survivors’ testimony, inserting the former comfort women’s voices where needed; sometimes corroborating, and oftentimes challenging the official version of events. My intent is not so much to compile yet another history of the system as it is to bring already existing histories together while taking note of the different approaches scholars have taken, in the hopes that such an amalgam will allow for a more nuanced understanding of the contexts and conditions in which the comfort women lived, and the texture of the experiences about which they testify today.

The origins of what is now called the comfort system can be traced as far back as the 1904-05 Russo-Japanese war (Chung; Hicks; Tanaka; Yoshimi). In a special comfort women issue of the journal *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique*, historian Chin Sung Chung looks at diaries kept by Japanese soldiers during that war. The diary entries describing the brothels built for the soldiers indicate that the women who worked in them mostly came from China. While the precise extent of the military’s control over those early brothels cannot be determined, they seem to have set a precedent for future policies on military prostitution such as those instituted for the Japanese soldiers sent to fight in Siberia between 1918 and 1922 (Chung). Personal diaries and the surveys that soldiers

answered upon returning to Japan reveal that there had been a great deal of unrest and unruliness among the enlisted men, more than half of whom admitted to not understanding why they had been sent to fight, or what it was they were fighting for. This unrest was blamed for numerous incidents in which the Japanese soldiers raped area civilians and looted their homes. Also, an unusually large number of the soldiers stationed in Siberia were found to have contracted sexually transmitted infections, and military doctors had to assume that there were many more cases than were reported (Yoshimi 46).<sup>8</sup> Faced with unhappy, unhealthy troops, the chief of Japanese military administration on the island of Sakhalin<sup>9</sup> imposed strict regulations upon the local prostitutes. Under the new rules, women had to get medical clearance before the military police would grant them permission to work. As Yoshimi observes, “This amounted to a licensed prostitution system under the control of the military police” (46-47).<sup>10</sup> The imposition of the new rules was the beginning of the medical management of women for the sake of soldiers’ health, which would later become one of the distinct features of the comfort system.

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<sup>8</sup> It was considered dishonorable for a soldier to have a venereal disease, and so some soldiers hid their condition. Between 1918 and 1920 in Siberia, 1,109 soldiers were found to be infected; when compared to the 1,399 soldiers killed in action and the 1,528 wounded in battle, the number of ill soldiers was alarming indeed (Yoshimi 46). Tanaka reports that in the 1940s, with the comfort system solidly entrenched in the military, sexually transmitted infections continued to run rampant among the troops. At the time, the punishment for contracting such diseases was a two-rank demotion. The secrecy encouraged by this punitive measure fed the soldiers’ cycle of violence, as the high cost of the medicines they secretly purchased at civilian pharmacies drove them to looting (Tanaka 30).

<sup>9</sup> Russia’s largest island, located in the North Pacific. From 1905 to 1945 under the Treaty of Portsmouth, the southern two-fifths of the island were Japanese territory.

<sup>10</sup> For a history of legal prostitution in Japan, see John Lie’s “The State as Pimp: Prostitution and the Patriarchal State in Japan in the 1940s.”



The officers' experience managing these prototype comfort stations was put to use during the early years of the second Sino-Japanese war, which began when Japanese troops invaded Manchuria in 1931 and later became part of World War II. In March of 1932, the Shanghai Expeditionary Force's Vice Chief of Staff, Okamura Yasuji, began receiving reports of Japanese soldiers raping Chinese women. Okabe Naosaburo, a senior officer in the Shanghai Force, wrote in his diary:

As long as conditions are peaceful and the army is not engaged in fighting, these incidents [i.e. Japanese soldiers raping local women] are difficult to prevent. Rather, we should recognize that we can actively provide facilities. I have considered many policy options for resolving the troops' sexual problems and have set to work on realizing that goal (qtd. in Yoshimi 45).

The senior officers asked the governor of Nagasaki prefecture to send women to Shanghai. At the time, Nagasaki was the point of origin of many *karayukisan*,<sup>11</sup> Japanese and Korean indentured prostitutes who had entered or been sold into sex work and sent to

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<sup>11</sup>*Sandakan Brothel No. 8: An Episode in the History of Lower-Class Japanese Women* is the first book in Yamazaki Tomoko's trilogy on the *karayukisan*. Yamazaki delves into the history of the *karayuki* system of overseas prostitution, which operated from 1860s into the 1930s and exploited poor, rural Japanese women. In this book, Yamazaki details the life of Osaki, a former *karayukisan* whom she had met while doing research in Kyushu. Equally interesting are the author's musings on the dilemmas faced by ethnographers doing this kind of work. She writes at length about the deep, personal relationship that developed between scholar and informant, and about the weeks she spent living as Osaki's guest and learning her story, sharing this very poor woman's shack and meager food, not buying anything with her own money. Yamazaki writes,

Time after time I sought to relieve my own suffering ... bring home white rice, meat, and fish ... I would begin scolding myself. Didn't you make this second trip to Amakusa so that you could experience life with Osaki just as she lives it? If you can't eat Osaki's barley rice ... sit on rotten tatami ... and sleep on her futon of Borneo cotton on which she had to lie with thousands of foreign men ... how can you expect her to look at you as an equal? If you can't do that, surely she won't tell you about her life as a *karayuki-san* (39-40).

I am at once fascinated by and skeptical of Yamazaki's approach to self-reflexivity and power imbalances in ethnography. C. Sarah Soh grapples with similar questions in her book, *The Comfort Women: Sexual Violence and Postcolonial Memory in Korea and Japan*.

Japanese communities overseas. Many of the *karayukisan* who first traveled to join the troops had hopes of earning enough to buy back their freedom quickly. Brothels for exclusively military clientele were soon established. The following year, a Disease Prevention and Hygiene Facility was established in Pingquan for the exclusive use of the 14<sup>th</sup> Mixed Brigade. Although the words “comfort station” are not used in any of the documentation on this facility, scholars agree that this is the earliest confirmable military comfort station (Hicks; Tanaka; Yoshimi). The Pingquan station housed thirty-five Korean and three Japanese women, all of whom were regularly examined for signs of infection by an army doctor (Yoshimi 47). One rationale for creating the facility was that it would curb the spread of venereal disease among the troops. Apparently, most of the prostitutes in or near Pingquan had venereal diseases; military personnel were therefore not allowed to patronize local brothels and instead were directed towards the military facility (Yoshimi 47).

By 1934, there were fourteen Shanghai comfort stations exclusively for military personnel. Regulations were “strictly enforced, and no new establishments were allowed to open” (Yoshimi 44). Until then, stations had been set up specifically in response to troop health and discipline problems in particular locations. By late 1937, the comfort system had become part of the infrastructure of the Japanese military, and stations were being erected systematically wherever troops were, or would be, stationed. The Nanjing Massacre, also referred to as the Rape of Nanjing, has been identified as the main impetus for this systematization. In November of 1937, the Central China Area Army (the branch of the Japanese army assigned to Central China) marched from Shanghai to Nanjing, looting, raping, torturing, and killing along the way. The damage done to

communities along the Yangtze River and in Nanjing itself was truly terrible. In a span of six weeks, Japanese troops are estimated to have killed between 260,000 and 350,000 Chinese men and women (Chang).<sup>12</sup> Even the most conservative estimate posits a far larger number than the death count from the firebombing of Dresden. Iris Chang explains,

Surviving Japanese veterans claim that the army had officially outlawed the rape of enemy women, but rape remained so deeply embedded in Japanese military culture and superstition that no one took the rule seriously ... The military policy forbidding rape only encouraged soldiers to kill their victims afterwards (49).

The six-week massacre only served to further incense the Chinese community. Also, the many foreign news correspondents and missionaries living in Nanjing at the time ensured that news of the atrocities quickly reached the international community, making Japan the sudden object of international scrutiny. Both of these factors made it particularly difficult for the Japanese troops to maintain order in now-occupied Nanjing. In addition, the Japanese soldiers' extreme behavior during the massacre could not be curbed after the city fell. Ozaki Junko, a Yokohama housewife, relates that while staying at a lodging house in Niigata, she overheard a conversation between recently discharged soldiers, who said that they had the most fun in Nanjing because they could do anything there. Ozaki writes, "Each bragged about his exploits in the War ... They laughed coarsely about how many Chinese women they had raped, and one told about seeing how far into a woman's body his arm would go, pushing his arm all the way in up to the armpit" (Gibney 75). As had happened in Shanghai in 1932, the Vice Chief of Staff responded to the increasing

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<sup>12</sup> See also Nancy Tong's documentary on the Rape of Nanjing, *In the Name of the Emperor*, which uses the diary entries and home movies of an American missionary to reconstruct the horror of those six weeks.

lawlessness of his troops not by attempting to quash those aggressions, but by redirecting them towards an officially sanctioned space: comfort stations in which Japanese and Korean women, plus a few Chinese women who had somehow survived the massacre, bore the unmitigated brunt of the soldiers' appetites.

By May of 1938, the war had become deadlocked, which only heightened the perceived need for comfort stations. With no end to the war in sight, Japanese soldiers had to serve much longer tours of duty without any leave. The comfort stations became a sort of consolation prize—the soldiers' only source of “comfort” during those extended tours (Hicks; Tanaka). Margaret Stetz and Bonnie Oh speculate that a combination of psychology and superstition played a role in the creation of the comfort system. Sex before battle was believed to protect a soldier from harm, a belief that no doubt proliferated when it became clear that the war was not going to end anytime soon. For their part, the officers theorized that “allowing sex to soldiers boosted their morale, promoted their discipline, and aroused courage, as well as relieved stress from combat” (Stetz and Oh 9).

### The Disciplined Soldier and the Benevolent Empire<sup>13</sup>

As Japan's imperial ambitions extended beyond China into other areas of Southeast Asia and the Pacific, maintaining order in occupied areas continued to be a justification for comfort stations, as was constructing an image of Japan as a benevolent and generous colonial power. The Nanjing Massacre had exacerbated already strong anti-Japanese sentiment in China, and the invaders-turned-occupiers found it difficult to

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<sup>13</sup> An earlier version of this analysis appears in my 2003 article, “Freeing the ‘Slaves of Destiny’: The Lolas of the Filipino Comfort Women Movement.”

control enraged and combative civilians. An entry in the Ninth Infantry Brigade's "Battlefield Diary" reads:

not only are rapes illegal acts in each of these areas, but they also undermine public order and obstruct the combat activities of the military as a whole. We ought to call them *acts of high treason that threaten the nation* ... We must stamp out the outbreaks of these acts. Any commanders who disregard these orders can only be called disloyal subjects ... The provision of facilities for sexual comfort as quickly as possible is of great importance (qtd. in Yoshimi 55, my emphasis).

The unquestioned assumption at work in the creation of the comfort stations was that men needed sex in order to function.<sup>14</sup> War was also believed to intensify a man's sexual urges, and without a proper outlet, so the logic goes, soldiers would inevitably turn to rape. Such behavior was considered unacceptable not for its own sake, but because it damaged the image of the Japanese nation and hindered the progress of its imperial project. A Japanese military doctor stationed in Indonesia in 1941 reported: "It is necessary that we take care to conduct ourselves in such a way as to cultivate a sense of trust among the native inhabitants that we love them and are acting sincerely toward them" (qtd. in Yoshimi 77).

A closer look at the regulations that governed the comfort system reveal an institution that used women's bodies as a means to discipline men's unruly desires and consequently shape a useful, manageable soldier in the service of the Japanese imperial project. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault describes the figure of the ideal soldier, which he traces through the seventeenth and into the late eighteenth century. According to Foucault, the visible signs of soldierly discipline—"A lively, alert manner, an erect head"—were internalized as a "calculated restraint" that ran through the entire body

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<sup>14</sup> And underlying *that* was the assumption that all men were heterosexual.

(135). By the eighteenth century, the body, as exemplified by Foucault's soldier, had become both the target and the object of power. Modern hospitals, schools, and militaries regulate an individual's movements to a great degree, and it is through these institutions that discipline takes hold of a body's most inconsequential gesture.

Sex, perceived as dangerous and yet necessary for soldiers to have, was far from being an "inconsequential bodily gesture," and thus came under the surveillance of the Japanese military. In a report entitled "Phenomena Particular to the Battlefield and Policies Toward Them," army psychiatrist Hayao Tora asked,

Why is it that Japanese soldiers are so unreasonable when it comes to sexual desire? ... The military leaders [in Shanghai] ... didn't think it strange at all. And I never once heard an admonition of this subject ... The military leaders there assume that the soldiers' sexual desires are impossible to restrain and set up comfort stations ... Rapes, however, are committed quite frequently ... Soldiers of conscience, knowing what goes on in comfort stations, laugh scornfully at these military leaders. But there are also some officers who insult soldiers who won't go to comfort stations, calling them crazy (qtd. in Yoshimi 68).

Although they were supposedly outlets for male sexual desires, the comfort stations quickly became a way to monitor and even encourage soldiers' sexual activities. As Dr. Hayao notes above, soldiers were pressured by peers and superiors to use the comfort stations or risk having one's manhood called into question. The comfort system's own rates, rules, and regulations mirrored the Japanese military and racial hierarchies, making very clear distinctions between the many privileges extended to officers and those few privileges allowed to enlisted men, many of whom were Koreans conscripted into service.

According to a rate chart seized by the Allied Forces, Japanese officers at the Manila, Philippines South Sector Billet comfort stations were allowed luxuries not

extended to mere enlisted men. Where the latter were permitted to purchase “visits” of 30 minutes to an hour in length, the former could buy extended or even overnight stays. Prices for these “visits” ranged from ¥1 to ¥15, and were determined by the length of the stay as well as the ethnicity or nationality of the comfort woman. The darker a woman’s skin, the less desirable she was, and therefore, the lower her price. There *were* Japanese comfort women, but they were few and expensive. Most often located in comfort stations in secure territories, Japanese women catered mostly to officers, even though they were “often considerably older, more jaded, and more likely to be diseased.” Hicks goes on to explain, “Koreans were ranked after Japanese and Okinawans; then came the Chinese, and lastly Southeast Asians, who tended to be darker-skinned” (48).

The comfort women were subject to monitoring and maintenance, much like other necessary objects. Whatever their complexions, the women had to submit to an examination by a medic or a doctor every few days, as detailed in the “Guidelines for Conducting Medical Examinations of Prostitutes and Serving Women.” The soldiers were also expected to report any unusual symptoms or behavior they observed to the medical officers. Every comfort woman traveling with or to the troops had to register with local command and get medical clearance before going to work. “Procedures for the Hygiene Education of Key Officers” warned soldiers to always make sure that the women they had sex with had up-to-date health certificates. Soldiers were given “Assault No. 1” brand condoms and “Secret Star Cream” disinfecting lubricant, and were instructed to use disinfectant on their genitals after having sex (Yoshimi 47). By policing the women, the soldiers were also supposed to be learning *self*-surveillance. Even as these practices contributed to the dehumanization of the comfort women, they also

reinforced the belief that women's bodies were dangerous. Paradoxically, the soldiers who patronized the comfort stations were conditioned to think of the sex act that was supposed to render them impervious during battle as the very same thing that could do them great harm.

### The Girl Army

Testimonial and documentary evidence indicate that the Japanese Imperial Army set up comfort stations not just all over China but also in the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Sakhalin, and the South Sea Islands. The Japanese military even had a "Department of Rewards," whose chief estimated the number of brothels needed in each occupied territory (Chung 224). In some cases the comfort women arrived at the front lines before the soldiers did. Former soldier Nakayama Tadanao relates,

I understood clearly how the "girl army" (*joshigun*) was actually not a play on words, but was actually a part of the army, was really an "army." I grasped the truth of the Jinzhou headquarters' statement that "women are a necessity, so they are transported by airplane." When the Japanese army advances, the officers' primary concern is the transportation of the "girl army" ... So they are not merely prostitutes! (qtd. in Yoshimi 48).

Former army accounting officer Shikanai Nobutaka describes the training he received at a military-run school he attended from April to September 1939:

[W]e estimated the endurance of the women rounded up in local areas and the rates at which they would wear out. We analyzed which women were strong or weak in those areas, and then had to go so far as to determine "how long they would be in use" ... We set different prices for different ranks and prices for overstaying (qtd. in Yoshimi 60-61).

The systematization and institutionalization of sexual violence did not necessarily mean uniformity in its execution. There was much variation in comfort station facilities, regulations, and inmates: major cities with military headquarters, like Shanghai and Nanjing, had large, permanent stations. Large army units had semi-permanent stations



directly attached to them, much like the first official comfort station for the 14<sup>th</sup> Mixed Brigade in Shanghai. Temporary stations were erected for smaller units, usually located in combat zones (Chung; Tanaka; Ueno *Nationalism and Gender*; Yoshimi).

As mentioned earlier, the first women sent to the comfort stations were Japanese *karayukisan*, but their numbers were not nearly enough to keep up with the military's growing demand for sexual "comfort." As a signatory to an international treaty banning traffic in women and children, Japan's comfort women recruitment activities were supposedly governed by certain regulations. Women traveling to work in the overseas comfort stations had to be 21 or older, and already working as prostitutes. Furthermore, they were to be issued identification papers and travel documents only if they proved to be free of infectious diseases. Japanese women traveling to navy comfort stations had to sign contracts specifying a period of service (typically one and a half years) and income (60% to the navy, 40% to the woman). They were also told, "if they died, their spirits could be enshrined at Yasukuni Shrine," which was devoted to the enshrinement and worship of war dead (Yoshimi 100-101). Most comfort system recruits, however, did not have the protection of a contract or the promise of future holiness. Recruitment regulations were infrequently enforced, and recruitment usually meant coercion or deception, especially when it came to the poor, young Koreans who constituted about eighty percent of all comfort women, and the thousands of Filipino, Indonesian, Chinese, and Taiwanese also swallowed up by this system and funneled to smaller stations.

Testimonial and documentary evidence indicate that the smaller the comfort station,<sup>15</sup> and the closer its proximity to the front, the more coercion and deception were used to

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<sup>15</sup> Some "stations" were little more than a row of tatami mats laid out in a temporary shelter and separated by curtains.

procure women. These makeshift comfort stations were also the farthest away from headquarters and the least overseen. Broken supply lines and the lack of consequences for bad behavior meant more exploitation of local women (Tanaka 19). The comfort system's organizational structure continued to break down as World War II drew to a close. In Indonesia and Okinawa, for example, civilian procurers and station managers were having trouble acquiring "materials"<sup>16</sup> from Korea, and so officers filled the gaps in the supply line by capturing local girls and women.

"This is Part of Your Work, Too":  
The Slippage from Work to Rape and Back Again

Before the 1992 publication of the Self-Defense Agency documents forced Japanese officials to admit to military involvement in the stations, their official position had been that the comfort women were professional sex workers who had gone to the civilian-operated stations voluntarily (Ueno *Nationalism and Gender*; Yoshimi). This early stance was made possible partly by the involvement of the *karayukisan* who, as noted earlier, had signed work contracts and had been promised a place among the war dead in the Yasukuni Shrine. But the *karayukisan* made up only a handful of the hundreds of thousands of women who eventually became part of—and usually did not survive—the comfort system. As Japanese women, the *karayukisan* had an ever-so-slightly higher value within the comfort system economy, especially after Nanjing, when

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<sup>16</sup> "Materials" is Chin's word. Throughout his article, "The Origin and Development of the Military Sexual Slavery Problem in Imperial Japan," the comfort women are not women, they are "material." The varied and mostly vile ways in which girls were taken to the comfort stations are "mobilizations." Chin's cold, dispassionate language mimics, perhaps intentionally, the same logic employed by the Japanese military as it went about setting up and maintaining the comfort stations, reducing living, breathing human beings to provisions.

recruitment tactics began to specifically target colonial subjects (Soh “Imperial Gifts,” 64).<sup>17</sup>

The claim of volunteerism is especially problematic with regards to Koreans, who at the time were Japan’s colonial subjects and had been since 1910. The comfort women, regardless of ethnicity and nationality, were victims of class status, colonialism, racism, and sexism, but Korean women’s experience of these converging oppressions took on a very particular form: the *Chongshindae*, or Women’s Volunteer Corps. There was an ambiguous “volunteer” umbrella under which male and female Koreans were coerced into serving the Japanese Emperor in this war. The men were sent off to fight, while the women were conscripted to do everything from soldiers’ laundry to sex work. The exhortation to serve “their” Japanese nation was only part of a longer, more widespread process of erasing Korean identity and absorbing them into Japan—except, conveniently, when it came to who got to die in battle or get raped at the front lines. At those times, they were entirely Korean—of less value than the Japanese, and therefore expendable.

There were several ways by which the Japanese army obtained non-Japanese women for the comfort stations. In Korea and Taiwan, civilian recruiters, usually brothel proprietors or labor-brokers, would gather together as many as 50 girls and women, and then send them off to the military outposts all at once. The most common method by far was deception, and poor Korean families in rural areas were recruiters’ primary targets. A labor-broker would approach a girl and ask her if she would like to work for the military

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<sup>17</sup> The conscription of Koreans into the comfort system was accompanied by the militarization of Japanese women at home and shaped by a confluence of Japanese culture’s xenophobic and misogynistic attitudes. With the exception of *karayukisan*, Japanese women were exhorted by their Emperor to contribute to the war effort by being virtuous and having many children in order to propagate their “superior” race (Tanaka 32). This racist attitude protected most Japanese women from sexual exploitation at the hands of their own military, while rendering other Asian women particularly vulnerable to it.

doing respectable domestic work like cooking or doing laundry. The recruiter would promise high pay and good food, and offer the girl's family money up front. In other instances, recruiters would enlist the help of local community leaders who could easily convince their constituents of the nobility and profitability of sending their daughters to serve in the Emperor's war (Hicks; Tanaka; Yoshimi). In Kim-Gibson's documentary film, *Silence Broken: Korean Comfort Women*, a retired Japanese teacher speaks to the camera, describing how she had followed instructions to convince her Korean students to go to the war front and work for the army. She claims that at the time she was fully convinced that her students were going to be paid well to do legitimate jobs. Sometimes they actually did get paid, but not for the kind of work they had been promised. Payment often came in the form of military scrip, which had no value after Japan lost the war. Abduction seems not to have been a common recruitment method in Japan's colonies or in the Dutch East Indies; it was, however, the primary method used in China and the Philippines, where military personnel were more likely to be directly involved. In these areas, the comfort stations were filled mostly with local women, many of whom describe having first been ambushed and raped by one or more Japanese soldiers before being taken to the stations, to be raped repeatedly and on a schedule. Almost all the comfort station survivors captured in this way report never receiving any form of compensation for their "work" (Tanaka; Ueno *Nationalism and Gender*; Yoshimi).

Contemporary feminists understand rape as a matter of consent versus coercion, but within the logic of the comfort system, the definition of rape had nothing to do with a woman's consent. Rather, "rape" or "not rape" was determined by whether or not these sexual acts were happening in a context officially sanctioned and managed by the

Japanese nation-state. As illustrated in the testimony of former comfort women, their captors and abusers referred to sexual slavery as work, whether or not the women actually received any portion of the money that soldiers paid for comfort. To a certain extent, this rhetoric of work permeates the survivors' own narratives.<sup>18</sup> Taiwanese survivor Lin Shen-Chin recounts that she was sixteen years old when the police chief of Tong-Men recruited her and three other girls to launder and care for military uniforms (Gomez 45). A total of six girls lived in a house near the barracks, as they were not allowed to go home to their families at night. Lin did sewing work for almost three months, until one day a captain in the Japanese army took her to a cave outside of town. There, she was met by a Japanese soldier, who demanded that she have sex with him. When she refused he said: "Since you came to work here, this is part of your work too" (Gomez 45). He proceeded to rape her. Every night from then on, all six of the girls were taken to the cave to be raped by as many as five soldiers in one night. Filipino comfort station survivor and activist Maria Rosa Henson tells that, months before she was ever taken to a comfort station, she had already been raped by Japanese soldiers on two prior occasions. The second time, she had been grabbed by the soldiers in full view of her uncles, who cried at their helplessness to protect her. Both assaults were of the moment, spontaneous and unexpected, and very different from the daily routine of the comfort station she later experienced.

At two in the afternoon, the soldiers came. Some of them were brought by truck to the garrison. My work began, and I lay down as one by one the soldiers raped me. At six p.m., we rested for a while and ate dinner. Often I was hungry because our rations were so small. After thirty minutes, I lay

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<sup>18</sup> At this point I want to clarify that I do not subscribe to, nor do I intend to reproduce, the idea that the comfort women were sex workers.

down on the bed again to be raped for the next three or four hours. Every day, anywhere from ten to over twenty soldiers raped me. There were times when there were as many as thirty: they came to the garrison in truckloads. At other times, there were only a few soldiers, and we finished early (Henson 64).

Henson refers to intercourse with the Japanese soldiers alternately as “work” and “rape.” This is a telling slippage, one that speaks of the difference the comfort *system* made with regard to her experiences of sexual violation. From her writings, it is clear that Henson did not think of being a comfort woman as “work” in the ordinary sense; rather, this mindset seems to be the effect of the routine that governed sex in the comfort system. Henson goes on to explain that her life as a comfort woman followed a set timetable: every morning, she and the other women breakfasted, cleaned their rooms, and bathed. They could count on three small meals a day, on a doctor coming to see them every Wednesday, and on being taken outside twice a week for sunshine and exercise. They could also count on the soldiers coming at two every afternoon and on having to endure assault after assault until late in the evening (Henson 69).

These accounts, and others like them, demonstrate how easily and destructively rape became just another kind of work, and provides some insight into why many survivors report conflicting feelings of violation and outrage at having been raped, but also shame and worthlessness at having been prostitutes. The routine of life at the stations, the schedules, price lists, medical surveillance, and the long lines of “clients”—in other words, the systematization of sexual violence—seem to have marked these women in ways that made them feel different from women who had been raped by soldiers in other, less regimented contexts. Japanese scholars and government officials who, at present, continue to deny the government’s involvement in the comfort system

have argued that the fees paid by soldiers prove that the comfort women were prostitutes and not sex slaves, but Ueno replies: “It is necessary here to separate the issue of whether recruitment was voluntary or not from the question of receiving money ... [W]hat we are actually talking about is forced labour under conditions of confinement” (*Nationalism and Gender* 82-84). The comfort women were prisoners within this sexual economy, forced to provide a service, price-tagged and paid for, that was intended to give strength to their captors/colonizers. To add the ultimate insult to injury, some of the women who were momentarily freed when the defeated Japanese troops fled occupied territories were captured *again*—this time by the Allied Forces. Korean survivor Pak Yong Sim explains,

When the war ended, we were taken as prisoners, along with the defeated Japanese troops, and sent to the Kunming POW camp in China. It was an additional shock and humiliation for me to be detained in the company of the men I loathed and whose victim I had been (qtd. in Gomez 136).

In the eyes of the Allied Forces then, and in the eyes of comfort system deniers now, the women were not the Japanese military’s enemies or victims, but their collaborators and employees.

“There is No End”

None of the justifications for the comfort system, and none of the regulations that governed them, were directed at actually stopping sexual violence. According to the patriarchal logic that informed the prototype brothels in Siberia down to the highly regulated stations in occupied China, male sexual impulses simply had to be directed towards and contained within sanctioned outlets so as not to damage the tenuous peace of occupation. It did not seem to bother policy makers that, in order to spare Chinese women from being raped and tortured, women of other ethnicities were being rounded up to be raped and tortured in their place.

In actuality, the comfort system did not achieve its purpose. Available evidence demonstrates that the rapes committed in the comfort stations went hand in hand with rape in battle zones and occupied territories (Yoshimi). Lieutenant Okamura, the same officer who in 1932 had first asked for women to be shipped to Shanghai, wrote in his diary: “At present, almost all units are accompanied by comfort women corps ... But even though such units as the Sixth Division march with a comfort women corps, there is no end to the rapes” (qtd. in Yoshimi 66). Militarized prostitution was supposed to have eliminated not wartime rape itself, but *the problems brought about by* wartime rape: the logistical inconveniences and loss of face it caused for the Empire and its military. This reasoning assumes a separation between wartime rape and militarized prostitution, a separation that “serves the interests of many patriarchal officials: it allows them to discuss rape and prostitution as if their perpetrators and their victims were entirely different” (Enloe 111). The surveillance imposed by the system did nothing to curb sexual violence in the comfort stations or in the occupied territories. How could it, when the system prohibited sexual violence in one area, while providing (even encouraging) it in another?

In their continuing push for an official apology and reparations, redress activists place great emphasis on holding the Japanese nation-state responsible for these crimes of war. Tanaka, who has been praised for his work on the Allied Forces’ role in suppressing information about the comfort system during the war and after, places the individual soldier at the center of the dialogue.

Japanese officers and enlisted men were *not ordered or forced* to abuse comfort women. They visited comfort stations by choice ... [therefore] the abuse of comfort women must be examined ... within the parameters of the intertwined ideologies of masculinity and militarism rather than



exclusively within those of the Japanese military structure, even as we search for distinctive features of the Japanese system of sexual enslavement ... The structure of the Japanese military organization must be examined in relation to this fundamental question—how its specific structure and ideology created a strong propensity among soldiers to abuse women. The answer ... does not lie merely in a simple analysis of the organizational structure of the Japanese military (4, emphasis in original).

The perpetrators' personal responsibility is, of course, important, but choice is never just about individual will. It is always constrained by and exercised within institutional structures. As described earlier, sex in the comfort system was, among other things, a way to assert and enforce male power hierarchies within the military institution. The individual Japanese soldiers may not have been explicitly ordered or forced to use the comfort facilities, but they were provided those facilities and were constantly bombarded with information and instructions regarding their use. The debate about personal versus institutional responsibility in international comfort women discourse today was not possible before the 1990s.

### **The Conditions of Possibility for Comfort Women Activism**

Once World War II was officially over, the Allied Powers set about implementing their victors' justice. Two weeks after Emperor Hirohito's surrender, U.S. troops were already occupying Japan. The International Military Tribunal for the Far East (or IMTFE, sometimes referred to as the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal) was quickly convened for the prosecution of Class "A" war criminals, with other international tribunals for Class "B" and "C" criminals (Dolgopol and Paranjape; Tanaka; Yoshimi). The existence and nature of the comfort system was known to the Allied Powers, and yet, in over two and a half years of hearings on war crimes committed by the Japanese against civilians, the victims and survivors of the comfort stations did not see justice done. At the Batavia trial, several

Japanese soldiers were tried and convicted for sexual crimes against a few Dutch women they had captured while in Indonesia, but the cases of local Indonesian women who had also been victimized were not looked into, much less prosecuted (Dolgopol and Paranjape; Tanaka). The international legal system may have failed the Asian comfort women, but information about the comfort system's horrors began circulating in the mass media as early as 1947, when Tamura Taijiro's novel *Shunpuden* (A Prostitute's Story) was first published. 1973 saw the publication of Senda Kako's *Jugun Ianfu* (Military Comfort Women), a nonfiction work that detailed the lives women led within the comfort system (Yoshimi). News of the comfort women *was* out there, but it would take several more years for that knowledge to evolve into concern and action. What historical and discursive conditions finally allowed "the 'emergence' of the 'comfort woman' as an international subject of cultural production, scholarship, activism and adjudication" (Kang 48)? What made the late twentieth century especially ripe for comfort women advocacy?

### The Usable Past

The past leaves traces, in material ruins and evidence, in mnemonic traces in the human neurological system, in individual psychical dynamics, and in the symbolic world. In themselves, these traces do not constitute "memory" unless they are evoked and placed in a context that gives them meaning.

Elizabeth Jelin, *State Repression and the Labors of Memory*

Many works on and about memory and testimony mark the Holocaust as the stimulus for present-day Western culture's preoccupation with memory (Felman and Laub; Jelin; LaCapra), which I, in turn, see as one of the tributaries feeding the impulse to collect and contemplate the testimonial narratives of the comfort women. According to Jay Winter, however, this supposedly recent "memory boom" has a much a longer history

which, like the Holocaust-driven preoccupation with remembrance, was born out of a world war. Winter asserts that memory first became “a universal phenomenon” at the turn of the twentieth century, from the 1890s to the 1920s. Around 1918, after the end of the Great War (World War I), memorials sprung up everywhere: “Their message was to remember—the sacrifice, the suffering, the slaughter, the names of the fallen” (59). This first generation boom focused on memory as the key to identity formation, in particular the (re)formation of national identities.

The 1970s and 80s saw another memory boom, this one a belated result of World War II, which had fragmented many of those identities forged at the beginning of the century. Memory became a way of casting about in the ruins of earlier identities and finding elements of what has been called a “usable past” (Winter 5).<sup>19</sup> There is a difference, Winter goes on to say, between our current approach to memory and the idealized remembrances that circulated *immediately* after World War II. Those early remembrances consisted mostly of stories about heroism and resistance, and it was only after those uplifting narratives had done the work of bringing war-torn countries and peoples back to some semblance of political stability that the heroes could step back and make way for the war’s victims. These “new remembrancers,” to use Winter’s term, brought to the fore the darker aspects of wartime and spoke of compromise and survival rather than resistance and heroism (61).

As the 1980s wore on, memory, once “discarded as an undisciplined activity that troubles the clear waters of historiography,” became increasingly more respectable

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<sup>19</sup> Winter borrows this term from French historian Pierre Nora *lieux de memoire*.

(Assmann 263). In venues like *History and Memory*, an academic journal co-founded in 1989 by Saul Friedländer and Dan Diner, the eponymous activities were brought together in productive conversation, and became accepted as “complementary modes of reconstructing and relating to the past” (Assmann 263). Friedländer sought to close the distance between the detached scholarly account and the intense but often fragmented personal experience, and the cultural power of memory can be seen in the proliferation of archives, commemorative dates and holidays, and memorials.<sup>20</sup> The exploration of memory is not reserved only for past *tragedies*, but collective trauma does seem to rank high among remembrances. Assman states:

The first question for historians to ask is still what has happened? But it is no longer the only one. Other questions are now also being asked by historians, such as: How is an event, and especially a traumatic event, experienced and remembered? What kind of shadow does the past cast over the present? What are more or less adequate modes of representing the past events? How can the memory of a historic event be preserved in public commemoration and personal memories? (263).

We acknowledge the shadow the past casts over the present by asking not only *what* happened but also *what it felt like*, and there were a few specific anniversaries in the 1990s that led to the emergence, out of this shadow, of the facts and feelings about the comfort system.

### Anniversaries

The West’s “awakening” about the comfort women, as Chungmoo Choi puts it, coincided with the end of the Cold War (v). During the Cold War, Choi explains, the U.S.

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<sup>20</sup> Memory is not solely the realm of scholars and governments. As Jelin observes: “The mass media structure and organize this presence of the past in all areas of contemporary life” (1). Fascination with memory also thrives in the domestic sphere. Families create shrines to the mundane and flood the inboxes of friends and family with megapixel clutter. The popularity of increasingly more sophisticated yet (relatively) affordable digital photography and videography equipment has contributed to, among other industries, the latest keep-white-middle-class-homemakers-busy industry: scrapbooking.

suppressed discussion of Japan's attempts at colonialism in general, and biological warfare in particular. No one spoke of Japanese Army Unit 731's live human subject experimentation because those who had performed the experiments had given their technology over to the U.S. and thus were exonerated of their crimes (v-vi). With the end of the Cold War, however, these and other long-buried tidbits of history came to light. Another factor was the impending fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II, which inspired much international reflection in the vein of "What have we accomplished since?" Reflections on the lessons of the Holocaust contributed significantly to the growing cultural importance of testimony and memory. Various Asian nations and territories commemorated their liberation from Japanese occupation, while in Japan people were contemplating the fiftieth anniversary of the bombings of Nagasaki and Hiroshima. In these parts of the world, the late 1980s and early 1990s belonged to the politics of remembering and forgetting, of dusting off the long forgotten designations of victim and perpetrator, and of wondering how those identities had managed to get so tangled up in one another.

In July 1986, the *Asahi Shimbun*, a major Japanese daily newspaper, began publishing a series of readers' letters. These letters were about the Asia Pacific War, and the paper was running them as part of a *Senso* (war)-themed series that was to run over a period of three months. The letters came from both men and women who had lived through the war and covered everything from civilian life to POW experiences, and a very few of them talked about the comfort women.<sup>21</sup> The general readership's

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<sup>21</sup> Excerpts from former soldiers' testimony, specifically about the comfort system, can be found in Yoshimi's book, as well as in Dolgopol and Paranjape's *Report of a Mission* written for the International Commission of Jurists.

enthusiasm for the series was so overwhelming that the series was extended several times, finally ending in August 1987 (Gibney). Why did these letter-writing former privates and junior officers, who by then were septuagenarians and octogenarians, begin speaking up about wartime experiences they had previously kept private? Buruma speculates:

Perhaps it was the proximity of death that made them want to talk, or perhaps it was because most of their superior officers were no longer alive; there was less pressure to keep quiet, less face to be preserved. The same thing happened after the death of Emperor Hirohito [in 1989]; it was as though forbidden subjects could suddenly be aired (129).

Tongues that had been kept in check by the postwar remnants of the Shinto Emperor cult were suddenly free. Hirohito, commander in chief of the Japanese imperial forces and “the most exalted political figure in the nation,” had been declared innocent of any war crimes by the IMTFE. “If *he* was deemed to have no responsibility whatsoever for the horrors and disasters that took place between ... 1926 and ... 1945, why should ordinary Japanese even think of taking responsibility on themselves?” (Dower 233). It is almost as if some collective sense of impunity or justification had died along with the Emperor, and veterans could publicly reminisce and explore their participation in his war.

The *Asahi Shimbun*'s *Senso* letters stirred up a spectrum of responses, among them accusations of the newspaper's deliberate resurrection of an ugly past at a time when the nation was trying to burnish its international image. Nagasawa Michio, a member of the newspaper's editorial board, published a response that said: “The really brave will face up to the negative acts of the past” (qtd. in Gibney viii). Prophetic words indeed; in 1995, at the height of the controversy about comfort women and war responsibility, Frank Gibney published the collected letters in Japanese and English

translation, placing all of those *Senso* memories in the hands of an eager international readership. As Ueno succinctly puts it: “With the emergence of a Japanese version of historical revisionism, the comfort women issue [became] a litmus test of attitudes about war responsibility and the construction of public memory” (“The Politics of Memory” 129). The rising tide of activism on behalf of the comfort women threatened the victim identity that the Japanese nation had adopted after the bombings at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. But what created the conditions of possibility for this activism?

#### The Emergence of an International Redress Movement

One major, more global factor in the emergence of the comfort system issue is the still-new idea that women’s rights are human rights. The last three decades have seen the birth and evolution of grassroots women’s movements in many different parts of the world, leading to the understanding that violence against women is not just a “women’s issue” contained within a separate, secondary sphere, but rather a matter of human rights and public policy. From its beginnings as a list of the concerns of Western, white, property-owning men, “human rights” has been slowly expanding to include, among other things, (some of) the realities of women’s lives and (not enough of) the gender-specific ways in which women’s dignity gets violated (Bunch 4). Feminists of the late twentieth century called for an understanding of rape as a cruel and inhuman act, a violation of a woman’s body and autonomy, and therefore a violation of human rights. This was quite a leap from the Geneva Convention’s characterization of rape as “a crime against the honor and dignity of women” (Soh “Prostitutes versus Sex Slaves,” 80). Until recently, violence against women in wartime had been so invisible for so long that even the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence Against Women (CEDAW)

did not name it. Feminist activists and scholars began to see patterns of wartime sexual violence emerging out of misogynist military policies and practices. Knowledge about comfort women evolved into an awareness of the comfort system as part of a “cycle of impunity”<sup>22</sup> stretching from the British military’s recruitment of Indian prostitutes during the Raj, to the American military’s R&R program for soldiers doing a tour in Vietnam, to the rape and genocide camps in the former Yugoslavia, to analyses of the ways in which sex and militarism are linked even in peacetime.

The unprecedented and oft-praised transnational nature of the comfort women movement could not have existed without South Korean grassroots organizing around sex trafficking, which opened a door onto Japan’s history of military sex slavery. As a young girl, Professor Yun Chin Ok<sup>23</sup> of Ehwa Women’s University, who later became the “tactical leader” of the comfort women’s Seoul campaign, narrowly escaped being conscripted into the comfort system. She started researching the comfort stations on her own in 1980, and in April 1988 her work found an attentive audience at a seminar on modern-day sex tourism. The seminar was part of an international conference on “Women and Tourism,” held on Cheju Island, Korea, and sponsored by a Christian group called the Korea Church Women United. After hearing Yun speak about the comfort system, members of the church group decided to explore the issue further. They located and visited the remains of structures that had once served as military brothels in Korea,

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<sup>22</sup> I first came across the term “cycle of impunity” on a list of the comfort women movement’s goals and demands. Activists are pushing for the successful prosecution of Japanese military sex slavery as a war crime—not just for reparations for the comfort women, but also in the hope that it will end the centuries-old cycle of impunity by which male leaders have been condoning, encouraging, and using wartime sexual violence without fear of consequence.

<sup>23</sup> Anglicized as “Yun Jon Ok” (Ueno “The Politics of Memory,” 136) and alternately as “Yun Chong-ok” (Chin 234).



which in turn inspired them to seek out the women who had once lived within those walls, survivors willing—perhaps waiting—to speak out about Japanese military sex slavery. This search for survivors was a move that became crucial to the emergence of the comfort women redress movement as we now know it (Kiyoteru; Soh “The Korean ‘Comfort Women’”).

1989 saw another incident that contributed to the movement’s birth: in January of that year, South Koreans protested their government’s decision to send an emissary to the funeral of Emperor Hirohito in Japan, despite several unresolved political issues between the two nations—among them, the matter of the comfort women (Kiyoteru 336).

Meanwhile, Church Women United had formed a coalition with other South Korean women’s organizations. In 1990, the coalition, called The Korean Council for Women Drafted into Military Sexual Slavery by Japan, began urging President Roh Tae Woo to speak to the Japanese prime minister about their nations’ shared history of military sexual slavery. The issue first came to the attention of the Japanese Diet in June 1990, when, during budget commission deliberations, Upper House Diet member Motooka Shoji of the Socialist Party called upon his government to investigate military sexual slavery (Chung 234). In August 1991, the Council issued a list of demands on the comfort women’s behalf.<sup>24</sup>

1. The Japanese Government should reveal the crime of the *Jungshindae*, i.e. comfort women;
2. The Japanese Government should formally apologize;
3. The Japanese Government should erect a memorial for these victims;

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<sup>24</sup> The Task Force for Filipino Comfort Women (TFFCW) issued its own list of demands against the Japanese *and* Philippine governments. I go into more detail about the Filipino comfort women movement in Chapter III.

4. The Japanese Government should pay reparations to these victims/their bereaved families;
5. The crime of *Jungshindae* must be accurately recorded in Japanese school textbooks and history books;
6. The Japanese Government must punish such offenders, as are alive today (Dolgopol and Paranjape 185).

The Council set up a Victim Hotline in South Korea in September 1991, and the calls started coming in. Meanwhile, a feminist paradigm shift was occurring in Japan, leading to the growing understanding that women are not simply victimized by war, but also participate in it, overtly or not, and thus share the responsibility for wartime atrocities. In the face of their own government's denial of war crimes accountability, Japanese feminists would become some of the comfort station survivors' most ardent advocates,<sup>25</sup> taking it upon themselves to shoulder the responsibility their government shrugged off. The Japanese Hotline for Military Comfort Women, which was set up in January 1992, received calls not only from former comfort women, but also from their patrons/perpetrators, men who had served in the military during the war. Some called to express regret for their actions while others called expressly to denounce the women and their demands (Brownmiller; Chung; Dolgopol and Paranjape; Ueno *Nationalism and Gender* and "The Politics of Memory").

The coalition's initial strategy involved filing lawsuits against the Japanese state, and getting the word out via Japanese and Korean national media and public fora.

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<sup>25</sup> Nishioka Tsutomu, a Professor at Tokyo Christian University and an ardent comfort system denier, coined the phrase "Japanese Japan-haters." In his latest online publication, *Behind the Comfort Women Controversy: How Lies Became Truth*, Nishioka quotes himself:

Japanese Japan-haters, whose sole purpose in life is to condemn Japan, have joined forces with South Koreans who feel the need to criticize everything that Japan does. They are aided by the media of both nations, which intentionally misinform the public. The two governments are sucked into the whirlpool and react without thinking (qtd. in Nishioka 53).

Although these actions did generate some support from the general public, the Japanese government's response was decidedly cold, claiming that the comfort stations had been owned and operated by private interests and asserting that any war crime liability issues between the nations had been resolved with the 1965 signing of the Japan-South Korea normalization treaty. As 1991 came to a close, the movement seemed not to have made much political headway. January 8, 1992, a Wednesday, saw the first of what would become regular weekly demonstrations in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul (Chung 235). Every Wednesday since, regardless of the weather, the former comfort women and their advocates can be found in front of the embassy, and according to the Council they will continue to return there until the issue has been resolved to their satisfaction. The visibility of these protests, combined with pressure from organizations like the United Nations and the International Commission of Jurists—alerted to the issue by the Korean Council—pushed the Japanese government to produce a report on the issue in 1992 and another in 1993. The 1992 report acknowledged military involvement in the system while, “at the same time, it denied the forced nature of [the women’s] drafting. It also refused to acknowledge the testimonies of the surviving comfort women as evidence that force was used” (Yang 54). The comfort women’s case was strengthened further by Yoshiaki Yoshimi’s discovery of documentary evidence linking the Japanese government directly to the comfort system, a development I mentioned earlier in this chapter (Kiyoteru 336-337).

In 1992, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR) began a series of investigations and hearings that effected

a drastic shift in the paradigm for representing the comfort women. In contrast to the pre-UN debate view of the comfort women as *prostitutes*,

the international community has now come to define them as *victims* of military sexual enslavement, a war crime perpetrated by the Japanese state (Soh “Imperial Gifts,” 60, my emphasis).

The battle between the categories of “prostitute” and “victim” had begun, and awareness of the comfort women spread like fire in dry grass.<sup>26</sup> As more and more women identified themselves as comfort station survivors, redress activists ignited debate in other Asian territories that had also been invaded by Japanese forces in the 1930s and 1940s. Soon the former comfort women, many of whom insisted upon being called “Grandmother,” were everywhere—on the radio, on television, in newspapers and magazines. Their statements were collected and reported by fact-finding missions sent by the UNCHR and the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) to the Republic of Korea, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, the Philippines, and Japan. The Japanese government’s 1993 report waffled, offering what Yang characterizes as a somewhat ambiguous statement that it was possible that force may have been used in drafting some of the comfort women. Also in 1993, the South Korean government issued a public statement saying that they cared little for material reparations from the Japanese government; what they wanted was for the Japanese government to “take major responsibility for investigating the issue” (Yang 54).

Taken together, the developments and events I have discussed over the last several pages together created the conditions of possibility for the comfort women redress movement in the late 20th century. That movement, in turn, has generated many publications collecting the legal testimony and personal narratives of comfort station survivors of different nationalities. The United Nations alone has sponsored three such

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<sup>26</sup> I will discuss these identity categories in greater detail in Chapter II.

collections. In 1994, the ICJ published *Comfort Women: An Unfinished Ordeal, Report of a Mission*, a study researched and edited by Ustina Dolgopol and Snehan Paranjape. In January 1996, Radhika Coomaraswamy, UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, submitted to the UNCHR a detailed report on the comfort women. Yet another report, the 1998 Report on Wartime Slavery by Special Rapporteur Gay McDougall contains a section on the comfort stations—characterized by McDougall as “rape centers”—recommending concrete measures towards resolving the comfort women issue.

Of course, urging such a resolution is easier than achieving it, and more than two decades after the McDougall report, redress scholars and activists have begun to explore other aspects of this history, such as the testimonial narratives produced by the former comfort women themselves. In the next chapters, I explore the ways in which we ask the comfort women, “What happened?” and I examine closely the form and substance of the stories they tell us in response.

CHAPTER II  
 “I DO NOT WANT TO DIE THE GHOST OF A VIRGIN”:  
 THEORIZING THE TESTIMONIAL NARRATIVES  
 OF THE COMFORT WOMEN

If the Greeks invented tragedy, the Romans the epistle, and the Renaissance the sonnet, our generation invented a new literature, that of testimony.

Elie Wiesel, *Dimensions of the Holocaust*

[T]estimonial witnessing cuts across literary genres and disciplinary categories in its engagement with trauma as destabilizing narrative, memory, identity, and history, its performances of the fragmentation of identity effected by atrocity, its demand for a performative witnessing engagement with the survivor’s interlocutor as witness, and its enactment of an ethical community of humans across difference, as those people who resist violence and their effacement from juridical and cultural fields.

Anne Cubilie, *Women Witnessing Terror*

*Halmoni* Mun Pil-gi was one of many comfort station survivors who testified at the Women’s International War Crimes Tribunal on Japan’s Military Sexual Slavery<sup>27</sup> held at The Hague in December 2001. Having described the various abuses she suffered at the hands of Japanese troops, she asked the Tribunal judges for justice, telling them, “I do not want to die as the ghost of a virgin” (qtd. in Chinkin 337). Hers is a plea that speaks to how the former comfort women’s past traumas live in their present. It is a plea that opens up to interrogation one of the redress movement’s foundational and most dearly held assumptions: that by breaking their silence, the Grandmothers have reclaimed the younger, innocent selves they lost to the abuses of the comfort system.

Redress activists and scholars describe testimony as being crucial both to the Grandmothers’ collective pursuit of justice and to the healing of their individual mental and emotional wounds. Arguing for the inclusion of the comfort women’s narratives in Japanese school textbooks, Ueno frames the act of giving testimony as a pivotal moment

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<sup>27</sup> Hereafter referred to as “the Women’s Tribunal,” or simply “the Tribunal.”

for the comfort women, a moment that transformed them personally and publicly, giving them the support structure of a redress movement and the validation of having access to legal process. Testifying, she remarks in “The Politics of Memory,”

signified the recovery of a suppressed past. However negative the memories were, these women were recovering the wholeness of their selves by identifying their own past as something meaningful ... Already, in the act of testifying, the former comfort women have laid claim to their dignity (137).

By telling their stories, the Grandmothers have indeed made their past meaningful. By making the comfort system visible, they have placed it among the ranks of the twentieth century mass traumas that are studied by scholars working in many diverse disciplines. Upon examination, however, Mun Pil-gi’s appeal to the Tribunal judges reveals not a survivor who is healed and whole, but a victim who continues to be locked into her trauma—who exists only as the ghost of the virgin who died at the moment of first rape. For this Halmoni,<sup>28</sup> the reclamation of dignity and wholeness resides not in her ability to publicly speak of her past, but in the court’s ability and willingness to reclaim them for her.

By the time the comfort women’s narratives became available to a wider audience via such publications as Kim-Gibson’s *Silence Broken: Korean Comfort Women*,<sup>29</sup> Gomez’s *From the Depths of Silence: Voices of Women Survivors of War*, and Schellstede’s *Comfort Women Speak*, the trope of “silence broken” was already firmly entrenched in the rhetoric of comfort women advocacy. A silence that is broken conveys

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<sup>28</sup> Grandmother.

<sup>29</sup> Kim-Gibson also produced and directed a documentary film of the same name.

a sense of suddenness and immediacy; it carries with it the implication that to break silence means to cause instantaneous and irrevocable change in the status quo. In its many permutations (“finding a voice,” “speaking out,” “emerging from the depths of silence,” and so on), the notion of a silence that must be broken is far from exclusively applicable to the comfort women’s circumstances. U.S. social movements are particularly fond of deploying this kind of rhetoric. It appears frequently in discourse on domestic and sexual violence, positioning liberation “precisely within the very discourses of speech, suggesting that ... silence represents both the precondition and the very foundations of oppression” (Duncan 7). To be silent—or silenced—is to be invisible, powerless, unknown.<sup>30</sup> The trope’s omnipresence in local and global feminist discourse suggests that to break silence is to cross some kind of threshold past which women become visible as objects of investigation and analysis. However, silence broken does not begin to encompass the complexity of the comfort women’s public articulation of a trauma so private. It belies the complex development, over time, of the historical and political conditions that made testimony possible, and the limitations imposed by the contexts out of which testimony emerges.

In this chapter I move past this notion of a silence broken in search of a more nuanced understanding of the comfort women’s testimony. Testimony has become a significant medium through which we relate to the world. We would do well to consider Anne Cubilie’s observation that “we privilege voice and individuality in the face of death and repression, but only in the stories that we are prepared to hear, not necessarily the stories survivors would tell if we listened differently” (xii). Valuable as they are in

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<sup>30</sup> This was memorably invoked by the 1980s U.S. campaign for AIDS awareness, which featured the slogan, “Silence = Death.”



bringing atrocities to light and holding accountable the perpetrators of violence, victims' "real" stories have of late come under the scrutiny of feminist scholars whose necessary and paradoxical work it is to "interrogate truth-telling discourses, even as we rely on those discourses to rethink imperialist, ethnocentric, and Western epistemologies" (Hesford ix). With this in mind, I build my work upon an understanding of the comfort women's narratives as rhetorical constructions shaped by circumstance, elicited in context, and deployed, most often, in the pursuit of legal and compensatory redress for the comfort women and their families. My concern here is with the ways in which these factors have shaped the comfort women's narratives, and with how we—advocates, scholars, feminists—seek out the "textured excess" of their testimony, and finally, with how their articulation of trauma obeys as well as exceeds the strictures of our juridical unconscious. My central question here is: Who is the comfort woman who emerges out of the struggle for the narrative reconstitution of the self that was destroyed by trauma?

**"Locked Within That Skin": Trauma and the Paradox of Testimony**

If every century has been marked by extreme experience, it has become almost compulsory in ours to document the disaster.

Nancy K. Miller and Jason Tougaw,  
*Extremities: Trauma, Testimony and Community*

The twentieth century—an era of historic trials—was in effect a century of traumas and (concurrently) a century of theories of trauma.

Shoshana Felman, *The Juridical Unconscious*

In medical usage, "trauma" refers to a blow to the body or mind that injures or otherwise disturbs. It is "an assault from outside that breaks into the space one occupies as a person and damages the interior" (Erikson 455). In the late 1980s, as scholars from non-medical fields began to take an interest in the subject, the strict medical definition of trauma began to drift, and the term is now used to refer to anything from the initiating

event to the resulting post-event state. What we now call Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD, was first defined and entered into the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III) in 1980.<sup>31</sup> For my purposes I use the word trauma to refer not to the event itself but to its resultant state. This is not an arbitrary decision; the initiating event may be where the story begins but, as explained by Kai Erikson, “it is the later condition that gives the event its traumatic quality ... it is the *harm* that defines and gives shape to the initial event, the *harm* that gives it its name. The center of gravity of the traumatic occurrence, that is to say, is the damage done” (456, emphasis in original). In the years since its first DSM appearance, the implications of a PTSD diagnosis have reached well beyond the realm of psychoanalysis. As Cathy Caruth points out, the more precise our classifications and definitions of PTSD symptoms become, the less defined and bounded our modes of understanding trauma,

so that psychoanalysis and medically-oriented [sic] psychiatry, sociology, history and even literature<sup>32</sup> *all seem to be called upon to explain, to cure, or to show why it is that we can no longer simply explain or simply cure.* The phenomenon of trauma has seemed to become all-inclusive but it has

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<sup>31</sup> Erikson points out that the once-controversial PTSD is “named for the stimulus that brought it into being, a logic very like the one that would be at work if mumps were known as ‘post-exposure glandular disorder’” (Erikson 456). Humorous logic aside, the framers of the PTSD diagnosis had in mind stressors they considered unusual and outside the “normal” range of human experience: disasters both natural and human-made, from earthquakes, tornadoes, and typhoons to war, the Holocaust, and the atomic bomb. Feminist psychoanalyst Laura S. Brown argues that this definition came out of and supported a sexist status quo, as it excluded many traumatic stressors, such as sexual harassment and incest, that all too often are part of girls’ and women’s day to day lives. “They are,” Brown explains, “experiences to which women accommodate; potentials for which women make room in their lives and their psyches. They are private events, sometimes known only to the victim and perpetrator” (121). In the case of the comfort women even this distinction is blurry. Part of the complexity of studying the comfort women’s narratives lies in how they transform private, individual trauma into public, collective trauma, a transformation I explore later in this chapter.

<sup>32</sup> Given the profoundly embodied nature of trauma, perhaps it is not surprising that women authors are overrepresented in trauma literature. To name only a few: Marguerite Duras, Toni Morrison, Nora Okja Keller, Julia Alvarez, Edwidge Danticat, and Octavia Butler. This overrepresentation seems to be not just about the hyperembodiment of women in many cultures, but also about conventions of pornography which include a fascination with the hurt, bruised female body.

done so precisely because it brings us to the limits of our understanding (1-2, my emphasis).

Trauma is also thought to bring us to the limits of communication. Language, or rather, the absence or destruction of language, has been cited as the first and perhaps the largest obstacle to the victim's ability to express and therefore exercise the effects of trauma. In *The Body in Pain*, Elaine Scarry describes profound pain as an experience so embodied that it *destroys* language and therefore can never be fully communicated to others. This raises the question of whether there even is a vocabulary of pain *to* destroy. Patricia Culbertson discusses the relationship between pain and language as the

paradox of a known and felt truth that unfortunately obeys the logic of dreams rather than of speech and so seems as unreachable ... It is a paradox of the distance of one's own experience.

*No experience is more one's own than harm to one's own skin, but none is more locked within that skin*, played out within it in actions other than words, in patterns of consciousness below the everyday and the constructions of language (169-70, my emphasis).

The way we think about trauma and testimony has been greatly influenced by the discourse on these concepts that emerged out of the Holocaust, which is perhaps the most studied limit event of the twentieth century. Dori Laub, working with Holocaust survivors and writing from a specifically medical-therapeutic perspective, concludes that telling one's story is imperative to recovery: by the act of telling, one comes to know one's story "unimpeded by ghosts from the past against which one has to protect oneself" (Laub 77). The question then becomes: *How* does one articulate that which is locked within the skin, that which is beyond words?

Culbertson explains that the function of the trauma narrative is to "render body memories tellable" by arranging difficult memories into story form, linking together events and emotions.

In so doing it becomes possible to return the self to its legitimate social status as something ... that recounts its own biography, *undoing the grasp of the perpetrator* and reestablishing the social dimension of the self lost in the midst of violation ... What we normally call memory is not the remembered at all of course, but a socially accepted fabrication ... the remembered (178, my emphasis).

The survivor must first translate the experiences locked within her skin, the “protolanguage of violation,” into words, and then arrange those words into a sequence that can be understood. The already difficult work of re-membering becomes even more complicated in a situation like that in which the Asian comfort station survivors found themselves after World War II. There existed no vocabulary, no socially acceptable narrative they could adopt or adapt that would cast them as being victims of military sexual slavery and not wartime prostitutes or, at best, “damaged goods.”<sup>33</sup> The discrepancy between the events that they lived through and the narrative frameworks available to them at the time meant that the survivors dwelled in silence for decades after the war had ended. Lola Andresa Fernandez narrates that after she and her family’s two maids (“helpers”) escaped from a comfort station in Leyte, Philippines,

the two helpers advised me not to tell my family what really happened, but to invent story [sic] that we were only chased by the Japanese and we got lost in the forest. They said we had to lie because if we told the truth the people would look down on us, as they would not understand, and it would be hard for me as I was still young.

That I was finally reunited with my family at Dumalaan [sic]; my mother tearfully hugged and kissed me and asked where I had been. I did not answer and instead asked to rest first as I was tired. The two helpers

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<sup>33</sup> I specify “Asian” comfort women because there is evidence that white women victimized by the Japanese military *did* have access to a serviceable narrative of victimization. I briefly mentioned in Chapter I that although the majority of the comfort women were Asian, a few Dutch women—settlers in the Dutch East Indies, now Indonesia—had been captured and raped repeatedly. The atrocities of the comfort system as a *system* were not at issue during the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal; however, testimony *was* given regarding the rape of Dutch women. Tanaka qualifies that this testimony was meant to demonstrate that the Japanese military had committed crimes against *Allied civilians* (63).

were the ones who told them about the version of our story that we had agreed on (qtd. in Sancho 75).

This bit of testimony shows how comfort station “recruitment” practices<sup>34</sup> had broken down by the time the Japanese came to occupy the Philippines. Andresa Fernandez was no child of a poor family, lured to a comfort station with promises of legitimate work; rather, she and the helpers had been abducted by Japanese soldiers. I find it particularly interesting that the two maids included their young mistress in their lie. Their rationale indicated not only the awareness that the truth of their experience was not comprehensible, but also that class privilege offered no protection from the social taint of having been a wartime prostitute or rape victim.

Like Lola Andresa, many survivors waited until the 1990s to speak of their experiences even privately, but there were those who did confide in their family members. Sometimes they found acceptance, but in many instances patriarchal notions of virtue drove a wedge between the survivor and her family, as Lola Remedios Tecson learned.

In 1955, I married [Ricardo Tecson]. I told him what had happened to me and he seemed to understand. We were together for three years. But there came a time when his friends found out about my past and they started taunting him. They told him that I was damaged goods, and that he was making do with leftovers by the Japanese [sic]. I think he believed his friends so that one day, he just abandoned me while I was pregnant with our second child (qtd. in Sancho 109).

Lola Remedios’ anecdote demonstrates the sad truth that an individual’s ability to comprehend what happened to the comfort women can succumb to cultural prejudices that mark rape victims as “unclean.” The lack of cultural forms that did not trap the comfort station survivors in a patriarchal virgin/whore paradigm only compounded the

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<sup>34</sup> I describe these recruitment methods in Chapter I.

paradox of articulating the traumatic, embodied experiences that are beyond the reach of language.

An understanding of trauma narrative as the reconstitution of a socially legitimate self is an invaluable lens through which to read the comfort station survivors' testimonies, but I am as yet unsure that the narrative structures and juridical venues we have now are up to the task of, to use Culbertson's phrase, undoing the grasp of the perpetrator. Much of the trauma discourse I have drawn upon thus far frames the act of telling one's story in a one-on-one context, as supplicant to confessor, as patient to doctor. Such convenient religious and medical metaphors reveal the power differential that often exists between the trauma survivor and her listener. By adopting these perspectives we encourage a construction of the survivor as delicate and extremely frangible—or, to return to Mun Pil-gi's metaphor, as a ghost, insubstantial, barely there. In this scenario she is extremely fragile, and any hope she has of surviving depends not on her own actions but on the actions of others: the doctor must heal, the confessor must grant absolution. But *is* the comfort station survivor so breakable, or is this politically useful representation a function of the narrative structures presently available to her?

### **The Juridical Unconscious and the Teleology of Redress**

As mentioned earlier, Caruth observes that in the last few decades the fields of psychiatry, sociology, history, and literature have all been tasked “to explain, to cure, or to show why it is that we can no longer simply explain or simply cure” trauma (2). In the case of the comfort women, however, the most visible and most aggressively pursued recourse for explanation and cure is the law. I return to Ueno, who stated that the comfort women “were recovering the wholeness of their selves by identifying their own past as

something meaningful ... Already, in the act of testifying, the former comfort women have laid claim to their dignity” (137). Prior to the emergence of the movement, the abuses of the comfort system did not exist as a *collective* trauma, and the experiences of a former comfort woman did not have a place in public memory about World War II.<sup>35</sup> Without the support structure of a redress movement and without the validation of legal process, the comfort women were individuals struggling with their personal misfortunes. In light of this, a more accurate restatement of Ueno’s claim would go something like this: it is *by testifying to a public, collective trauma in concert with other survivors and pleading their case in a court of law* that the comfort women are able to define their past as meaningful to others.

Indeed, some of the comfort women’s most passionate supporters and advocates—believers in the restorative powers of legal process—are attorneys. At a symposium on Filipino comfort women’s legal standing and strategy, one such attorney declared:

At long last, they have broken their silence and taken action to recover their honor. We, not the women, have to overcome the prejudice we have created in our society which has suppressed them and prevented them from speaking the truth. A society that condemns women who were sexually victimized is wrong and must change. Justice has to be brought to bear [upon] the unjustifiable acts committed by the Japanese army. *Compensation for former “comfort women” is important, primarily because it will restore human dignity to the victims and bring justice* (Takagi 6, my emphasis).

Unlike Ueno, who identifies the act of giving testimony as the moment of transformation, Takagi focuses on the legal outcome that testimony is meant to facilitate. In this

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<sup>35</sup> Noting the commercial success of Holocaust-themed popular entertainment (for example, films such as Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List* and Benigni’s *Life is Beautiful*, 1993 and 1998 respectively), Miller and Tougaw quote the so-called “famous joke” from Philip Roth’s novel *Operation Shylock*: “There’s no business like *Shoah* business” (3).

formulation, it is not enough for the comfort women to tell their stories; rather, the restoration of lost dignity can only happen when the victims' testimony leads to the perpetrators admitting their guilt and making material reparations.

It is this compensatory theory of justice that fuels the movement's dogged pursuit of reparations, but I must ask, by what logic does recompense—financial or otherwise—ordered by a court of law bring an end to the comfort women's ordeal? Would a favorable ruling really allow Mun Pil-gi to become someone other than that ghost of a virgin? Legal scholar Martha Minow explains that the belief that compensation for injuries wipes the slate clean is commonplace enough in the context of personal injury, contracts, and bankruptcy, and extends into cases concerning mass violence. Doing so

substitutes money or other material benefits ... for the devastation inflicted by wrongful incarcerations, or tortures, or murders. This means crossing over different lexicons of value ...

Yet no market measures exist for the value of living an ordinary life, without nightmares or survivor guilt. Valuing the losses from torture and murder strains the moral imagination (104).<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> The Asian Women's Fund, founded in 1995, was one such attempt to assess the market value of the Grandmothers' losses. The organizers of the AWF distributed—or tried to distribute—financial compensation to comfort station survivors, and the controversy this caused among the survivors will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter III. Despite such setbacks, the AWF continued its work, which was described by Japanese President Tomiichi Murayama in a March 2007 press conference as:

three specific missions: to express atonement to the former comfort women at a national level, combining compensation from citizen donations and medical welfare support from government funds; to collect and edit historical documents related with the issue and use them for historical lessons; to reflect on past mistakes of violating women's dignity and assist projects that deal with current women's issues such as violence (Digital Museum: The Comfort Women and the Asian Women's Fund at <http://www.awf.or.jp/>).

Until its dissolution in 2007, the AWF directed its funds to medical and general senior welfare projects and facilities construction in the Philippines, the Netherlands, Indonesia, Korea, and Taiwan. The online Digital Museum was created after the Fund's dissolution.



More recently, legal scholars have been debating the benefits of “punitive justice” versus “restorative justice;” in other words, justice as a means of social repair rather than simple punishment. Vesna Nikolic-Ristanovic observes how this controversial notion of justice manifests itself in the rules of evidence and procedures used by the International Criminal Court during the Tribunals held on the massacres in Yugoslavia and Rwanda. “Through the establishment of legal truth about crimes,” she says, “both international and national criminal courts are supposed to contribute to the creation of collective memories and, consequently, historical truth about the past of post-conflict societies” (275). Where some champion alternative “restorative justice” models, such as reconciliation-oriented mediation between perpetrator and victim, others advocate the application of restorative models *alongside* punitive models. Nikolic-Ristanovic herself has reservations about what punitive justice alone can achieve, and looks to alternative modes of reconciliation that contain elements of restorative justice such as “storytelling workshops, days of reflection, permanent living memorial museums, as well as truth and reconciliation commissions,” seeing them as a means to fill the gaps in a post-conflict society’s attempts to deal with its violent past (280).

Whatever mode or combination of modes one advocates, what is clear is that trauma and the trial process are intimately linked. Shoshana Felman sees this link as having been forged when the Allied Forces attempted to resolve the massive trauma that was World War II using the “conceptual resources and ... practical tools of the law” (*Juridical Unconscious* 1). In the eyes of the Western world, whose priorities and conceptualizations have great influence on international discourses on human rights, the Holocaust truly was a limit event. The amount and degree of violence done in those few

years pushes the limits of human understanding. The Nuremberg trials constituted an attempt to contain that violence within the familiar frame of the law and turn it into something that could be comprehended and therefore contained. These attempts at restoring balance rested upon a conception of justice “not simply as punishment but as a marked symbolic exit from the injuries of a traumatic history: *as liberation from violence itself*” (*Juridical Unconscious* 1, my emphasis). This logic, which Felman names “the juridical unconscious,”<sup>37</sup> was made possible by three occurrences in the twentieth century: (1) with the emergence of psychoanalysis and the unconscious, trauma—“a new conceptual center”—came to the fore as an aspect of human experience as well as a lens through which to understand history; (2) the technologies of the twentieth century, primarily weapons of mass destruction, engendered catastrophic losses that left in their wake human trauma on a massive scale; and (3) the unprecedented use of the instruments of law to deal with the collective hurts of these traumatic events (*Juridical Unconscious* 2). Such trials signified crises of legitimacy and truth that were organized around “a *critical traumatic content*” that, due to the repressed nature of the unconscious itself, was at best only partially accessible to conscious expression (*Juridical Unconscious* 4, emphasis in original).<sup>38</sup> As the resolution of collective historical injuries became a major function of post-conflict trials, it became “judicially necessary” to put history itself on

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<sup>37</sup> As the term “juridical unconscious” suggests, Felman’s theories on the hidden link between trauma and trials draws upon the conceptual frameworks of Freud, Benjamin, and Arendt, all three of whom she describes as “groundbreaking thinkers of memory” and “theorists of trauma” (*Juridical Unconscious* 8).

<sup>38</sup> To explore the many dimensions of juridical unconsciousness, Felman juxtaposes the trials of OJ Simpson and Adolf Eichmann, both of which had, at the time, been tagged “the trial of the century.” However, these trials must compete for that title not only with each other, but with the dozens of other trials that have been so named. Felman cleverly suggests that perhaps the phrase “is itself a symptom of the twentieth century” (*Juridical Unconscious* 3).

trial and to arbitrate between different and often conflicting versions of the truth. In this respect, Felman argues, a trial verdict is a decision about what counts as collective memory.

Law is, in this way, an organizing force of the significance of history. But law relates to history through trauma. What should have been historically remembered, in effect, is not only the trial but also the trauma that made the trial necessary, the individual and social trauma that the trial was supposed to remedy, to solve or to resolve (*Juridical Unconscious* 84).

But how, then, to collectively resolve the trauma of something as intimate and cloaked in shame as sexual violence? In Felman's analysis, introducing trauma into the court setting disrupts the assumed separation of the private from the public, necessitating a redefinition of what constitutes private trauma and public trauma (*Juridical Unconscious* 5). To demonstrate the indivisibility and reversibility between public, collective trauma and private, individual trauma she cites the trial of Adolf Eichmann in 1961, which she describes as "a conscious and deliberate attempt to transform an incoherent mass of private traumas ... into one collective, national, and public trauma, and thus to give a public stage to a collection of individual abuses and private traumas" that had been previously hidden away (*Juridical Unconscious* 7). However, the kind of trauma on the public stage during the Eichmann trial was not primarily of a sexual nature. The stakes are different for the comfort women, and the work of communicating their experiences via the largely affect- and context-divesting language of the law becomes that much more difficult. Soh considers this decontextualization to be a good thing, in that it overrides the competing symbolic representations of each of the "ideological combatants" in the

international comfort women debate (*Comfort Women* 2008).<sup>39</sup> Such a position assumes that decontextualization, even in a courtroom setting, is actually possible.

Felman claims that “while the law strives to contain the trauma, it often is in fact the trauma that takes over and whose surreptitious logic in the end reclaims the trial ... Unknowingly, the trial thus repeats the trauma, reenacts its structures” (*Juridical Unconscious* 5). On this point, I disagree. I see it the other way around: trauma is made to repeat itself, and in that repetition it takes on the structures of the trial. Profound pain remains trapped within the skin, existing outside of language until such time as the victim is called upon to share it. Prior to its interpellation upon the witness stand, there is no structure for the articulation and communication of pain; patterns of violence do not translate into patterns of expressing pain. Each incitement to testify—to linguistically dislodge the suppressed experience of pain—is a *new* opportunity to construct a narrative that could potentially undo the grasp of the perpetrator. However, each new articulation is shaped by the context in which it is elicited. The trial does not reenact the structure of the trauma—rather, trauma is called upon to reenact itself according to the evidentiary structures already in place in a court of law, structures which, as I discuss later, influence even the comfort women’s *extrajudicial* narratives.

In the case of the former comfort women, recasting the suffering of the individual as the suffering of the collective may somewhat alleviate the shame and stigma that surrounds sexual violation, if only by giving the survivor the knowledge that she is not alone in her experience—that there are others who have, locked within *their* skin, pain

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<sup>39</sup> These ideological combatants will be enumerated later in this chapter.

similar to hers.<sup>40</sup> However, this benefit is lessened by how the Grandmothers' testimony all too often plays second fiddle to an already established version of events. Yang observes that when South Korean television journalists (mostly men in their twenties and thirties) interviewed the comfort system survivors, they did not treat the women as the central figures of this bit of history. Rather, "the women are treated as 'informants' in clarifying an already constructed past, rather than as the main figures in this history. Their testimonies are used to 'prove' already established facts" (53). Aleida Assman explains: "In the courtroom, the witness as a person is of less interest than his or her testimony. The economy of the trial demands that biographical aspects are invoked only to the extent that they help to probe and to ascertain the testimony" (266).<sup>41</sup> It would seem that because the atrocities to which the Grandmothers are testifying are of such an intimate, sexual nature, it would be difficult to separate testimony from the textured fullness of the witness' biography. However, the unique circumstances of the comfort women cases have led to some disturbing perspectives on the kinds of details and biographical information the comfort women's testimonies must contain. The language in

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<sup>40</sup> Even so, the trial as vehicle for the articulation, transmission, and prosecution of trauma comes with its own problems. One such problem is the argument (between redress activists and their opponents) over the validity of the comfort women's testimony, a debate that only allows for two possibilities: it is either true or not true. In response to assertions that there were no official documents to support the women's "bogus" claims, Ueno argued: "What we refer to as official documents are in fact sources that indicate the way in which bureaucracy has managed affairs" (*Nationalism and Gender* 116). I discuss the back and forth between Ueno and Yoshimi on this subject in Chapter I.

<sup>41</sup> Positioning the comfort women's testimony as juridical truth both accurate and unimpeachable ironically opens it up to overt attempts at suppressing that testimony and once again silencing the Grandmothers. Nishioka Tsutomu's *Behind the Comfort Women Controversy: How Lies Became Truth* delights in picking apart survivors' testimonies. He combs through transcripts of every public statement a comfort woman has ever given and then charts each and every inconsistency in an attempt to discredit them and prove that their demands for recompense are unfounded. Nishioka's book was made available in 2008 as a pdf file at <[http://www.sdh-fact.com/CL02\\_1/39\\_S4.pdf](http://www.sdh-fact.com/CL02_1/39_S4.pdf)>

a 1993 claim filed on behalf of eighteen Filipinas explains that shame culture and rape stigma make it particularly difficult for victims of sexual violence to describe their experiences. It is because of this, the lawyers assert, that “it is more difficult for the judicial system to grasp the realities of the damage done to such victims. Details are given as to the way in which the women were captured, raped and maltreated” (Dolgopol and Paranjape 197). As I will explore further in the next section, the result of all this is a kind of testimonial narrative that is selectively spectacular, explicit, and violent, and that allows for the invocation not of a survivor’s textured and full experience, but of only a few specific biographical details that serve to create and propagate an image of the comfort woman as eternal victim.

### **The Women’s Tribunal**

The creation of the Women’s International War Crimes Tribunal is generally considered a victory for the redress movement and a shining example of the movement’s transnational nature. Held at The Hague in December of 2000, the Tribunal was not convened by any single nation-state or other official national or international entity and therefore did not have the legal authority to order reparations or determine and enforce sentences. Rather, the organizers and judges saw the Tribunal as having the *moral* authority of a peoples’ tribunal, premised on the understanding that the law does not belong to governments but is an instrument of civil society. The Tribunal’s Charter states that it is “the moral responsibility of every member of the global civil society” to restore justice to the comfort women (Charter 2). However, the restoration of justice comes up against an obstacle that is the product of the Tribunal’s very nature. As a people’s tribunal, it was free from the limitations imposed by state mechanisms, a freedom that

allowed for the combination of already existing legal procedures with the various networking strategies employed by grassroots organizations. This convergence highlighted and ameliorated some of the inadequacies of current international law (Chinkin). The other side of this coin was that freedom from the strictures imposed by the state also meant that no entity could enforce the Tribunal's judgement.

During the four days of the Tribunal, the judges heard from comfort station survivors and former Japanese military personnel, as well as from expert witnesses on militarism, Japanese history, and post-traumatic stress disorder. The judges ruled in favor of the comfort women, declaring the state of Japan criminally responsible for the atrocities of the comfort system as well as the systematic rape of the women of the town of Mapanique, Pampanga, Philippines. What's more, the judges also found Emperor Hirohito and his generals, *as individuals*, criminally responsible for these war crimes (Transcript of Oral Judgment).<sup>42</sup>

Like many of the Tribunal's participants and observers, filmmaker and redress activist Dai Sil Kim-Gibson attributes the Tribunal's success to what she refers to as the power of the survivors' testimonies, which I understand to mean the testimonies' persuasive power. To support and justify their verdict the Tribunal judges included excerpts from the Grandmothers' testimonies—graphic excerpts that fixate on the specifically sexual abuses of the comfort station. Maxima de la Cruz, who was fifteen years old at the time of her incarceration in a Philippine comfort camp, narrates:

[A] Japanese soldier entered my room. He told me to lie down on the bed. I refused and he forced me to lie down. I screamed and struggled until he

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<sup>42</sup> The survivors of the Mapanique incident will be discussed at length in Chapter III.

drew his sabre and pointed it at me. I was so scared that I fell silent. He then pushed me to the bed and raped me. I cried for help and pleaded with the soldier to stop but he did not listen to my pleas. Since that first time I was sexually abused, I became extremely nervous. Every time a Japanese soldier armed with a sabre would enter the room and touch me, I would faint. That is why I cannot recall the exact number of times I was raped. I knew that I was raped though because I felt aches and pains all over my body especially in my private parts (qtd. in Transcript 6).

Besides attesting to the far-reaching effects of first rape, this bit from Lola Maxima's testimony also emphasizes her initial attempts at resistance and the subsequent physical responses triggered by a soldier's mere touch. Kim Bok-Dong, also fifteen when installed in a comfort station, described a typical day in the comfort stations for the Tribunal judges:

Fifteen soldiers usually came each day, but on the weekend the number often exceeded fifty. The enlisted soldiers came between noon and 5 pm on Saturdays, and from 8 am to 5 pm on Sundays ... they had to be gone by 5 pm when the military police came to check on the station. Officers arrived after 7 pm, many of whom slept there and then left. If my vagina was swollen and it was hard to penetrate, the soldiers put an ointment on the condom and forced themselves in. If I didn't know that my menstruation had started and a soldier saw the blood, he would get angry, and slap my face and hit me (qtd. in Transcript 5).

Kim's mention of the number of soldiers who raped her daily is typical of the paradigmatic comfort woman narrative—as if to be raped by just one person is not heinous enough to merit the kind of verdict the Grandmothers seek. This excerpt from Kim's testimony also highlights the disrespect shown, and damage done to, the women's reproductive functions, an appeal to patriarchal culture's location of women's value in their capacity to bear children. To return to Lola Maxima's statement, she intimates that after that first rape even being *touched* hurt her, raising the question of whether or not she was ever again able to enjoy sex after leaving the comfort camp.



When the Tribunal judges delivered their ruling on December 4, 2001, they stated that not only was it clear that the former comfort women were deeply scarred by their ordeals and continued to suffer in the present, but that this present, visible suffering “is further evidence of the truthfulness and veracity of their stories” (3-4). Though not explicitly stated in the Tribunal’s Charter, based on the judges’ explanation it seems that the definition of “testimony” at play here includes not only what the witnesses remembered of their time in the comfort system, but also their performance of present and continuing trauma, which in turn supports the image of the comfort woman as an eternal victim. Felman claims that in the courtroom, the body matters. It is “the ultimate site of memory of individual and collective trauma—because trauma makes the body matter, and because the body testifying to the trauma *matters in the courtroom*” (*Juridical Unconscious* 9, emphasis in original). The kind of body the comfort women have constituted for themselves on that witness stand is one that is frozen in a rictus of suffering. In such a formulation, the idea of “moving on,” so precious in Western popular psychology, would be damaging to the pursuit of redress. But why should finding ways to endure foreclose the possibility of obtaining justice? Why must the comfort woman forever be a suffering victim in order for her claims to be considered valid?

If the trauma narrative’s function is to “render body memories tellable” and to remake the self so that it “recounts its own biography, undoing the grasp of the perpetrator,” I suggest that we need to consider how the law, with its own agenda, may undermine that function (Culbertson 178). The way the comfort women’s testimonies are deployed in court, not only as evidence of past violation but of the survivors’ *continued* suffering, is extremely problematic. Rather than a self-determined articulation of

experience, the comfort woman as witness in the courtroom chooses the components of her testimony according to criteria determined by the sometimes prurient interests of lawyers, judges, and spectators. Rather than breaking free of her perpetrator's grasp, the witness constructs, through her testimony, *a public self that is defined by the grasp of the perpetrator*; she is a victim rather than a survivor. To what other unfortunate foreclosures, in and out of the courtroom, have the limitations of the juridical context led?

### **The Politics of Representation**

What the testimony does not offer is ... a completed statement, a totalizable account of those events. In the testimony, language is in process and in trial, it does not possess itself as a conclusion ... Testimony is ... a discursive *practice*, as opposed to a pure *theory*. To *testify*—to *vow to tell*, to *promise* and *produce* one's own speech as material evidence for truth—is to accomplish a *speech act*, rather than to simply formulate a statement.

Shoshana Felman, "Education and Crisis,  
or the Vicissitudes of Teaching"

I have previously mentioned the former comfort women's preference for the honorific "Grandmother" (Halmoni in Korean, Lola in Filipino) when being addressed or spoken of in public venues. The term signals respect and serves as a pointed reminder of their advanced age, invoking in the public a sense of filial duty. As Kim-Gibson argues, they are all our grandmothers and we must listen to them, be enraged on their behalf, and do what we can to help them obtain the justice they seek ("They are Our Grandmas"). Many of the Grandmothers reject the label "comfort woman" outright, preferring to use the term "military sex slave," as comfort played no part in their experiences of the war.<sup>43</sup> Activists also use "military sex slave," while English-language scholars tend to choose the term "comfort women." There has been much debate in academic circles about

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<sup>43</sup> Soh credits international fact-finding missions and publications like the 2004 International Commission of Jurists' report on comfort women with fueling the shift in the comfort women discursive paradigm to one of "sexual slavery" (*Comfort Women* 47).

whether or not continuing to use “comfort women” perpetuates the exact attitudes the redress movement is trying to correct, but as Laura Hein sees it, such a practice is not necessarily unfeminist. Rather, it is about “how the word ‘slave’ shifts its valence toward playfulness when modified by the word ‘sex’ ... The slight strangeness of ‘comfort women’ permits a horror at their fate that is harder to achieve with the more forthright ‘sex slave’” (343).<sup>44</sup>

The kinds of subtle distinctions Hein makes are decidedly *not* at work in the ongoing public debate on the issue. Soh identifies three groups that dominate the politics of representation in this debate: the wartime Imperial Japanese state, the Imperial troops, and contemporary redress activists. These three entities and their ideologies have played an important role in defining the comfort women as follows: on the part of the wartime Japanese state’s patriarchal fascism, these women were *comfort women* (a statist euphemism), *gifts from the emperor* (a paternalistic metaphor), or *supplies* (a documentary classification). In the troops’ masculinist and sexist view, the women were *public toilets* or *pi* (vernacular Chinese for “goods” or “articles,” also slang for female genitalia). Besides laying out the sexist assumptions behind the comfort system as an institution (i.e., the male need for and right to sex), these labels reveal how sex acts were considered merely acts of bodily relief, as necessary and unremarkable as urinating or moving one’s bowels (“Imperial Gifts” 61-62). The slang *pi* is thought to have originated

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<sup>44</sup> Hein’s rationale makes sense in the context of Western attitudes towards sexuality. I am not sure the same argument would ring true in a more outwardly conservative culture like that of the Philippines, though I do agree that the strangeness of the term “comfort women” is useful not just to underscore the horror of what happened to the Lolas, but also to maintain the specificity of this particular configuration of wartime sexual violence.

from the soldiers stationed in China and then spread out to the rest of the imperial troops. Certain slang terms like *pi-kankan* (*pi*-viewing) and *pi-mai* (*pi*-purchase) make it very clear that the soldiers saw these women not just as prostitutes but as “mere vaginas.” Other terms point to the ethnic hierarchy within the comfort system: there were Chinese *pi*, and there were *Chosen* (Korean) *pi*, or its even more derogatory variation, *Sen pi* (68). As for “public toilet,” the term has been traced back to a Dr. Aso Tetsuo, architect of the comfort system regulations. Soh translates: “the special military comfort station should not become a place of hedonistic pleasure because it ought to be a hygienic public toilet” (68).

In practice, the boundaries between these definitions were blurry at best, for once the Emperor’s gifts arrived at the comfort station, they were unwrapped by the troops and used as *pi* and *public toilets*. These overlaps in category indicate overlaps in ideology: the troops’ masculinist sexism was part of imperial Japan’s patriarchal fascism, which ultimately saw the comfort system as a recreational amenity provided to the troops. To counteract these representations of comfort women, redress activists use the term military sex slaves, a term that arises out of the framing of rape as a war crime and the understanding of women’s rights as human rights (61, 68). In the debate over reparations, these already porous boundaries disappear and the multiple representations that speak to different aspects of the ideology behind the comfort system coagulate into two general categories: “prostitute” and “sex slave.” Representations painted in such broad strokes serve the present interests of the parties involved in the battle over redress, but even these oversimplified categories can become conflated with one another, as demonstrated by an article in the September 2007 issue of the peer-reviewed journal *Violence Against*

*Women*. “Modern-Day Comfort Women: The U.S. Military, Transnational Crime, and the Trafficking of Women,” by Hughes, Chon, and Ellerman, is mainly about the connections between the U.S. base in South Korea and the Filipina sex workers in the adjacent “Americatown.” After the title, the authors make no more mention of the comfort women, apparently unaware—or, at best, unconcerned—that they have just conflated two groups of women in very different situations, with different needs and demands.<sup>45</sup>

The simplification of representations of the comfort women into the broad categories of “prostitute” or “sex slave” manifests itself outside the juridical context in several ways. Filmmaker Dai Sil Kim-Gibson, for example, worries that the former comfort women have learned to truncate their stories, speaking only of their time in the comfort station and giving details that highlight sexual abuses and construct an “ideal victim,” one who is prepubescent and virginal. This construct leaves no room for the reality that even older, sexually experienced women were also exploited by the comfort system, especially in the Philippines, where the “recruitment” of sex slaves was chaotic and indiscriminate. Kim-Gibson’s concern is a methodological one, attributing the problems she sees to how journalists, activists, and scholars go about recovering the narratives of former comfort women. Kim-Gibson spent several days at the House of Sharing, which shelters several former comfort women, is located just outside Seoul, Korea and is supported financially by the nearby Buddhist temple. In her time there, she got to know the Halmonis and had the opportunity to observe their interactions with the

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<sup>45</sup> For their part, the South Korean former comfort women collectively reject any association with contemporary prostitution, angrily protesting that they are nothing like “those girls” in Americatown (so named for its proximity to, and financial dependence upon, the U.S. military base in South Korea).

visitors who came from different parts of the world, all of whom pressed the grandmothers to tell their tales.

In her essay, “They are Our Grandmas,” Kim-Gibson problematizes the scope, pattern, and sensationalized nature of the stories that emerged from these conversations, describing her “unpleasant, sinking feeling that these visitors were ‘buying’ tragedy and turning the grandmas into stock characters with formula stories” (257). She noticed a pattern in what they told visitors, who asked many of the same questions. This repeated interaction, Kim-Gibson concludes, resulted in a standardized narrative that would invariably include some or all of the following details:

age at time of capture ... initial period of bondage ... “how many soldiers a day,” the medical examination, the venereal diseases, her menstruation, fees for services, and ... the particular sadism of the soldiers, recruiters, and managers ... *Each informant was convinced that she knew what I wanted.* They all had experience and could give me the information I sought. It was also quite obvious that they had learned to adjust their stories for maximum political impact (“Grandmas” 259, my emphasis).

These “adjustments,” Kim-Gibson shows, serve to reify victimhood rather than celebrate survival. She witnessed one interview in which a Halmoni failed to mention that she had already been a mature, married woman at the time of her capture—a detail she had provided in previous interviews. When asked about the omission, the former comfort woman replied, “These days I understand better what it is we are trying to achieve, so I sort out what is important to tell and what is not ... my having been married at the time does not add anything to our case” (qtd. in Kim-Gibson, “Grandmas” 261). Of course, not all comfort women’s narratives follow this pattern, but what is being described here is the juridical unconscious manifesting itself in an extrajudicial narrative context. What the structures of law do in the courtroom, the culture does outside of it. The texture and

nuance of the survivors' life stories get sanded off, while certain other details are emphasized in order to fit into assumptions about the kind of victims the survivors need to be in order to deserve justice.

The above example does more than just indicate how well schooled the survivors have become in telling the story people want to hear. It highlights an interesting phenomenon by which the comfort woman is represented either as the young virgin at the moment of first rape, or the aged grandmother talking about how her life has been ruined by the camps. Both virgin and grandmother are decidedly nonsexual images. Is the notion of a wartime rape survivor who is also a sexual being so threatening?<sup>46</sup> One has to actively seek out texts that speak of the survivors as being mature and sexually active before or after the war. On the few occasions that an excerpt of testimony *does* describe the years between virginity and old age, more often than not it describes the survivor's inability to enjoy sex later in life, or how her husband or lover treated her in ways similar to what she experienced as a comfort woman. Lola Juanita Jamot relates,

I lived together with a person ... in the year 1968, when I was 44 years old. I did not tell him about my past. Even then whilst having sex with him, I found that I was severely restrained and bore an aversion to sex ... My terrible past experience severely crippled my normal sex life. I have separated from my second husband (qtd. in Dolgopol and Paranjape 68).

Once the war was over, Lola Gertrude Balisalisa went home, only to find that her family had moved away while she had been incarcerated in a comfort station. With the help of American soldiers she was able to find her loved ones, but the reunion was not what she had hoped it would be.

When I reached my house my husband received me very warmly while in the presence of the American soldiers. However, when the soldiers had

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<sup>46</sup> Many thanks to Prof. Rosemarie Scullion for pointing this out.

left he immediately distanced himself from me. He told me to sleep in a separate room and made it very clear that he would not share a bedroom with me any more ... [H]e would not allow me to share my children's bedroom. I was thus isolated in my own house. Thereafter, I noticed that my husband also treated me just like a comfort woman. He would come to me whenever he felt the need for sex. He said he did not want to restore our original relationship because he termed me as a leftover of the Japanese soldiers (qtd. in Dolgopol and Paranjape 74).

Unsympathetic family members are not the only ones who have treated the Grandmothers as if they were still comfort women. Hein observes that remembrances of the comfort women “mimic the international conventions of pornography today, in which female social degradation and pain is eroticized,” even when the intent is to critique violence against women (343). There is a marked fascination with the story of first rape—the “fall from grace” as it were—which coincides with the moment of the woman’s transformation into rape victim and unpaid prostitute. This fixation “implicitly valorises a narrative of degradation and transformation from ‘good’ to ‘bad’ women, and re-enacts it for the reader” (343). Also, the “fall from grace” narrative highlights the *sexual* abuses the comfort women suffered while obscuring the equally horrific isolation, emotional and psychological abuse, and substandard living conditions that the comfort women endured. This often included the emotional torture of being stripped of one’s identity and assigned a Japanese name and/or a number. In their report to the International Commission of Jurists, Dolgopol and Paranjape describe the ordeal of Lola Francisca Austari:

she discovered both her parents had died while she was in the military camp. This was obviously one of the worst memories for her since, while she was in the camp, she had held on to a picture of her parents and thought continuously about being able to see them again when she was released from the camp. She described herself as being numb while in the camp and said that, because of her isolation, she began to talk to herself.



The only human contact she would have in the daytime was short conversations with the *Makapili* (58).<sup>47</sup>

Lola Julia Porras lived with her family in Davao City. At the beginning of the occupation, a Japanese neighbor who had lived in the Philippines for several years promised her family that they would not have any trouble with the occupying soldiers. Though the occupation began peacefully enough, it was not long before the Japanese soldiers began mistreating and punishing civilians for the actions of Filipino resistance fighters. Porras was taken from her home and taken to

a tunnel which was full of military equipment, including machine guns, rifles, bullets and canned goods as well as some cots to sleep on. Ms. Porras described the space to the interviewer: it would have been approximately seven feet in diameter and ten to twelve feet in length; as to height, the tunnel was just large enough to stand in. When she arrived, there were two other women there ... As it was dark in the tunnel and the women were forced to keep apart from one another, Ms. Porras does not know what experience the other women had, but was aware that they were, like her, crying most of the time. There were fifteen to twenty soldiers in the tunnel on a permanent basis (Dolgopol and Paranjape 59, 60-61).

Such descriptions of isolation and loss figure hardly at all in public debate over the comfort women. Our juridical unconscious effectively limits representations of the comfort woman so that she can only be either prostitute or victim. To those who deny the illegality of the comfort system, she is a prostitute, a “fallen” woman. To redress advocates she is the virginal young girl, the asexual grandmother, or the fetish object. According to this formula, the heinousness of having been raped is dependent upon the victim’s location *outside* consensual, mature, and pleasurable sexual activity. At the same time, there is a pornographic veneer to the image of the comfort woman as virgin,

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<sup>47</sup> This was the term for Filipino collaborators who worked for the Japanese troops, often helping them cow local residents, gather supplies (including women), and uncover anti-Japanese guerrilla activity.

precisely because of the titillating taboo around sex with young girls. So where do we go from here? Can we make the comfort woman's body matter differently inside and outside the courtroom?

### **The Metaphorical Intrusion**

What I wish to bring into sharp critical relief are the ways that our juridical unconscious shapes the way that testimony is given and received, as well as the voyeuristic tendencies that only serve to perpetuate the reduction of a complex issue into "Was she a victim or a prostitute?" As feminist scholars and teachers, what are our responsibilities to the Grandmothers and their stories? Patricia Yaeger offers a brutal assessment of our reading practices when it comes to trauma narratives, saying that the way we read is often trivializing: "turn the page, make a cup of coffee, weep for the survivors, open a Diet Coke" ("Testimony without Intimacy" 413). It would be easy to accuse Yaeger of being glib, but there is a measure of truth to what she says.<sup>48</sup> It is disturbing, to say the least, to see how the "fall from grace" story stirs the prurient interests even of those, like scholars, who should know better. Yaeger, never one to pull punches, calls attention to the academic "habit" of trading on others' misfortunes and "consuming trauma."

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<sup>48</sup> Miller and Tougaw comment on how the trauma narrative has replaced the hero story as the drug from which readers get their "fix" of vicarious thrill:

In a culture of trauma, accounts of extreme situations sell books. Narratives of illness, sexual abuse, torture, or the death of loved ones have come to rival the classic, heroic adventure as a test of limits that offers the reader the suspicious thrill of borrowed emotion (2).

But is it such a bad thing to replace the "classic heroic" tale with real people's stories (keeping in mind, of course, that their stories are representations, not some sort of absolute, objective "Truth")? After all, many of those narratives contain their own heroic teleologies.

If we can buy tenure by turning a trope or a page, then my own writing is also self-pleasing, self-consuming, enchanted at its own aporetics, adrift with the pleasures of merely circulating. What is the status of academic consumerism—of a world of words where we can channel-surf from trauma to pleasure and back to trauma again with so little cost? (“Consuming Trauma” 46).

There is yet another way in which cost can be measured. Assmann makes a scandalous (but, I think, terribly important) observation about testimony. She worries that “the massive repetition and dire monotony of the central traumatic event” may serve to desensitize readers to the very pain that survivors of trauma struggle to communicate (267). As witnesses take their turns on the stand and the same story of victimization is told over and over again, does blistering horror become boring repetition? What happens if and when this transformation occurs? Is legal testimony ultimately dehumanizing? Does this kind of repetition, even as it works to establish the collective trauma of the comfort system, end up *reenacting* the violence of erasure the survivors of the comfort stations experienced after the war?

For the traumatized person, memory, history, and even just daily life are all contested ground. In *Women Witnessing Terror*, Anne Cubilie reminds us that the crisis at the heart of the testimonial act is the imperative to tell what cannot be adequately conveyed. But to call trauma “unspeakable” is itself an act of mystification. Some have offered up art and literature as eloquent palliatives to the problems of testimony and the juridical unconscious. Felman positions literature as the counterbalance to the language of law, and I agree with her assessment of it as a medium that “encapsulates not closure but precisely what in a given legal case refuses to be closed and cannot be closed. It is to this refusal of the trauma to be closed that literature does justice” (*Juridical Unconscious* 8). Two notable examples are the novels *A Gesture Life* by Chang-Rae Lee and *Comfort*

*Woman* by Nora Okja Keller. The former novel is told from the perspective of an older man named Franklin Hata, a Korean born during the period when Korea was a Japanese colony. As a young boy, Franklin makes every effort to fit into Japanese society, to the extent that he becomes a soldier in the Japanese Imperial Army during the Asia Pacific War. When the novel opens, a much older Hata is living in the U.S.A., but his suburban discontent and troubled relationship with his adopted daughter lead him to confront a portion of his past he has tried to deny: his involvement in the death of a young girl in the comfort station that he, as a soldier in the Japanese Army, had both guarded and patronized.

Keller's novel is written in two voices, those of Akiko, a Korean woman who escaped a comfort station and married an American missionary, and Beccah, Akiko's half-Caucasian daughter. Beccah's father dies while she is still a little girl and the misunderstandings and resentments that build between mother and daughter in the years that follow are mostly the result of Akiko's ability to communicate with the dead and inability to communicate with her child. Akiko's lengthy and sometimes violent trances are a source of income for the family, as people come from far and wide to consult, through Akiko, with their departed relatives. But this supernatural gift is also a source of pain for Beccah, who at a very young age had to be a parent to both herself and to her seemingly insane mother. Akiko keeps a secret: she hovers between the world of the living and the world of the dead because as a girl of twelve, she "died." That was the year she became a comfort woman; since then, the only living thing she has been able to love is her daughter, who knows nothing about her past. After Akiko dies, Beccah finally

learns what her mother kept hidden: her time in the comfort camp, and her true Korean name, Soon-hyo.

As demonstrated by these novels, literature can indeed serve as a means to explore and honor the lives of the comfort women in ways the law does not or cannot.<sup>49</sup> In less skilled hands, however, fiction can fall into the same pitfalls that riddle the terrain of testimony. Take, for instance, Therese Park's novel *A Gift of the Emperor*, which fails to distinguish between lived experience and representation, between exploitative appropriations of the comfort woman story and thoughtful representations of the survivors and their experiences. Can those who have been silenced by violence find expression in the voices of those who purport to speak *for* them? Park conflates her identification with the comfort women and her creation of a fictional character, ending up with a constructed representation masquerading as experiential truth. In "To Give a Voice," her chapter in Stetz and Oh's *Legacies of the Comfort Women*, Park narrates how the character of Soon-ah came to be. Upon first learning about the comfort women issue, she felt the desire

*to become a channel between [the comfort women] and the Western world, so that their voices could be heard loud and clear and would echo in every corner of the globe ... The heroine [Soon-ah] came to me during a long walk. It seemed that she found me, rather than that I created her. "I was one of them," she told me. "I'll tell you how it happened, if you'll*

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<sup>49</sup> Lengthier analyses of these novels fall outside the scope of this dissertation; however, there is no lack of scholarly work on comfort women fiction. Laura Kang, for example, observes that there *are* limitations to what literature can accomplish: "the selfhood that is achieved through this remembrance [Keller's and Lee's novels] must be distinguished as a particularly *American* one, one that is allowed and enabled to remember these pasts ... as a consequence of their national location in the United States" (33 emphasis in original). Other scholars also cite these novels as part of the recent "Americanization" of the comfort women issue, but Schultersmandl has a different take. She argues that Akiko and Beccah together demonstrate not the Americanization of the comfort woman, but the possibilities for non-essentialized, truly transnational connection and coalition via the language of the body, which Schultersmandl sees the novel emphasizing even more than it does Beccah's Americanness (95).

trust my voice.” Not only did I trust her voice, but I embraced her with compassion as well (220-221, my emphasis).

Park positions Soon-ah’s story not as a literary construction, but as first-hand testimony through the process of identification. Such a conceit renders the author transparent, as if she were a neutral conduit through which story flowed, and not as a writer whose positionality as a first generation Korean-American impacts her writing and her drive to make the Korean comfort women, via Soon-ah, accessible to an audience of Westerners.

These works of fiction, flaws and all, provide new configurations of the comfort woman and constitute a small but growing set of complex texts that will allow us to study in greater depth the representations that emerge out of the struggle between competing groups interests and aims, in ways that extend beyond the images of “prostitute” and “victim” that dominate contemporary public discourses on this issue. As feminist scholars and teachers, we struggle to reconcile what Hesford and Kozol have described as “the urgent desire to convey to our students and readers evidence of the traumatic and oppressive conditions faced by women” with the importance of questioning that kind of positivism (3). As members of the Grandmothers’ audience, we struggle with the obligations of witnessing: the obligation to listen and respond, as well as the obligation to thoughtfully and ethically represent and transport these narratives *beyond* the moment of enunciation. How can we approach their testimony in a different way, what reading practices can we employ that do not trivialize, that do not consume, that do not merely circulate, as Yaeger puts it, between pleasure and pain (“Consuming Trauma”)?

A more literary approach to the testimonial narrative allows for the study of how figures of speech operate within a narrative of atrocity. According to Culbertson, bridging the divide between what is known and what can be said is dependent upon “the

availability in the cultural repertoire of explanations and language describing the events of memory, and legitimating their fragmentary, body-based, metaphorical, and even mystical, other-worldly forms” (179). With this in mind, I return one last time to Halmoni Mun Pil-gi’s otherworldly description of herself as the “ghost of a virgin,” as she asks the judges of the Women’s Tribunal to grant the comfort women the justice they seek. Even in the courtroom, metaphor intrudes into her testimony, and the image she invokes cannot exist comfortably within the confines of “evidence.”

There is a figure in Korean folklore known as the *cheonyeo gwisin* or “virgin ghost.” It is said that a woman who dies unmarried (and therefore, it is assumed, a virgin) cannot cross over into the afterlife because she has not fulfilled her purpose. The virgin ghost has very long black hair and is usually dressed all in white. Pale of face, she is sometimes seen with blood dripping from the corners of her mouth. She haunts her family and friends, causing them illness and misfortune. Newlyweds feel her wrath the most because they inspire her deepest jealousy and hatred. This bitter ghost *can* be exorcised, but lore instructs that the best way to deal with her is to perform a spirit wedding. By binding her to a bachelor ghost, or *mongdal gwisin*, the living help the virgin ghost fulfill her destiny and rest in peace. That these female and male specters are referred to as “virgin” and “bachelor,” respectively, drives home the assumption that virginity as a defining characteristic matters only with regards to women.

I have no way of knowing if Mun Pil-gi was indeed referencing the *cheonyeo gwisin* when she spoke at the Tribunal. However, I find this notion of a virgin ghost to be an invaluable way to complicate our image of the comfort woman and break open the constraints that the juridical context places upon it. Becoming a comfort woman did not

*literally* kill Mun Pil-gi, but by tainting her with the stigma of rape, it killed her chances of losing her virginity in the “good” and “proper” way—as a bride. Like the *cheonyeo gwisin*, the former comfort woman is trapped between worlds. Here, the experience of sexual violation is tied to social value; it is not so much her body or person, but her *virginity* that has been violated. Without her virginity she is not a survivor, nor even a woman. She is just a ghost: ephemeral, insubstantial, an object of fear and pity. Neither a virgin nor a married woman, she cannot “cross over,” cannot find peace. She is a burden and a bane to her family. The notion that the moment of first rape turns the victim into a ghost of herself is, to use Hesford and Kozol’s words, “a conception of trauma that limits forgetfulness to individual repression” (x). As the ghost of a virgin, the comfort woman is alone in her pain. By telling her story to the judges, to the world, she hopes to become one of many, part of a collective whose stories will be heard, remembered, and written into history.

The *cheonyeo gwisin* metaphor is jarring, surprising, uncanny. It wakes me up and jolts me out of the desensitization brought on by reading the same trauma story over and over again. It evokes the horror of rape in a culture that ties a woman’s value to her virginity. It references the “fall from grace” story without succumbing to the conventions of the pornography of pain. Simply put, it works. It works because, as Yaeger states, when juxtaposed with trauma, “even the most mundane literary techniques, the most familiar speech acts, spin out of control” (“Testimony without Intimacy” 406). This loss of control, this moment of surprise and discomfort brought on by a metaphorical intrusion, is crucial to resisting the voyeuristic urge and fending off the impulse to direct or appropriate the narrative.



I am reminded once again of the Halmoni from the House of Sharing, who understood that her status as a mature, married woman did not fit into the accepted, expected comfort woman story. Such absences and silences can also wake us up, spin the story out of control, compel us to question and examine. Seen this way, the Halmoni is not being disingenuous; the omission does not disqualify or invalidate her testimony. Rather, it compels us to ask what it means that such a detail does not, cannot fit the available narrative. On the subject of withholding, Yaeger has this to say: “if the scale of communication is always awry, if we are split in two by a simile,” we may develop an awareness, not only that the narrator is withholding something, but that such withholding is valid (“Testimony without Intimacy” 417). It is to these kinds of metaphorical intrusions, pointed omissions, and unexpected offerings that I attend as I explore texts by and about the Filipino comfort women. Rather than merely feeding our prurient interests, these poems, autobiographies, testimonial narratives invite us to think about sexual violence, culpability, and complicity in ways that are sometimes discomfiting, sometimes all too familiar, and always challenging.

CHAPTER III  
 THE GIRL TAKEN, THE SLAVE OF DESTINY,  
 AND THE GRANDMOTHER FREED:  
 OBLIGATION, COLLABORATION, AND BETRAYAL  
 IN THE LIFE STORIES OF  
 FILIPINA COMFORT WOMEN

Growing up I spent summers in Tacloban City, Leyte, my parents' hometown. With my siblings and cousins, I played on Red Beach and climbed the larger than life statue of General Douglas MacArthur that is the centerpiece of the Leyte Landing Memorial Park. During World War II the airfield now known as the Leyte Landing was of great strategic value to both the Japanese and American forces and therefore the site of many fierce skirmishes. As children, my playmates and I knew little else about the park in which we ran amok; unbeknownst to us, Leyte had also been the site of another struggle, not marked by statuary, that Remedios Felias narrates in *The Hidden Battle of Leyte: The Picture Diary of a Girl Taken by the Japanese Military*. Felias' picture diary explores territory, both literal and figurative, beyond what is usually covered by the paradigmatic comfort women narrative, as do the other Lolos' life stories I discuss in this chapter. Besides Felias' autobiography, this chapter considers the books *Comfort Woman: Slave of Destiny* by Maria Rosa Henson, and *The Women of Mapanique: Untold Crimes of War*, written by Nena Gajudo, Gina Alunan, and Susan Macabuag.<sup>50</sup>

The three texts I discuss in this chapter employ multiple languages, including the visual, to counter the affect- and context-divesting language of the courtroom and, to use Culbertson's phrase, "render body memories tellable" (178). The Lolos engage in the narrative work of re-membering the past and "reestablishing the social dimension of the

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<sup>50</sup> All the named authors are activists; none of them are former comfort women. Like many other comfort women texts, this book devotes a chapter to the Lolos' testimonial narratives.

self lost in the midst of violation” by fleshing out the familial, cultural, and political contexts that inflected their experiences of sexual violence during the Japanese Occupation of the Philippines (Culbertson 178). Each text has its own central themes and strategies, and common threads and points of divergence are equally plentiful among the three. Even as the authors chip away at the limitations of the paradigmatic narrative, they continue to demonstrate strong ties to the Philippine redress movement, from which they draw their critical energy and ethos.

In *The Hidden Battle of Leyte*, Felias’s story of a war-torn pastoral idyll is told in multiple languages: Tagalog, English, Japanese, and Felias’ own artwork.<sup>51</sup> In *Comfort Woman: Slave of Destiny*, Henson sets her ordeal of military sexual slavery against the backdrop of her poverty-stricken mother’s sexual abuse at the hands of Henson’s father, a wealthy landowner. From her mother, Henson inherits fraught and complex relationships with trauma, silence, and speech. Both books feature the authors’ own illustrations, blending visual and literary discourses of trauma and using the strategic placement of handwritten text on the printed page to recreate the various aspects of their experiences. Though the books begin at different points in the authors’ lives and family histories, each one closes with what seems like the logical end point: the author’s entry into the comfort women redress movement, marking that moment as the symbolic, if not literal, end of a life of repression and the beginning of a life of resistance.

The fundamental difference between *The Women of Mapanique* and Henson’s and Felias’ books lies in the fact that most of the eponymous women of Mapanique were

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<sup>51</sup> Interestingly, none of these is her first language. As she is from Leyte, Felias’ native tongue is Winaray, and she mentions in the book that she did not begin to learn Tagalog until 1948, when she moved to Manila to search for her estranged husband (45).

technically not comfort women. That is, these women were not sex slaves within the military comfort system. They are the female survivors of a Japanese military anti-guerrilla action in which the town of Mapanique in Pampanga was looted and razed, its inhabitants tortured and, in some cases, killed. Today, they are the members of an organization called *Malaya Lolos* (The Free Grandmothers). Unlike the two texts described in the previous paragraph, this particular book begins not in the prewar past but many decades after the war, on the brink of a major victory for the *Malaya Lolos*: reclaiming the place in which they were raped, the *Bahay na Pula* (the Red House, so called because of its red painted exterior), as the new headquarters for their organization. Despite the differences in their circumstances, many of the *Malaya Lolos*' goals coincide with those of the comfort woman redress movement, and they identify and ally themselves with the latter, successfully using the redress movement's rhetoric to tell their stories and advance their cause.

The general discourse of the redress movement is greatly preoccupied with issues of victimhood and perpetrator accountability; this preoccupation is a function of its juridical focus. Each book discussed in this chapter shifts and refines the necessarily broad-stroke discourse of blame and accountability at the level of the nation-state to explorations of betrayal not just between victim and perpetrator, but also between family members and members of the community, and not in the ways one would expect. Felias touches only briefly upon the topic of the *makapili*—those Filipinos who collaborated with the Japanese during the occupation years. It is not the book's content but its provenance that goes against the usual definition of Filipino-Japanese collaboration as Filipinos' betrayal of fellow Filipinos, and book project coordinator Chieko Takemi

explains how the book came to be in the article that follows Felias' story. As for Henson's text, it, too, is a betrayal. As I will discuss later in this chapter, by sharing her and her mother's life stories with the public she commits a necessary betrayal of a mandate of silence grounded in patriarchal, shame-driven definitions of family obligation and female sexuality. As mentioned earlier, these two Lolos' narratives end with redress activism—which is where the *Mapanique* book begins. It is the comfort women redress movement that gives the *Mapanique* Lolos the means with which to re-member their past. However, their adoption of narrative frameworks that have only recently become available to Filipino female victims of wartime sexual violence is in itself a sort of betrayal of brothers, fathers, and uncles. In telling the women's stories, this book inadvertently reveals the lack of, and desperate need for, ways with which to speak of sexual violence perpetrated by the occupying forces against the *men* of that town.

### **The Philippine Comfort Women Redress Movement**<sup>52</sup>

At this point it is helpful to recall the early years of the local movement that encouraged the Lolos to share their narratives with the public. Comfort women activism in the Philippines was the direct result of the stirrings of activism in Korea and Japan.<sup>53</sup> The Philippine mobilization has been called the most vital of the Asian comfort women collectives (Soh "Imperial Gifts," 59). The seeds of what would become the Philippine comfort women redress movement were planted in March of 1992, not long after activists in South Korea had begun to organize around their own former comfort women. The search for Filipino comfort system survivors began with Yoshimi's discovery of a

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<sup>52</sup> Some of the information in this section first appeared in my article, "Freeing the 'Slaves of Destiny': The Lolos of the Filipino Comfort Women Movement."

<sup>53</sup> These crucial, early stirrings of activism were discussed in Chapter I.

wartime Japanese military document—a medical report, dated March 19, 1942—that included a sketch of the location of a comfort station in the province of Iloilo.

Immediately following this discovery, the Philippine government (at the time headed by President Corazon Aquino) launched an investigation into the matter. University of the Philippines Professor Jose Ricardo was tasked with conducting the investigation. In June of that year, Ricardo announced that he had found no evidence that there had been comfort stations in the Philippines, findings that conveniently precluded the need to seek further apologies or reparations from Japan beyond those that had already been paid after the end of World War II (Hicks; Dolgopol and Paranjape).

Skeptical of Ricardo's conclusion, The Task Force on Filipino Comfort Women (TFFCW), launched its own investigation and sent researchers to the rural areas where the Japanese forces had established barracks during the war. Local residents confirmed that, contrary to Ricardo's report, there *had* been comfort facilities in the occupiers' garrisons. The TFFCW, then under the guidance of Indai Sajor and Nelia Sancho, began reaching out to former comfort women using on radio, television, and in the print media. These announcements and advertisements spoke of the Korean women who had already come forward and told their stories, and entreated any Filipino survivors out there to do the same and join other Asian women in seeking reparations for their wartime ordeal (Hicks; Sancho). The Task Force received their first response in September of that year, when they were contacted by Maria Rosa Henson. Henson relates in her autobiography that she had first heard the TFFCW's announcement in June of 1992. Shocked and weakened by a flood of memories, she at first did not—could not?—respond. Three

months passed, and she again heard mention of the comfort women on the radio. This time she composed a letter to the show's host. It read:

Dear Mr. Paredes,

I heard a woman talking about sex slaves in your radio program. I am Maria Rosa Luna Henson, who was made a sex slave during the Second World War. Please give me the telephone number of that woman's office. I will wait for your answer on the radio. Just call me Lola Rosa on the air (136-137).

Other comfort station survivors soon followed her lead. Calling themselves Lola Pacita, Lola Atanacia, and so on, they too came forward and told their stories.<sup>54</sup>

Stepping up its efforts, the TFFCW organized numerous press conferences and protests—including rallies outside the Japanese embassy in Manila—to heighten their cause's public profile and generate public support for the Lolos. In April 1993, Henson and 45 other Filipino comfort women went to the Tokyo District Court to file a lawsuit against the Japanese government, which they eventually lost. On the heels of the Aquino administration (1986-1992), President Fidel V. Ramos' government (1992-1998) prioritized strengthening the nation's economic relationship with Japan over pursuing an apology and reparations for the former comfort women. Despite the government's determination to suppress the local redress movement, the Lolos and their advocates successfully used various discursive strategies<sup>55</sup> to generate support for their cause and set about doing the work of speaking their own truths about World War II and the

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<sup>54</sup> The word Lola is often featured in the names of comfort women organizations. There is *LILA-Pilipina*, formed in 1994, an acronym for *Liga ng mga Lolang Pilipina*, or The League of Filipino Grandmothers. In 1996, a group of women from *LILA* formed their own organization, the *Malaya Lolos*, or the Free Grandmothers. Similarly, there is the group *Lolas Kampanyera*, which stands for Grandmothers for Peace and Compensation.

<sup>55</sup> These discursive strategies respond directly to the patriarchal and militaristic gender ideologies discussed in Chapter I that led to the establishment of the comfort system.

Japanese occupation. It seems safe to say that without the efforts of the redress activists who believed in their existence, the survivors would not have come out to the public, much less have the credibility and support they have today.

### **A Girl Taken**

In *The Hidden Battle of Leyte: The Picture Diary of a Girl Taken by the Japanese Military*, Lola Remedios Felias combines visual and literary discourses to reveal the kind of local history for which there are no statues and parks. Felias' autobiography broaches the subject of Filipino collaboration with the Japanese during the war, and not just with regards to the *makapili* who betrayed her. Though she does not mention it explicitly in her narrative, the story of how the book itself came to be is an unusual example of Filipino-Japanese collaboration in the present day, unusual because of its emphasis on just one survivor's broader narrative, with minimal movement-oriented companion texts.

Felias is the named author of the book, but the title page also credits Chieko Takemi as Supervisor and Masanobu Sawada and Jean Fallon for the Japanese and English translations, respectively. In the article that follows Felias' picture diary, "The Battle of Leyte is Not Yet Over," Takemi explains how the book came to be. The Japanese national explains that she had first traveled to Leyte in 1987 to start a local agricultural self-help project. Surprised by the amount of war damage and debris still visible in the area, Takemi developed an interest in local World War II history, an interest that eventually led her to Lola Remedios Felias. Although Takemi did not "discover" Felias, who had already given her testimony of the comfort system in a few venues, it was Takemi who, after meeting Felias and learning that she wished to publish a book of her drawings, initiated the multilingual book project (65). In the book's English language



“Message for Readers,” Rechelda Extremadula, then the Coordinator of the redress group *Liga ng mga Lolang Pilipina* (The League of Filipino Grandmothers, also known by the acronym LILA-Pilipina), writes: “We hope this book might inspire our supporters, like you who have been concerned with our struggle, to keep your alliance with victims of sexual violence, in its variety of forms, and as it continues, even now, everywhere in this world” (49). Besides being one of the Philippines’ two official languages, English is also the language in which much of the international and legal discourses on the comfort women issue are enunciated. By providing a Japanese translation, Felias, Takemi, and Extremadula have also made Felias’ story available to the comfort women’s Japanese supporters, who are mentioned in Chapter I.

I find it intriguing that, despite the late age at which Felias put pencil to paper, the book is presented not as a survivor’s recollections or a woman’s reminiscences, but as a “young girl’s picture diary.” Soh points out that before the internationalization (and, I will add, the politicization) of the comfort women issue, the Japanese euphemism *jugun ianfu* was translated into English as “comfort *girls*.” The translation “comfort *women*” has more recently become the international standard, which Soh assumes has to do with the notion that “women” is more respectful to the survivors as they are today (*Comfort Women* 69).<sup>56</sup> However, the designation “girl” more accurately describes how old many of the survivors had been when they were, as Felias puts it, taken. Despite how the paradigmatic comfort woman story often includes the recitation of age and sexual status at the time of first rape (i.e., “I was fourteen and a virgin”), the disconnect between the

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<sup>56</sup> In this book Soh traces the evolution of this label in comfort women discourse from “girls,” to “women,” to “military comfort women,” to “military sex slaves,” and finally to “grandmothers.”

label comfort *woman* and the image of the virginal teen or preteen typically goes unnoticed.

Deliberately or not, Felias' book recalls that early transliteration in its title, presentation, and affect, bringing to the forefront the uncomfortable truth that, despite the appellation "comfort women," the comfort system had preyed mostly on the young. This does not, however, indicate some sort of unbridgeable temporal schism. The redress movement may have shifted the label from "girls" to "women" but the paradigmatic narrative has always emphasized the victims' youth and innocence. The comfort women now active in the redress movement—the Grandmothers, Lolas, Amas, and Halmonis—seek reparations on behalf of the girls they used to be, those "virgin ghosts" who never became "proper" women because of what was done to them.

Each facing pair of pages in Felias' book consists of three separate blocks of text in Tagalog, Japanese, and English. *Traduttore traditore*, as the old pun goes. This bit of Italian wordplay comes up often in discussions about the difficulties of translating texts from one language to another, and the notion of the "unfaithful translator" has, as all good jokes must, the ring of truth about it. However, Felias' multilingual publication is not evidence of betrayal. It is, rather, an instance of translation as the result of collaboration: a collaboration based on trust and done in the service of redress, between language groups that are usually at odds with regards to the comfort women issue. As Takemi explains, the story told in this book originated as drawings, to which Felias added Tagalog text, which in turn were translated into Japanese and English. This chain of translation is reinforced by the way that the handwritten Tagalog text is presented as part

of the artwork, and stands visually separate from the English and Japanese translations which, unlike the Tagalog, are typeset.

While the book's multilingual nature is noteworthy, what draws my attention are Felias' drawings. These drawings constitute the primary language in which she tells the story of her life, from idyllic childhood, to the chaos and trauma of war, and into the postwar struggle to reconstruct a life for herself.

As she began for the first time in her life to draw, Lola Remedios ... was able to put down on paper memory after memory until they portrayed one continuous story. These pictures were the prototype of this book. Lola Remedios' drawings are very simple but have a powerful attraction (Takemi 65).

Felias, who first took up drawing as art therapy, creates deceptively simple yet evocative artwork. Though a careless viewer might mistake these drawings for a child's work simply because they are two-dimensional and defy the rules of perspective and depth, in many instances these supposedly childish attributes *add* dimension, perspective, and depth to the comfort women narrative.

In this dissertation I use the term "trauma" most often in reference not to the destructive event itself but to the damage it leaves behind: the social, emotional, and oftentimes physical aftermath that persists long after flesh wounds have healed.<sup>57</sup> Culbertson describes such trauma as an experience that is "locked within [one's own] skin" (170). She goes on to say that telling the trauma story—that is, speaking the "unspeakable" by linking sensations to events and placing them in a recognizable chronology and narrative framework—is the survivor's way of trying to reconstitute a socially legitimate identity. To effectively explore Felias' blending of visual and narrative

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<sup>57</sup> This is discussed in Chapter II.

discourses, I must consider trauma both in the sense that Culbertson describes, and in the sense of the literal wound upon the body. I also find Hirsch's understanding of the wound or mark to be particularly useful for studying Felias' illustrations. Following Culbertson's description of trauma as being locked within the skin, Hirsch claims that, "[t]he wound inflicted on the skin can thus be read as a sign of trauma's incommunicability, a figure for the traumatic real" (72). She continues,

Visual images ... can communicate an emotional or bodily experience to us by evoking our own emotional and body memories. They *produce* affect in the viewer, speaking *from* the body's sensations, rather than speaking of, or representing the past (72, emphasis in original).

Over the last two decades, artistic production by and about the comfort women in various media and venues—films, books, theaters, and museums—have given us, among other things, depictions of bodies bearing wounds, scars, tattoos, and other marks. In such works, the affect that Hirsch describes is often generated by focusing the viewer's gaze upon the violated female body, the same body that all too often is at the center of the paradigmatic comfort women narrative. Such a fixation on the female body in pain is potentially as problematic in visual form as it is in legal and activist discourses. Felias' book contains many such images, but they exist in combination with her narrative. With her drawings, she coaxes emotional and physical responses out of her viewers while simultaneously telling a story that names and reclaims that fetishized image of the comfort woman's body in pain as *her* body. Readers cannot help but contrast these figures to earlier illustrations of Felias in the time before, when she was still a whole and happy girl. In the paradigmatic story, the comfort woman's wounded body exists in a vacuum. Felias fills in this vacuum with those dimensions of her self and her history that

were damaged by war, and with her subsequent struggle to find new ways of relating to the world after the war.

Felias begins by introducing us to mid-twentieth century Barrio Esperanza, Leyte, which appears to have been a pastoral paradise. She fills the pages with drawings of coconut trees heavy with round fruit and *nipa* palms no doubt destined to thatch the roofs of the homes pictured in the background. There are children playing jump rope, rustic earthenware jars for food and water storage, and adults dancing the lively *tinikling*.<sup>58</sup> Felias fleshes out this idyll with words, explaining, “We were not a poor family. My parents were hard working and ambitious. We were all very happy” (3). Although Felias’ parents were not wealthy by any stretch of the imagination, they had the security of owning the land on which they grew rice, corn, and coconuts. The narrative invites the reader to draw a parallel between the fecund land and the potential that the young Felias herself had within herself. Such a parallel would further imply that she was also property to be tilled and sown by someone, an accurate enough view of the role of females in this patriarchal culture. The author/illustrator takes her time establishing this idealized vision of her childhood, and the ugly realities of war intrude only gradually, as if she were hesitant to shatter the pretty picture. The family’s attachment to the land is made even clearer when the war eventually reaches Barrio Esperanza. Felias tells of how her father had built a hidden refuge up in the mountains to which they retreated when the

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<sup>58</sup> The dance takes its name from the *tinikling* bird and involves two male-female couples. One couple holds opposite ends of two long bamboo poles parallel to the ground, clapping them against the ground and against one another in rhythm, while the other couple deftly dances in and out of the poles as they open and quickly snap shut. The cynic in me wonders if the residents of Barrio Esperanza in the 1940s really *did* dance the *tinikling* for fun, or if this is a bit of spectacular Filipiniana (the kind of cultural shorthand that is trotted out at “cultural festivals”) thrown in for the benefit of the book’s non-Pinoy audience.

Japanese began bombing and strafing the area. While in hiding, they constantly checked on their homestead, eventually returning to rebuild the family hut that had been burned down by the invaders. This wounding of the land would soon be echoed in the soldiers' wounding of Felias herself, but it would prove much more difficult for her to return home and rebuild her life.

I return once again to the prurient fixation on the image of the violated female body. Where the juridically driven story almost rushes towards this image, Felias takes her time and does not arrive there until halfway through her story. She recounts how, in retaliation for a guerrilla strike on their forces, Japanese soldiers attacked the civilians of Barrio Esperanza. Felias, whose father had fought alongside the guerrillas, was raped and beaten by the Japanese soldiers. After the initial beating, she says,

they brought me down the cliff to Marabong River where they pushed me under the water.<sup>59</sup> I thought they were killing me, but then they dragged me out. A Filipino *Makapili* (collaborator) said: "Don't kill her. Why not take her to your garrison?" It was, in fact, this man who put me into the water to clean off the blood that covered my whole body. It did not, however, stop my wounds from bleeding (21).

Though it was the Japanese soldiers who raped Felias, her narrative implies that it was the Filipino collaborator who turned her into a comfort woman. She invests the *makapili's* actions with the intent to betray: by cleaning the blood off her body, he would have removed the most visible sign of physical trauma, making her readable to the soldiers as a useful body and thus rendering her vulnerable to further trauma within the comfort system. Despite the fact that she began to bleed again after emerging from the river, the Japanese soldiers and the *makapili* took her to the garrison.

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<sup>59</sup> Immersion in water is a familiar image, particularly in a Catholic nation such as the Philippines. Usually it signifies a baptism or a cleansing, but in this instance it is neither, unless by "baptism" I mean the girl's induction into the comfort system.

Art historian Jill Bennett claims,

It is no coincidence that the image of ruptured skin recurs throughout the work of artists dealing with sense memory ... If the skin of memory is permeable, then it cannot serve to encase the past self as other. It is precisely through the breached boundaries of skin in such imagery that memory continues to be felt as a wound rather than seen as contained other ... it is here in sense memory that the past seeps back into the present, becoming sensation rather than representation (41-42).

In Felias' drawings, the representation of wounds is actually secondary to the representation of blood. On page after page, blood streams from Felias' injuries, flowing heaviest from between her legs. Despite the fact that reference to a victim's menarchal status is a common enough element of the comfort women story, the text remains silent on whether or not Felias had already begun menstruating by the time she was made a comfort girl. Such an omission leaves the image open to interpretation, and I read the blood from her wounds and from between her legs as mimicking the flow of menses come before its time, a visible marker of how she has been prematurely, violently yanked into adulthood.

Paradigmatic narratives tend to focus on rape to the exclusion of the many other oppressive dimensions of life in the comfort stations. Although Felias' book does spend several pages dwelling on the sexual abuse she experienced at the hands of the soldiers, her drawings of the garrison—like the earlier depictions of prewar Barrio Esperanza—cover more territory than just her body, showing the various structures and open spaces that comprised the Japanese garrison in which she was held. Sexual violence clearly looms large in her memories of the time and place, but what is also apparent is that sexual violence does not obscure or overpower her recall of other aspects of life as a comfort woman. Felias explains that when her wounds had healed, she was put to work in the

garrison and hospital. Her primary designation at the garrison was that of domestic laborer. According to the schedule she describes in the book, she was put to work, and work meant everything from taking out the garbage, to doing laundry, to having sex with the soldiers.<sup>60</sup> “When we finished with the wash,” she writes, “the soldiers would come and take each [of the] women to some place of their own. If we defied them we would be beaten” (30). Felias only selectively employs the principles of perspective and depth in the illustrations that accompany these lines, as she does in all of the drawings in this book. The clean soldiers’ uniforms drying in the sun are of equal size to, and occupy equal space with, the girls being pawed at by the soldiers. It would seem that the sexual component of her work was not necessarily more important nor more definitive of her role in the garrison than was her janitorial work.

As Felias goes on to tell of escaping the garrison, getting married, and moving to Manila, readers are presented with more text and fewer illustrations; the older Felias becomes, the more textual she is, leaving behind the young girl drawing a picture diary. Felias ends her story with this statement: “It is still very difficult for me to forget all that has happened to me, in particular my experience as a sex slave. For this reason, I have continued to struggle for the just restitution for what was done to me by the Japanese Military” (47). At no other point in her story does Felias mention her involvement in the comfort women redress movement. However, what could have easily become a throwaway line is immediately taken up by a representative of the movement. In the “Message to Readers” that follows Felias’ picture diary, activist leader Rechelda

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<sup>60</sup> Recall my discussion in Chapter I of the slippage from work to sex to rape.



Extremadura tosses out all the catchwords and phrases we are used to hearing from the movement: “testimony,” she says, and “silent for fifty years,” and “struggle against the Japanese Government in order to reclaim their dignity” (49). Extremadura rushes in to continue what Felias only hints at, annexing her life story to redress movement terrain and corralling it for political ends.

### **The Slave of Destiny**

Within a movement built upon breaking silence, Maria Rosa Henson attained iconic status by being the first Filipina comfort station survivor to tell her story to the public. The title of her autobiography, *Comfort Woman: Slave of Destiny*, published by the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, suggests that having been a comfort woman—and becoming the standard bearer for the Philippine redress movement—was, for her, preordained. Despite its tantalizing title, I argue that what the book says about the comfort system and the author’s experiences of wartime sexual violence end up being secondary to what it reveals about how remembrances of trauma circulate within the family. In Henson’s case, trauma is remembered and repeated in both her family of origin and the family she later forms with her husband.

I will begin with the book’s front and back covers and the promises they make to the casual browser about what can be found on the pages inside (See Figs. 5 and 6). Lola Rosa herself graces the front cover of this paperback. When referring to her work as an activist and a writer, I use her last name, Henson, but the persona I see in the cover photo is not Henson the author, but Lola Rosa the aging victim: the “slave of destiny.” Lola Rosa wears pearl earrings and a *batik* housedress. She faces toward me without looking *at* me; her eyes, heavy-lidded with age, are looking off to the side. Her hands cover her

mouth in a way that calls to mind, with no subtlety whatsoever, the idea of a story silenced and a voice suppressed. The image, like the use of the honorific “Lola,” is meant to tug at the heartstrings and evoke protective familial feelings.

Where the book’s front cover features Henson as the meek, silent grandmother, the back outside cover is all about Rosa at age fifteen: Rosa the child, Rosa the captive, Rosa the no-longer-innocent. In large print at the top of the back cover:

In April 1943, fifteen year-old Maria Rosa Henson was taken by Japanese soldiers and forced to become a “comfort woman.” In this gripping autobiography, she recalls her childhood as the illegitimate daughter of a big landowner, her wartime ordeal and her decision to go public with a secret she had kept for fifty years.

Obviously this book exists because Henson had once been a comfort woman, but what strikes me is the nature of the excerpts and illustrations that follow this banner.

Specifically, I am interested in the way these excerpts characterize the book. The passages and illustrations here are among the most sexually explicit that the book has to offer, and they appear to have been chosen to stir up as much salacious interest as possible. One of the drawings depicts a row of naked women, their backs to the reader, being laughed at by Japanese soldiers. Another shows an unclothed Rosa lying prone on a mat while a soldier ties her leg to a post, accompanied by these lines: “When the soldiers raped me, I felt like a pig. Sometimes they tied up my right leg with a waist band or a belt and hung it on a nail in the wall as they violated me.” Rosa, as pictured on this back cover, is the battered, young female body that is the quasi-pornographic focus of so many juridical comfort woman narratives.

If and when curiosity spurred a reader to crack the book’s spine, she or he would see that unlike those of most books, the inside covers of *Comfort Woman* are covered in

reproductions of Henson's handwritten manuscript (See Fig. 7). Where most comfort woman narratives appearing in English have been translated from the survivor's native language, these words are written in an English that, although grammatically imperfect, is perfectly comprehensible. One paragraph states, "Since I was 7 years old, my mother start to tell her life story gradually. Because at that age I have a good understanding to know my mother's situation, I pity her very much, that she experienced painful and sad life [sic]." To someone who has not read the book and the editor's End Notes, the paragraphs of cursive on the inside covers may not make much sense. In the context of the entire book, however, this unusual book styling element can be understood as one more way to say "Lola Rosa is a real person and the story she tells is true." As noted by editor Sheila Coronel, Henson spent an entire year writing longhand on legal pads—she was driven to, and bent on, writing her story. Coronel also makes a point of how Henson wrote her original manuscript in English, a claim that is supported by the cursive handwriting on the book's inside covers. Rather than writing in her native Pampangeño or in Tagalog, Henson made a deliberate choice to write in English, addressing her words to an audience for whom fluency in that language continues to be a marker of class and educational distinction. Though imperfect, Henson's grasp of the English language is meant to be read as a marker of education and class, and can only help her as she works to (re)establish her social value as a woman and a writer.

On its surface, the book design promises the paradigmatic comfort women narrative, enticing potential readers with the familiar and problematic images discussed in Chapter II. On the front cover, we see the desexualized, silenced grandmother; on the back, a series of passages and illustrations that, like many comfort woman

representations, “mimic the international conventions of pornography today, in which female social degradation and pain is eroticized,” even when the intent is to critique violence against women (Hein 343). Make no mistake, there are parts of the book that hit those notes, but ultimately these stock representations serve to draw readers into a different kind of comfort woman narrative. At the core of Henson’s book I have found a story about how a good daughter is not always an obedient one.

### The Good Daughter

In an opening paragraph that astutely takes up her grandfather’s lack of socioeconomic privilege as a thread in her own story of sexual exploitation, Henson writes, “My story begins in the barrio of Pampang in Angeles, Pampanga, about eighty kilometers north of Manila. My grandfather, Alberto Luna, lived in that barrio” (3). Reaching farther back into family history than is typically allowed for within the limits of the usual comfort women narrative, Henson goes on to explain that her Lolo Alberto was a tenant farmer on a rice and sugarcane plantation owned by one *Don Pepe Henson*. Life as a tenant farmer under the thumb of *hacenderos* like *Don Pepe* meant backbreaking work without the hope of advancement. “They were always in debt,” Henson states matter-of-factly, “and they lived and died in poverty” (3). Young Alberto, Henson goes on to tell readers, won the hand of a young woman named Carmen Salas who had been courted by, among others, an American soldier stationed at Fort Stotsenburg.<sup>61</sup> Julia, the first of Alberto and Carmen’s ten children, was born in 1907 (4).

Life was hard for the large Luna family, as it is for most tenant farmers, and Henson goes on to explain how it was Julia, the good daughter, who literally put a roof

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<sup>61</sup> Fort Stotsenberg later became Clark Airbase, which, along with Subic Naval Base, was part of the U.S. military presence in Southeast Asia until 1992.

over their head by working as a live-in maid in the *hacienda* or “big house.” *Don Pepe* advanced the Lunas P120, two years’ worth of her salary. The money paid for a tin roof to replace the family hut’s leaking thatch roof, under which *Don Pepe* had first espied the thirteen year-old Julia. Most of those two years of service passed without incident, but one night, soon after Julia had turned 15, the landlord came into Julia’s bedroom and raped her. “She wanted to scream,” Henson says, “but she heard a voice whispering in her ear, ‘Do not shout, nobody can hear you because only my wife and I are in the house. All my children are not here’” (8-9). *Don Pepe* threatened to kick Julia’s family off his land if she spoke about what happened, so the next day she did her work as usual. “She kept quiet, but in her heart she was very angry” (9).

Julia’s silence did not last long. On her next visit home she told her parents what had happened, to which Alberto replied, “*Don Pepe* is a religious man, he will [sic] not do that” (Henson 9). Julia was made to return to the big house where the *haciendero* forced himself upon Julia several more times. He later initiated an arrangement that was to last for many years. One day Carmen told her eldest daughter, “*Don Pepe* has talked with your father about his plan ... He will provide for our financial needs if we will agree to let you live with him.” At first Julia refused, to which her mother replied angrily,

“If you refuse what the landlord wants, then go and pay all our debts and give us the benefits that the landlord is giving us now. Otherwise, your father and I will despise you. You are not a good daughter. You are selfish.” Then Carmen stormed out of the room, very angry (15).

These were serious allegations, and in order to prove that she *was* a good daughter—in Tagalog, *mabuting anak*<sup>62</sup>—Julia put her obligation to her family ahead of her bodily integrity and agreed to the arrangement with *Don Pepe*. The discourse of the

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<sup>62</sup> The Tagalog word *anak* is actually ungendered and translates into English as “child.”

good/obedient child in particular, and familial responsibility in general (inextricably linked to the notion of *utang na loob*, or the debt of gratitude), carry great power in Filipino culture. As was pointed out in the 1989 Philippine National Development Plan for Women, “women, particularly unskilled ones, tend to take any type of work because they feel obligated to help their parents in return for their care during childhood” (Hilsdon 105). My equivocation of sex and work in this instance is, of course, intentional. When Henson notes that although it was Julia who “earned” the monthly stipend, *Don Pepe* always paid this money directly to Carmen, she points to how easily sexual exploitation could be, and was, framed as duty to family.

Henson was born, she writes, in Pasay City, where the Lunas moved Julia once the details of her indenture to *Don Pepe* had been worked out. It was a difficult birth: “The pain of childbirth combined with the sadness in [Julia’s] heart. She was having the child of a man she did not love,” but Julia quickly came to see her healthy infant daughter as a sign that she had “overcome the hard times and the pain” (Henson 19). *Don Pepe* named the infant “Maria Rosa” and gave her his family’s name.<sup>63</sup> As Rosa grew, *Don Pepe* continued to financially support the Lunas, including Julia’s nine brothers and sisters and their families. For the Luna clan, the stipend they received from *Don Pepe* became the primary source of income. By the time Rosa was of school age, the little of *Don Pepe*’s money that Carmen apportioned to Julia was no longer sufficient for all of Julia’s and Rosa’s needs, and Henson writes with pride of having maintained good grades while also sewing and crocheting to earn some extra money to help out her mother.

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<sup>63</sup> Though it is unusual for an illegitimate child to bear its father’s name, particularly when the parents come from such different economic classes, Henson does not comment on why her father chose to claim her in such a public way. It is worth noting that Lola Rosa campaigns and writes under her maiden (read: “higher class”) name.

Where the comfort women narrative is prone to positioning a girl's virginity as the primary loss she suffers within the comfort system, Henson uses the more expansive venue of the memoir to lay out a chain of losses and sacrifices linking Julia's indenture to *Don Pepe* to Rosa's lost potential. The latter is a major subject in Henson's description of her early life. Henson relates that before the war she had been an excellent student, and had dreamed of going on to college and then medical school. By her own account, she was a hard worker, and her drive came in large part from seeing what had become of Julia's life. "I pitied her very much," Henson recalls, "especially because she could neither write nor read. She did not even know how to count. I worried about her. I studied very hard because she was illiterate. My dream was to redeem her sad life" (23). Henson devotes the first two chapters of her book to detailing Julia's sad life and describing what it was like for her to grow up as *Don Pepe*'s illegitimate child and therefore the object of her neighbors' and schoolmates' scorn. According to Henson, Julia's life can be effectively summed up in the following way: "She lived in misery because she was an obedient daughter" (33). Henson repeatedly mentions that Julia silently nursed a great pain and anger that was directed at her parents just as much as it was at *Don Pepe*. She obeyed, but did not accept, the life to which she had been consigned. Although Julia felt trapped and silenced, she found an audience in her own young daughter, who was in turn instructed to tell no one else. Thus Julia and Rosa became one another's confidantes and companions in their lives as obedient daughter and granddaughter to the Luna family. Henson writes, "This story comes from my mother's own lips. She told me all that happened to her before I was born. She told me not only once but many times. That is why this is written in the diary of my mind" (10).

“Maybe This is Your Fate”:  
The Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma

Henson’s book strikes many of the paradigmatic narrative’s usual chords. But Julia’s story and the details of Rosa’s childhood make those familiar notes resonate in different ways, particularly with regards to the intergenerational transmission of trauma—to be more precise, silence about trauma—between generations. Henson’s relationship with her mother is preeminent throughout the book, and the defining characteristic of that relationship is the sharing of trauma narratives, a practice that Julia begins with her early and repeated telling of being handed over by her family into the grasping hands of Don Pepe. In the essay “Marked by Memory,” Hirsch describes a scene from Toni Morrison’s novel *Beloved* in which a young black girl, Sethe, meets her mother for the first and only time. The mother shows Sethe the slave brand underneath her breast, a cross in a circle permanently burned onto her skin. Sethe’s reaction “expresses her sense of her own vulnerability, and her desire for mutuality and maternal recognition: ... ‘Mark me too,’ I said. ‘Mark the mark on me too’” (71). Unlike the young Sethe, whose request angers her mother, Henson understands that Julia’s “slave mark” is not something she wants on her own body. However, circumstances conspire so that she, too, comes to bear the marks of sexual exploitation.

Henson was fourteen years old in January 1942, when Japanese forces took control of Metro Manila. Food and money were hard to come by, so Henson helped earn money for the family by selling firewood. While gathering wood near Fort McKinley<sup>64</sup> one afternoon, she was grabbed and raped by three Japanese soldiers. Afterwards, they left her alone and unconscious. Henson eventually awoke and found her way home.

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<sup>64</sup> A U.S. military complex taken over by the Japanese during the occupation.



I told my mother what had happened to me ... She advised me not to talk about the incident to anybody but I was very sad. I could feel the pain inside me. I was fourteen, and had not yet begun to menstruate. I kept thinking, why did this happen to me? I remembered the landlord who had raped my mother.

Did I inherit my mother's fate? (42)

Henson brings up the notion of inheriting Julia's destiny time and again, but what she gets from her mother is more along the lines of what Hirsch calls "the *familial* inheritance and transmission of cultural trauma" (77, emphasis in original). As the above quotation indicates, this particular family inheritance includes silence about sexual exploitation, which Julia had learned from her parents and then passed on to Rosa. For the rest of Julia's life, she and her daughter serve as one another's secret keepers.

After being raped a second time, Rosa joined the *Hukbo ng Bayan Laban sa Hapon* or *Hukbalahap* (The People's Army Against Japan), also referred to as the Huk, a guerrilla force that battled the Japanese during the occupation years.<sup>65</sup> She helped the Huk by gathering and delivering food, clothes, and medicine, and describes this period as having been the happiest time in her life, despite the fact that it was during a supply run for the Huk that she was once again captured by the Japanese (59). This time she was

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<sup>65</sup> The Huk was officially formed on March 29, 1942, when leaders of guerrilla detachments from various townships congregated at a secret spot in Central Luzon. As a resistance group, the Huk was somewhat different from other guerrilla armies. Many of the Huk were members of the Communist Party and, before the Japanese Occupation, had been members and leaders of labor and peasant unions in Central Luzon. As explained in *The Philippines: A Past Revisited* and *The Philippines: The Continuing Past*, this was not a group hastily thrown together in response to the Occupation; the Huk was made up of people who already had a history of organized struggle (Constantino and Constantino). The Huk's actions prevented the Japanese forces from occupying more than thirty percent of the Philippines.

Philippine cultural memory of the war has always valorized the men of the Huk. Although there are a handful of women leaders and fighters, among them Felipa Culala, aka *Kumander* Dayang-Dayang, from Candaba, Pampanga, the Huk remains, in recorded Philippine history, a male entity. The same histories that revere the *Hukbalahap* make no mention of Filipina comfort women.

taken to the Japanese garrison, where she was a comfort woman for nine months. She escaped in January 1944, after which she lay in a coma for two months (81).

When she awoke, she found that she literally could not tell anyone about what had happened to her. In an almost too perfect example of Scarry's description of profound pain as an experience so embodied that it *destroys* language and therefore can never be fully communicated to others, Henson had lost the ability to speak.<sup>66</sup> Henson herself speculates that she had sustained brain damage from having been beaten so often and so hard at the garrison, and goes on to explain that she was too poor and too ashamed to seek medical help (101). Although her muteness turned out to be only temporary, it took her a long time to learn how to speak again, and when she did, the only person to whom she spoke of her life in the garrison was her mother. At this point, the cumulative weight of the secrets they shared must have been staggering. Years later, this already heavy burden was added to by Henson's estranged husband, who raped her, too. Upon learning of this latest incident, Julia only said, "Maybe this is your fate" (120).

It would seem that Henson, for all her pain, had an advantage that many other Lolas did not: someone to talk to, someone who could understand and empathize with her about having been a victim of rape. But Julia perceived these traumatic memories as things to be shared only between the two of them, and in the telling and retelling they turned it into something they bore alone, something inevitable, something they called destiny. To share their pasts with others was simply not an option, and to speak their sadness to one another was the only coping mechanism allowed by a culture of female obedience and silence. In effect, Henson and her mother became isolated by, and with,

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<sup>66</sup> See Scarry's book, *The Body in Pain*.

their traumatic memories, an isolation that the author makes painfully clear towards the end of *Slave of Destiny*. Henson describes a particularly difficult stretch of time in her life after Julia's death and before the emergence of the comfort woman redress movement, a time during which she had no one with whom she could talk about the past. It was during this time that she took to writing, "The Japanese raped me" on scraps of paper, which she would then crumple up and throw away (130). Manifesting the *need* to tell her story and demonstrating the inadequacy of Julia's practice of telling no one else (keeping it in the family, as it were), Henson kept her memories to herself until the day in 1992 when she heard the radio address asking comfort women to come forward.

Earlier, I wrote that Henson demonstrates how being a good daughter does not always mean being obedient. By responding to the radio address and going public with her recollections of wartime sexual slavery, Henson defied her mother's instructions to tell no one of her wartime ordeal. Henson's painstaking and faithful narration of her mother's travails *despite* Julia's admonitions to tell no one is both a demonstration and a subversion of the Filipino cultural ideal of the *mabuting anak*. By writing Julia's story as part of her own autobiography, recording for posterity what Julia had endured in silence for her family's financial gain, Henson redefines the good daughter by serving as the mouthpiece for the mother who in her own lifetime could not speak of her parents' betrayal. By including—rather, by beginning with, and giving prominence to—Julia's biography, Henson goes a step further and betrays her mother's confidence, exposing ugly realities about patriarchal culture and adding their voices to the chorus of other survivors. It is an act of disobedience by which Henson, ever the good daughter, seeks to

reconstitute not only herself, but her mother, out of the shattered pieces left by sexual violence.

### **The Grandmother Freed**

*The Women of Mapanique: Untold Crimes of War*, by Gajudo et al, is notably unlike the two other texts covered in this chapter. This book, published by the Asian Centre for Women's Human Rights (known also as ASCENT), is about a Japanese military raid on the town of Mapanique in Candaba, Pampanga on November 23, 1944, which resulted in the killing of many of the town's men and boys and the rape of its women and girls. *The Women of Mapanique* includes the Lolas' stories, a brief history of the town, and accounts and analyses of the Japanese raid. In this way, the book is more like the comfort women compilations discussed in earlier chapters. By the time Mapanique survivors started sharing their wartime experiences publicly, the comfort women redress movement had already established itself as a vibrant, visible entity. It attracted survivors, supporters, and media coverage; it had a momentum and power of its own.

Despite the differences in the *forms* of wartime sexual violence experienced by the two groups of women, there are parallels between the lives of the Lolas of the comfort system and the Lolas of Mapanique, and the narratives of the latter echo the trope of silence broken and the faith that justice brings healing that characterize the rhetoric of the former. I have included this book among the texts discussed in this chapter precisely because it is about survivors who, while technically *not* comfort women, use that rhetoric and adopt that label to make their own history visible. In doing so, they commit a betrayal of sorts, in that their visibility reveals that we desperately need, and do

not yet have, an adequate language with which to speak of the sexual violence that was done, not only to women, but also to men during that war.

In 1944, Mapanique, Pampanga was a village of about 1000 people, spread over approximately 60 hectares of rice fields and some swampland. Rich in rice, vegetables, fruits, and freshwater fish, Mapanique at the time was also a nest of guerrilla activity and a major stronghold of the *Hukbalahap* forces. The Huk and other resistance groups were crucial to eventually forcing the Japanese out of the country, but the occupying forces lost no opportunity to retaliate against Filipino civilians, male and female. According to Huk member Luis Taruc, the occupying forces were well aware of the danger posed by the presence of guerrillas, who had killed a Japanese officer only two days before. The intense Huk activity in the Mapanique area spurred the Japanese forces to raze the town both as punishment and as a warning to other towns with similar rebellious leanings.

Huk activity aside, Mapanique was a military target in its own right. The raid happened towards the end of the war, by which time the military supply lines that ran from Japan to faraway occupied territories were barely functional or nonexistent. Local crops were ripe; a raid on the town would allow the ill-supplied JIA to kill two birds with one stone, simultaneously feeding itself and destroying the locals' morale (qtd. in Gajudo et al 105). From documents uncovered by the Violence Against Women in War Network (VAWW-Net Japan): the plan for this punitive mission, written by Kwai Shigeo of the Japanese military's Strategic Section 12091 and led by Major Kanoe Buhei, included instructions to "dampen the guerrillas' fighting spirit by raping the women" (Gajudo et al 107-108). The town was attacked from the air and ground. Japanese troops gathered people in the center of town, setting fire to structures as they went. They beat and tortured

the men and chose which of the women and girls to take with them. Those townsfolk deemed too old, too infirm, or too young, were left behind. The unlucky chosen were loaded down with loot and marched approximately 3 kilometers to the town of Anyatam, where the Japanese had commandeered a mansion known as *Bahay na Pula* (the Red House). Many of the women and girls who survived the trek and made it all the way to the Red House were raped.

Unlike similar incidents across the Philippines and other Asian territories,<sup>67</sup> the events at Mapanique were *not* among the war crimes for which Japanese officers were tried at the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (IMTFE) in 1946. According to activist Indai Sajor, the “Mapanique tragedy” remained “buried among the ruins of war” until August 1996. “For more than 55 years,” Sajor continues, “[the Lolos of Mapanique] kept their malingering pain and ... anger to themselves. The unearthing of the issue on comfort women in the Philippines brought courage to the women of Mapanique to tell their story” (4). There is much in the Mapanique Lolos’ experience that resonates with that of the comfort women, and Mapanique so easily and completely came under the umbrella of comfort women rhetoric and activism that some of the testimonials published in this book appear exactly as they did in the ICJ report *Comfort Women: An Unfinished Ordeal*.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> For example, the attacks on Tanauan, Lipa, and the Bay View Hotel in Manila.

<sup>68</sup> I want to emphasize that what happened in Mapanique is an example of wartime sexual violence as a weapon, and not as part of the supply line/troop recreation facilities, as the comfort system was intended. While the intent and practice were not the same, in both cases, the rape and torture of women was an exercise of androcentric militarism. In one case the women are raped to *punish* their recalcitrant men folk; in the other they provide “comfort” for the opposing forces’ men. That the ICJ report was published in 1994, two years before Sajor says the Mapanique *Lolos* organized, highlights the fact that there is overlap between the two categories of rape victims. If nothing else, this serves as a good reminder that despite the analytical importance of such distinctions, in practice they often prove to be porous.

One of the factors allowing for the easy incorporation of the Mapanique women into the comfort women redress movement is the label “Lola.” Like the survivors of the comfort system, the women of Mapanique adopted the honorific Lola in the public eye: they are the Lolas of Mapanique and their organization is known as *The Malaya Lolas* (The Free Grandmothers). Besides this, there *is* some literal overlap between the strict categories of “military sex slave” and “wartime rape victim.” There is, for example, the mother-daughter pair of Lola Amanda and Lola Maxima, who were held in a comfort station for three months. They managed to escape together and return home to Mapanique, and were subsequently taken to the Red House where they were raped again.

*The Malaya Lolas* use the comfort women redress movement as a power and credibility base and their narratives include some of the tropes commonly found in the paradigmatic comfort woman story. But it is not simply a matter of lumping all women who were raped by Japanese soldiers into the category of comfort women. Rather, the *Malaya Lolas* inhabit a sort of ecotone in which two forms of wartime sexual violence overlap. Ecotones are found where two different environments meet (i.e. sea and land, forest and plain), and they are typically richer than the two environments they suture together. There is more biodiversity in an ecotone; things thrive in the margins. Thriving in *this* margin is solidarity among survivors and across experiences, as well as a conscious deployment of rhetoric that has previously proven effective in rallying public support. It also serves as an important reminder that although the comfort system had been established by the Japanese military to direct and contain its soldiers’ sexual desires and keep civilians safe, in practice this purported concern for the public was easily discarded at officers’ discretion. Rape had never stopped being a weapon of war.

Talking the Comfort Women Talk

The first chapter of *Women of Mapanique* begins with the Lolas, all in their 60s and 70s, walking up to the Red House, joking and squabbling with one another. As they explore the old building that will soon become the *Malaya Lolas* headquarters, the women reminisce about what happened to them in that same house long ago, and what has happened since. Readers are presented with the comfort woman story in the usual way of various individuals' testimony collected in one place, but with a difference: the book's first chapter also weaves an overarching narrative that contextualizes and locates each woman's personal story of violation and survival within the region's narrative of invasion and resistance. Most of the Lolas and their families had been involved with the Huk in some way. Lola Leonor, for example, recalls that her wedding to Ambrosio, whose guerrilla name was *Pag-asa* (meaning "hope"), had been officiated by Huk *Kumander* Victoria and their marriage contract signed by Huk *Supremo* Luis Taruc (15-16).

The Lolas of Mapanique participate in the national redress movement and work with the survivors of the comfort stations to raise all Filipinos' awareness of World War II military sexual violence. Unlike the many former comfort women who for decades had felt abandoned or forgotten by their communities, to the people of Mapanique, the rape has always been part of their memories of the war. Lola Tarcila, who had happened to be visiting Mapanique during the attack, explains to her fellow *Malaya Lolas* that, outside the township, love and sex postwar were very different.

Most of the men in your community know what happened during the war. You were still respected. They understood. But I am from another village. I am from Lourdes, not far but still another village. And I have had a



number of suitors. I tell you. Whenever I would tell them that I was raped. Good Lord, they're gone (18).

The nature of the attack on Mapanique meant that the female survivors of sexual violence had not had to hide it from their families and community. However, the Lolos' narratives indicate that this knowledge and acceptance was not always enough to keep broader cultural prejudices at bay, adding to our understanding of the tenacity of survivors' own lowered perceptions of their self-worth vis-à-vis rape stigma. Oddly enough, what emerges from *this* narrative is that most of the local men that the Lolos eventually married seem to have understood and been able to see beyond the stigma of rape. As I have mentioned before, many a comfort woman has explained her long silence as being due to the fear of being rejected by loved ones, should the truth come out. The Lolos of Mapanique remind us that rejection need not come from outside. In *Madonnas and Martyrs: Militarism and Violence in the Philippines*, Hilsdon explains that in conservative Philippine culture,

a woman's honour is contingent predominantly on her own sense of sexual shame and identity, which in turn is based on a virginity complex. Hence being "used" (i.e. raped) *by someone other than your husband* is considered "worse than death." Women reported feeling dirty and naughty, stigmatized and paranoid (11, my emphasis).

Despite this, the Lolos had internalized the notion that they were "tainted" by rape—to the point that they initially resisted and doubted men's protestations to the contrary. For some of the Mapanique Lolos, those doubts lingered until the emergence of the redress movement let them know that many other women shared similar doubts, a strength-in-numbers narrative touchstone often found in comfort women narratives.

One characteristic that distinguishes the first chapter of *Women of Mapanique* from other redress movement publications is humor. Mirth is extremely rare in comfort

women's narratives, and it is incredibly refreshing to see the Lolas shown here with their sense of humor intact—so different from the dour, agonized eternal victim of the typical narrative. For example, as they explore the Red House, Virginia makes the Lolas laugh with raunchy stories about being a newlywed: “I was telling them that for about a week after our wedding, he practically tore off my underwear—six panties for six nights. He couldn't do a thing. I told him to wait till I am ready. Of course, after that, we had seven children” (23). This snippet is particularly noteworthy because Virginia is joking about sex. In the paradigmatic narrative, the topic of sex only comes up in the context of rape or a lingering aversion to sex because of having experienced rape. The Mapanique story, in contrast, makes room for Lola Virginia to both laugh and speak seriously about physical intimacy after rape. Before the laughter fully dies down, Virginia confesses, “But to tell you the truth ladies, I never enjoyed making love, it was just that I feel it's the wife's obligation to her husband. And anyway, he was a good man” (23).

The Lolas of Mapanique are serious and funny, are wary from having been hurt, and yet continue to live. Partly because they linger in the ecotone between surviving Mapanique and surviving the comfort system, their stories offer readers an idea not just of what they were during the war (young, virginal, poor, vulnerable) but *who* they were (daughters, supporters of the Huk, *members* of the Huk, martial artists, rough-tongued tellers of dirty jokes). When useful, they talk the redress movement talk, but they also take off in different directions, constructing for us an image of the Lolas as active participants in the war, and not just its hapless victims. There is, however, another problematic to the Mapanique Lolas' newfound ability to discuss wartime sexual

violence outside the circle of the town survivors: its apparent limitation to wartime sexual violence against *women*.

Every Man for Himself

Prior to being moved to the Red House, the women and girls of Mapanique were made to watch as the Japanese tortured their fathers, brothers, and uncles. Lola Tarcila describes how a *makapili* identified her father as a member of the Huk and what the Japanese soldiers did to him as she watched.

The soldiers separated my father from the rest of the men. His clothes were torn off from severe punishment. He was naked and bloodied. With a saber that glistened under the morning sun, the military officer sliced off his penis and shoved the part into [my father's] mouth. It was an eternity of horror. I prayed hard for the grounds to open up and take us all into the pit of hell. I could not move. I could not speak. I was nailed to the ground. I could not do anything but uproot every [blade of] grass my hands could lay on (Gajudo et al 20).

In this passage—which, incidentally, is the first scene of graphic violence in the book—Tarcila explains the symbolic power behind the Japanese officer's action. By castrating the patriarch and having his wife and children bear witness to this violation, the officer renders the entire family powerless. Rendering one's enemy impotent (and, in effect, having him fellate himself) is the other side of the coin of raping his wife and daughters.

Beyond the horror of the scene itself, it is extremely problematic that it appears in the book without commentary or analysis from the Lolas or their advocates. Rather than being an object of discussion, outrage, and action for its own sake, it is presented in this book as not much more than an introduction. It is the opening act or “pre-show” to what is clearly meant to be the main spectacle: the rape and torture of women. While we have come to the point where we *can* talk about and act upon the violence visited upon the women during these retaliatory actions, we are as yet unable to do the same for male

victims. What was done to Tarcila's father was essentially a huge upset of the patriarchal paradigm in which men are the violators and never the *violated*, and yet the anecdote remains unexamined in the book. It is as if adopting the redress movement's rhetoric—which paints women as the victims of warmongering, sexually insatiable men—necessitates this analytical “silence” about sexual violence against men. The redress movement has carved out a space in which we can comprehend, talk about, and seek justice for wartime sexual violence against women, but there is no room, no language in there for men. By aligning themselves with the comfort women, have the Mapanique Lolas inadvertently abandoned their fathers, brothers, and uncles? In the realm of redress for military sexual violence, is it every gender for himself or herself?

Away from the direct prompts and queries of the curious, the Lolas are freer to experiment with different narrative strategies, although the juridical unconscious continues to exert its influence. With regards to the controversy over inaccuracies in Rigoberta Menchu's autobiography,<sup>69</sup> Leigh Gilmore observes,

when the issue is narrowed to the legalistic question, “Did she lie?,” almost none of the complexity of representing the self in the context of representing trauma can be retained without seeming to sink into massive ethical relativism and equivocation. A different question would focus on the way her testimony tests a crucial limit in autobiography, and not just the one understood as the boundary between truth and lies, but, rather, the limit of representativeness, with its compulsory inflation of the self to stand for others, the way it operates both to expand and to constrict testimonial speech, and the way it makes it hard to clarify without

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<sup>69</sup> In the Preface to *Rigoberta Menchu and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans*, anthropologist David Stoll asks the question, “What if much of Rigoberta's story is not true?” (xviii). Stoll caused quite an uproar with his critical analysis of the Nobel Laureate's autobiography, *I, Rigoberta Menchu*, that revealed that some experiences and observations attributed to Menchu had actually happened to other Guatemalans. Gilmore cites as an example of the silencing and shaming that oftentimes happens around trauma narratives. Gilmore concedes that, despite its polemic nature and the controversy it caused, Stoll's critique ultimately “concluded that Menchu had often achieved a larger symbolic truth” by claiming and circulating narratives that might not otherwise have been heard (4).

falsifying what is strictly and unambiguously “my” experience when “our” experience is also at stake (4).

In the previous chapter I argued that the redress movement’s focus on pursuing reparations via legal avenues has resulted in the construction of “our” (the comfort women’s) experience to the detriment of “my” experience. One example of this is the absence of older, sexually experienced women in the paradigmatic narrative because they do not fit the image of the young, virginal victim. Many of the Lolas’ stories discussed in this chapter do conform to that particular image of the victim. However, they test the paradigmatic narrative’s representational limits by examining the comfort women’s *relationships*—with their families, with their advocates, and with one another—and the obligations, collaborations, and betrayals that shape them.

CHAPTER IV  
ON BEING A WOMAN IN A TIME OF WAR:  
THE FILIPINO COMFORT WOMAN IN POETRY

*Ang pagiging babae ay pamumuhay sa panahon ng digma*  
(To be a woman is to live in a time of war).

Joi Barrios, *Ang Pagiging Babae ay  
Pamumuhay sa Panahon ng Digma*

Having discussed in the second chapter how the undue influence of our juridical unconscious on the comfort woman narrative has resulted in a legally useful, but inherently problematic and limited way of speaking what was thought to be unspeakable, I now turn to literary, specifically poetic, articulations of the unspeakable. When the topic of art vis-à-vis the comfort women has come up, scholars have tended to agree that it provides a needed counterbalance to the language of law that dominates this discourse. After all, trauma—embedded as deeply in the body and psyche as it is—cannot be completely closed and, “It is to this refusal of the trauma to be closed that literature does justice” (Felman *Juridical Unconscious*, 8). However, “comfort women literature” is more often than not positioned as just one more tool of redress, as Stetz describes below.

As well as reviewing the past, “comfort women” literature—from lithographs to films to fiction—has moreover, served the interests of advocacy in the present, placing in a sympathetic light the survivors’ demands for apologies and reparations from an unwilling Japanese government. It has also self-consciously positioned itself as a counterweight to other sorts of representations . . . “Comfort women” literature, in other words, has had to be propaganda art—a term that I am using not pejoratively, but positively, to acknowledge the work that art can and often must do in the political realm (29).

However positively it is spun, such an approach chains art to the juridical unconscious, defining art as “useful objects” with one particular purpose. Such a frame is not only limiting but also eerily reminiscent of the way that girls and women were themselves conscripted into the Japanese Imperial Army as useful objects.

With this in mind, I preface the analyses offered in this chapter with the obvious statement that art need not be propaganda in order to do political work. In truth, released from the unwieldy notion that legal redress for the comfort women means, as Felman states, “not simply ... punishment [for the perpetrators] but a marked symbolic exit from the injuries of a traumatic history: *as liberation from violence itself*,” art that explores the many aspects of the comfort station experience has political, cultural, emotional, and legal potential we have not yet begun to imagine (*Juridical Unconscious* 1, my emphasis). The three poems I examine in this chapter work to move us readers, scholars, and rubberneckers away from the teleology of testimony→justice→closure that facilitates, among other things, the voyeuristic consumption of trauma. Recast in the language of poetry, the comfort women story no longer exists as a means of achieving falsely promised closure. What I describe here is not simply a change of narrative destination but a change of narrative *region*, of finding ways for the rest of us to share cultural space with the victims and survivors. Culbertson describes trauma thus: “No experience is more one’s own than harm to one’s own skin, but none is more locked within that skin ... in patterns of consciousness below the everyday and the constructions of language” (169-70). As discussed in Chapter II, in international comfort women discourses the experiences and specific concerns of the Korean comfort women often stand in for all comfort women. Also, the “Just the facts, Ma’am” focus of courtroom dialogue leaves little room for context, imagery, metaphor, and affect, leaving “just the fact” of a female body, a spectacle of sexual violence laid out for the consumption of an audience held at arm’s length. With their poems, Ruth Mabanglo, Joi Barrios, and Bino Realuyo offer the opposite experience. Building a latticework of intimacy—one that

never presumes that the reader can fully know the speaker's pain—these poets address the distance between Filipina comfort station survivors and their Filipino audience by mining their common cultural repertoire for “explanations and language describing the events of memory, and legitimating their fragmentary, body-based, metaphorical, and even mystical, other-worldly forms” (Culbertson 179).

Poet and critic Virgilio Almario sees contemporary Filipino culture as being formed primarily by three “constellations.” The first of which, meaning the most visibly and consistently influential, is three and a half centuries’ worth of Spanish colonization, in particular its enduring legacy of Catholicism. The revolutionary movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries make up the second constellation. The third and oldest source is comprised of the archipelago’s numerous, but now only half-remembered, pre-colonial indigenous cultures (Garcia). All three constellations have significant implications for Filipina women, implications that Joi Barrios sums up nicely when she states that to be a woman is to live in a time of war. Expanding on Barrios’ statement, Neferti Tadiar posits that to be Filipina is “inextricable from the condition of the country that bears the same name as its women: *Filipinas*” (“Filipinas” 1).<sup>70</sup> Marjorie Evasco says that the work of twentieth century Filipina writers in English has been

to trace their ancestors to as far back as they can remember or dare to dream, for like them they carry upon their arms the enchanted marks of words which may enable them to continue to hold up half the sky of legend and worship. But the re-tracing is arduous and fraught with peril. Not only is there the deadly silence of four hundred centuries to contend with; there is also the overwhelming patriarchal order which may threaten them into a more deadly silence (“The Writer and Her Roots”).

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<sup>70</sup> Tadiar is referring to the country’s old name under Spanish rule. In contemporary Tagalog we are known as *Republika ng Pilipinas*.



Evasco is referring here to the *babaylanes*,<sup>71</sup> the female priestesses and leaders of Filipino pre-colonial indigenous cultures, who were supplanted by the cult of the Virgin Mary, nurtured by nearly four centuries of Spanish colonization. Mabanglo and Barrios write mostly in Tagalog, though I think that means the path they trace is only *slightly less* riddled with perils and pitfalls. The decades of silence about the comfort women's plight are both synecdoche for, and logical consequence of, the centuries of silence imposed by colonialism upon women.

By bringing these perspectives to bear upon the literary works discussed in this chapter, I can better demonstrate what poetry can offer that the paradigmatic narrative cannot. Mabanglo and Barrios draw upon the signs, symbols, and rituals of Filipino indigenous and religious culture, populating the landscape of the comfort women narrative with the monsters and saints of patriarchal notions of femininity. Realuyo is the only male poet I discuss here; he is also the only one who writes in English. Far from token, he, too, explores the landscape of memory, drenching it in the monsoon rains that regularly visit Philippine shores. Not just descriptive or prescriptive—not *scripted* at all, really—these poems capture the Filipina comfort women's collective experience as

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<sup>71</sup> The *babaylanes*' limbs were often tattooed with sacred and magical symbols, earning them the name *pintadas* (the painted ones).

Their psycho-spiritual functions were directly related to the survival and growth of the community. Theirs was the burden of memory in the continuum of life ...

But the vision of the long-haired women with enchanted marks on their arms, holding aloft the first grain of the year's harvest, flickered after the initial impact of colonialization was felt by the Filipinos. These priestesses were the first to suffer the brunt of Spanish domination; they were the ones who led the earliest uprisings against the Spaniards. After the loosely recorded accounts of sporadic attacks on the pueblos led by the *babaylanes* against the Spaniards, the records of history bear scant witness to the women who struggled to be heard by their people. Their story became submerged in the deluge of the new patriarchal order ("The Writer and Her Roots").

something that is open-ended, that extends into the nooks and crannies of Filipino culture and invites continued conversation about the events of the Japanese Occupation during World War II that ripple through the lives of the survivors and all of us who come after.

**Monsters: “The Ballad of Lola Amonita”**

Ruth Elynia S. Mabanglo’s poem, “*Balada ni Lola Amonita*” (“The Ballad of Lola Amonita”)<sup>72</sup> introduces the “Testimonies” section of Nelia Sancho’s *War Crimes on Asian Women: Military Sexual Slavery by Japan During World War II, The Case of the Filipino Comfort Women Part II*.<sup>73</sup> Mabanglo explains that the poem was inspired by a Filipina comfort station survivor whose story she had heard at a forum in Hawaii in September 1992. An acclaimed Tagalog poet, Mabanglo was the only woman out of 45 poets anthologized in Almario’s *Walong Dekada ng Makabagong Tulang Pilipino (Eight Decades of New Filipino Poetry)*. She made her mark in the 1970s and 1980s with poems on the “curse” of being female, radical poems that, according to Tadiar,

attest to a weakening, if not full severing, of the allegorical tie that had bound Filipina to *Filipinas* through the hundred-year history of nationalist imagination inscribed in Philippine literature. They demonstrate, further, the autonomization of *babae* (woman) as a category of experience (*Things Fall Away* 106).

These earlier validations of *babae* as a category of experience made possible Mabanglo’s poetic *renationalization* of the Filipina in the 1990s. With the publication of the collection *Mga Liham ni Pinay (Letters by Pinay)*, she set out to knot together, in a critical manner,

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<sup>72</sup> In this chapter I am working with my own English translation of Mabanglo’s poem. The original Tagalog text can be found in its entirety in Appendix A and the translation in Appendix B.

<sup>73</sup> The unwieldy title is explained in the book’s Foreword: it is called “Part II” because it is a reprint, with new and updated material, of the sold out first edition of *War Crimes* that came out in 1993 (v).

the severed tie between the nation *Filipinas* and its export, the Filipina caregiver: the mail-order bride sending letters home from Germany, the nurse in the U.K., the sex worker in Japan, the domestic helper in Singapore. Mabanglo's poem, "Ballad," marks a momentary and topical shift of focus from the Filipina in diaspora back to the Filipina at home.

"In this poem," Mabanglo says, "the woman speaks" (qtd. in Sancho 36). This is an interesting, because not strictly accurate, assertion: it is Amonita the frightened girl, not the adult activist, who makes her presence felt most strongly throughout the text. Like much of the prose in "Testimonies," the poem tells a "fall from grace" or first rape narrative. As described in Chapter II, the fall from grace narrative focuses on the rape of the young virgin as the moment of irrevocable transformation from good (untouched) to bad (unclean). On February 15, 2007, Jan Ruff O'Herne was one of several comfort station survivors to testify before the U.S. Congressional Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific, and the Global Environment. The subject: the human rights of comfort women.<sup>74</sup> Describing "opening night" at a comfort station in the former Dutch East Indies, O'Herne states that she and her teenage companions

were [of] a very innocent generation. We were still virgins, and I knew nothing about sex. The horrific memories of opening night of the brothel have tortured my mind all my life . . .

In the early hours of the morning, ten exhausted girls gathered round *and cried over lost virginity*. How could this happen to us? We were so helpless (qtd. in "Protecting the Human Rights of Comfort Women" 24, 25, my emphasis).

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<sup>74</sup> Reading the transcripts of this hearing, I was not at all surprised to see that despite repeated avowals of their dedication to the comfort women's cause and sympathy for their plight, members of the Subcommittee asked the survivors and their (female) representatives to "summarize maybe for the next two minutes some of the highlights," "sum it up," and "wrap it up" ("Protecting the Human Rights of Comfort Women" 18, 31, 45). No such instructions were given to the men who gave statements at that same hearing.

Besides emphasizing youth and virginity in ways similar to O’Herne’s, the juridical unconscious shapes the survivors’ testimony in a manner that cultivates and perpetuates an image of the comfort woman as an eternal victim, spotlighting the raped woman’s permanently compromised ability to fulfill her patriarchal duties as a virtuous wife and mother. Particularly noteworthy is O’Herne’s phrasing, which marks the loss of virginity—rather than the experience of sexual violence—as the object of the girls’ mourning. Another common theme in the testimonies of non-Korean comfort women (that is, women who were not already colonial subjects when Japan went to war) is invasion, specifically the invasion of the home country enacted upon the female body in the form of rape. To further reinforce the sense of invasion, such stories often highlight the rapist’s alienness by mentioning his slanted eyes and foreign tongue.

Mabanglo takes up the narrative markers of the fall from grace story and gives them substance and context. By fleshing out these markers rather than dropping them, the poem changes the terrain of the comfort woman story in two main ways. First, it expands the category of perpetrator to encompass more than just the foreign-soldier-who-rapes. The Japanese soldier’s monstrous actions call out the literal (*kapre, tikbalang, laho*) and cultural (patriarchy, rape stigma) monsters of home. Second, the poem extends the crime and indicts the victim’s home culture as co-conspirator by demonstrating that the family’s response to their daughter’s rape is just as reprehensible as the rape itself, if not more so. It begins with a description of the Japanese soldiers’ arrival. In the dead of night they emerge from the surrounding woods as ghosts from a fog:

Men in hats,  
Grubby,  
Sour with sweat,

Slant-eyed,  
 Burnt by the sun, shadow-dark,  
 Their strides long,  
 Purposeful.

The girl Amonita knows from their previous visits that these men—and at this point they are, grubby and slant-eyed, still just men—are to be feared. They have been here before to steal food, a common enough occurrence during the years of the occupation. This night, however, they are after something else. “Snatched from sleep,” Amonita and the other children of the barrio are led outside and made to line up by a fence, where

The men looked into each of our faces,  
 Learned who we were.  
 A hand touched my cheek  
 And fear ran up my spine.<sup>75</sup>

What Mabanglo only hints at here is a sentiment she explores in her other poems: “the being-for-others (particularly being-for-men) of women, their apprehension as *kasangkapan*, domestic belongings: household utensils, clothing, adornment, land, food” (Tadiar “Filipinas,” 2). Amonita recognizes

The rough and callused hand  
 Of a chicken thief,  
 Of a balding, dark-eyed man.

In his turn, that dark-eyed man recognizes the young girl as one more thing to steal, though she is no chicken. The soldier and his companions are here tonight on a raid of a different sort, and their intent broadcasts itself to Amonita. She continues,

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<sup>75</sup> O’Herne recounts a similar scenario in her statement to the U.S. Congressional Subcommittee:

I had been in a camp for two years when in 1944, high ranking Japanese officers arrived at the camp. The order was given. All single girls from 17 years up had to line up in the compound. We were very anxious about this. We thought it was just another inspection. The officers walked toward us, and a selection process began. They paced up and down the line, eyeing us up and down, looking at our figures, at our legs, lifting our chins (qtd. in “Protecting the Human Rights of Comfort Women” 24).

He made me think of the monsters  
 In the stories that old people tell:  
 The *laho* that devours children,  
 Or a *kapre* who has lost his cigar.

Many a Filipino child has heard stories about the *laho* and the *kapre*: giant creatures, humanoid but no less fearsome, who lurk in trees and smoke noxious *tabako*. If we wander, our parents and grandparents tell us, if we misbehave, we will be captured and consumed. Pinned down and sliced open, Amonita hears the soldier exclaim, “A virgin tastes so sweet!” Evidently the old tales are true; little girls *are* meat for monsters. “I was his meal,” she says. First a man with callused hands, then the shadow of a beast, briefly a mad dog moving “to and fro,” Amonita’s assailant metamorphoses into a creature (she is unsure which) from one of her Grandmother’s stories. Reaching for ways to comprehend and express what has just happened to her, Amonita recites a litany of sorts.

The night monsters—  
*Aswang*,  
*Tikbalang*,  
*Duwende*,  
*Manduduro*,

The night is full of monsters. In the glare of my adult preoccupations I had forgotten how many of them there were out there in the dark. The vampiric *aswang*, the horse-headed *tikbalang*, the *duwende* who make their home underground—they all have their particular appetites and weaknesses. If Amonita only knew which of these creatures had grabbed her, escape might be possible; at the very least she would know what to expect. As I read this poem I catch myself going through the list with her, but it is a futile exercise: “They are all the same in my mind,” she says, and the monsters merge together as do the various superstitions she hopes will give her some clue to what is happening.

I couldn’t remember making them angry—

Did I sweep the floor at night?  
 Did I plant pepper without permission?  
 Did I wander too close to a banyan tree?

Amonita does not remember *what* she did to anger the spirits, and yet there is no question in her mind that she did do *something*. This is her fault. To sweep the floor at night is to sweep out good fortune. One never knows which mound of dirt an *enkanto*<sup>76</sup> might be living in or near and so it is best to ask permission before disturbing the earth, and it is common knowledge that the gnarled old banyan trees are homes for unfriendly elementals. But rape is not something that can be warded off by giving banyan trees a wide berth, and no amount of questioning can lead Amonita to the answers she seeks.

At this point the poem has already accomplished something that other testimonial texts have been unable to do. As a Filipina raised on the same stories and superstitions—Almario’s third and most distant “constellation”—I feel what I can only describe as a limited but genuine connection with Amonita’s experience. I do not now know, nor do I ever want to know, what it feels like to have been raped, but the experience of sifting through the stories of my culture in search of explanation and insight, and finding none, resonates strongly with me. This is the small but densely packed space that I can share with Amonita.

Her ordeal is far from over. Two verses of the poem remain and there is worse to come. Having finished his business, Amonita’s assailant drags her back out to where her family can see her and then, no longer important, he vanishes. A monster he may have

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<sup>76</sup> *Enkanto*, the enchanted ones. General Tagalog term for supernatural creatures.

been, but the poem reserves its harshest judgment for Amonita's family. To explain this, I must first retrace my steps to an earlier verse. Before the rape, she says:

I saw my mother cover her mouth  
As the soldier caressed my cheek.  
I saw my father's fright,  
Heard my grandmother's whispered prayers.

This man who had dragged  
Chickens out from beneath our house  
Was now the color of night.  
This was the man who grabbed me,  
This was the man who dragged me  
Beneath our house  
And made me the color of starless night.

Amonita's home is what we refer to as a *nipa* hut: a cottage made of wood and bamboo whose walls and roof are thatched with the dried leaves of the *nipa*, a variety of palm tree. *Nipa* huts are built on stilts that elevate them two or more feet off the ground, leaving an open area underneath. It is no coincidence that the rape happens in this crawl space. He—soldier, monster—violates the home space at the same moment he violates Amonita's body, and what she discovers once she emerges from beneath the house is that there is no longer any place for her that is safe or welcoming.

I was still searching for answers  
When he dragged me out from underneath the house.  
My mother was death walking  
When our eyes met.  
My father, a rotting fish,<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> The figure of speech evolved from national hero Jose Rizal's poem "*Sa Aking mga Kabata*" ("To my Childhood Friends"), in which he says,

*Ang hindi magmahal sa kanyang salita  
Ay mahigit pa sa hayop at malansang isda.*

(He who does not love his native tongue  
Is far worse than an animal or an oily fish) (1869).

The poem, which Rizal penned at the tender age of eight, berates those who value the language of the colonizers (Spanish) over native Philippine dialects, but over the years the sentiment has come to apply to



Looked away.  
 He knew  
 He had failed to keep me safe,  
 And Grandmother knew  
 Neither Mary nor Jesus  
 Could save me now.

Amonita's failure to find explanations in the mythology of home echoes her parents' broken promise to keep her from harm and underscores their failure to comfort her in the aftermath.<sup>78</sup> This exchange of looks is by far the saddest part of the poem, laden as it is with a sense of betrayal and alienation. Seeing her family, Amonita knows that she is cursed and shamed. The death-like mother and fish-like father are themselves tainted with a touch of the monstrous. Rather than pulling Amonita out of her nightmare they seem to have become part of it, not as saviors but as threats. The father's failure to meet her gaze brings to mind something at the core of Catholic patriarchy: what Julia Kristeva calls the fascination with "the virgin daughter as guardian of paternal power" (163).

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those who are untrustworthy or traitorous. Such people are said to be "*higit pa sa lumang isda*" (worse than rotten fish).

<sup>78</sup> As told in *Women of Mapanique*, the story of Lola Rufina (no last name given) begins in atypically: *after* the rape. Rufina is home again, lying on the floor with her head in her mother's lap, wounds being carefully cleaned with water in which some medicinal herbs had been boiled. "There was something, somewhere deep in her soul that was violated. And she knew that no amount of bathing would cleanse her. She would have to live with it for the rest of her life" (Gajudo et al 35-36).

Unlike Mabanglo's poem, Rufina's story *skips* the time period usually covered by the comfort woman narrative and shows what she chooses to do after the rape. This is the story of how Rufina became a guerrilla fighter. Violated in body and spirit, forced to watch her brother die at the hands of the Japanese, "Her anger took new dimension. It is high time, she told herself, that the bow-legged, slit-eyed monsters must pay" (Gajudo et al 38, my emphasis). Rufina took up the Filipino martial art *arnis*, in which combatants wield bamboo sticks as weapons. She chose *arnis* not only for its efficiency and lethality but because "She believed there was something magical about bamboo, as village stories say that bamboo poles can kill evil creatures of darkness" (38). Though she remains silent about what she went through, Rufina takes protection and vengeance into her own hands, organizing and training a group of women fighters called *Doce Pares* (The Twelve Pairs).

Amonita's father has failed to protect her, and by being raped she in turn has "failed" to protect his position as patriarch. Even as he blames himself, he turns his back on her.

And then there is her grandmother. Earlier in the poem, when Amonita first begins to think of her assailant as a monster, she says:

I remembered those tales clearly  
 Child's mind in an adolescent's body.  
 Getting scolded for still wanting to play children's games,  
 Not knowing why Grandmother got angry when I giggled,  
 Or why she pulled my thighs together  
 When I sat with legs apart,  
 Or why she said "You are a woman now"  
 Over and over, like a litany.

Because the grandmother is established here as the arbiter of femininity and the facilitator of the transition from girl to woman, it makes sense that later it is the grandmother who knows—who decides—that Amonita is beyond saving. In hindsight, the litany, "You are a woman now," has acquired the ring of a prayer horribly, perversely answered. From this point onwards it no longer matters whether or not Amonita sits demurely, thighs together like a proper maiden; she has already been sliced open.

In addition to this, Mabanglo's inclusion and positioning of the grandmother character adds an interesting layer of meaning to the public persona that the comfort station survivors have crafted for themselves. To the Filipino public, each comfort woman is known by the honorific "Lola," which is the Tagalog word for grandmother. Of the *niña inocente* (woman as victim) trope in Philippine literature, Evasco says, "Given [their] conditioning towards accepting pain, loss and fear, it is easy to see women become the victims of their own circumstances ... the woman as innocent victim lives in limbo, pathetically unself-conscious of other alternatives to living" ("Roots"). Mabanglo flips that trope on its head: by claiming the title of Lola for herself, the real life, elderly

Amonita is taking back what her own grandmother took from her that night. As a girl she was made to believe that neither Mary nor Jesus could save her; as a Lola of the comfort women redress movement she works to save herself.

Amonita remembers hearing the Japanese soldiers' Captain yell over the cries and whimpers of the neighbor children.

Even now I cannot recall  
The curse  
That wounded the air,  
That stabbed the ear,  
That sunk deep into my soul.

The body's recollection is better than the mind's. She may not remember the Captain's words, but she remembers his voice and how it felt. As this ballad comes to a close, it references the idea of trauma as ultimately unspeakable, as something that resides in the physical body "locked within one's skin" (Culbertson 169). Amonita has become

A pile of burnt hair  
In God's hand.  
A wounded throat unable to form words.  
Tears disappearing  
Into the parched earth.  
And so began the cycle—  
The search for a grave  
In which to bury my pain.  
I have not yet found  
My final resting place.

Despite the activism of recent decades and the emphasis placed on survivors coming forward and speaking out, there continues to be an element of the unspeakable to the comfort women's experiences that is intimately tied to the ways in which trauma refuses closure. Everything circles back to the idea of wartime sexual violence being an unspeakable and permanent violation. The Captain's curse she cannot recall are the same words her wounded throat cannot form; the events of that night can neither be blamed on

the monsters in the earth nor washed away by God in heaven. She cannot speak of her pain because she *is* her pain, and circumstances dictate that there is nothing left for her to do but find a grave in which to bury herself.

Amonita may not be able to speak of her trauma, but she is able to speak around it, and effectively so. By holding parents and grandmother responsible for her search for a grave, Mabanglo accomplishes something that would not be possible in the juridical context geared towards legal redress and reparations from the Japanese government. She shows us the paradoxical reality that every comfort station survivor must face, and that quite possibly is *more* wounding than the sexual violence itself: the grim reality in which living in the grasp of the perpetrator is the same thing as living outside the loving embrace of family.

### **Saints: “Taken to Wife”**

In comfort women testimonies, court transcripts in particular, Japanese soldiers as typically portrayed as cruel, lust-crazed individuals who, at best, do not care that they inflict pain, and at worst, take enjoyment from it. This near-dehumanization of the perpetrators is an important element of directing public sympathy towards the comfort women, but other narrative venues will sometimes yield different aspects of the soldier-comfort woman relationship, aspects that complicate the image of “slant-eyed monsters” rampaging unchecked across nation and body. Some Lolas have spoken of being treated with, if not kindness, a little consideration, by their captors. While many women who spent time in the comfort stations had the heinous experience of “pulling a train” of sexual assailants, a handful of others enjoyed the relative benefits of sexual exclusivity.

There is, in short, a multiplicity of experiences belied by the paradigmatic survivor narrative, and Joi Barrios' poem, "*Inasawa ng Hapon*" ("Taken to Wife," first published in 1990)<sup>79</sup> describes one atypical situation. The "I" in the poem is a comfort woman who has the dubious luck of being chosen by a Japanese officer to live with him as his de facto "wife."<sup>80</sup> It is uncommon, but not unheard of, to come across non-courtroom testimonies that mention a soldier or officer taking a shine to a particular comfort woman. Depending upon rank, this could mean anything from an enlisted man availing himself of the same woman each time he visited the comfort station, to an officer having his favorite moved out of common quarters and into his private rooms, where she would then serve him both sexually and domestically.<sup>81</sup> In most cases, the favorite received special favors and slightly better treatment, plus the relative protection of sexual exclusivity in an atmosphere of institutionalized rape.

Lola Andresa Fernandez, whose story I touched on briefly in Chapter II, tells of being captured, along with her aunt's two maids, by a squad of Japanese soldiers at a forest spring in Dumalaan, Leyte. She recalls that one soldier, a Captain Tanaka, "embraced me and said, 'Do not be afraid, I will not harm you.'" She describes the two maids as being "feasted on by other soldiers," but she herself seems to have been touched

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<sup>79</sup> I am working here with my own English translation of Barrios' work. The original Tagalog text in can be found in Appendix C, and the full translation in Appendix D.

<sup>80</sup> Translation note: While *asawa* means spouse, *inasawa* is the passive verb form of the word, implying that a person was married off to someone, or forced to become someone's spouse. Though the title speaks of marriage, the text of the poem itself makes clear that this is not a legal union but the kind of sexual exclusivity that sometimes obtained between Japanese officers and comfort women.

<sup>81</sup> See my discussion in Chapter I on how the comfort system defined and regulated not only the comfort women but also the soldiers as useful bodies in the service of Japan's imperial ambitions. Reserving special "comfort" privileges for high-ranking officers was one of the ways in which the Japanese military exerted control over the enlisted men and reinforced military hierarchy.

only by Tanaka. “He did not maltreat me,” she says, but he did have intercourse with her repeatedly over the next few days. There is an odd neutrality to Fernandez’s language that I find rather unsettling; she uses no adjectives and betrays no emotion. Everything sounds the same: he raped her; she bled; he brought her *camote*<sup>82</sup> to eat; she was not allowed to bathe. He called in a medic to treat her when she began to hemorrhage and refrained from having sex with her one day because her bleeding had not slowed. He even told her when he was going on patrol. It seems that Tanaka was, relatively speaking, good to her, but any feelings of gratitude—indeed, any feelings at all—she might have with regards to this go unexpressed (qtd. in Sancho 74).

Other survivors’ narratives are more animated and detailed, and I have found a few that describe how certain women were in a position to help other comfort women in small ways. In *War Crimes on Asian Women*, Lola Dolores Molina of Tondo tells of the two weeks she spent in the Emilio Jacinto Elementary School, which had been converted into a Japanese garrison. While there, she ran into a woman named Miding, “a childhood friend who had married a Japanese official.”<sup>83</sup> While Miding did not have enough influence to get Dolores out of the garrison, “she talked with some Japanese officials about me and told them that I was her friend and could they please be kind to me.” Besides Miding, Dolores had another advocate: *Mang Ben*,<sup>84</sup> a Japanese neighbor she had known since before the war, who also spoke with the soldiers about making her garrison life easier. From then on, Dolores says, she could move about the garrison more

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82 Sweet potato.

83 Nowhere in her testimony does Molina imply that she uses the word “marriage” euphemistically.

84 *Mang* is short for *Manong*, an honorific applied to an older man that literally means “older brother.”

freely. She was even sent outside to run the occasional errand, though she never tried to run away. Soon after this first visit Miding came to see her again; “she whispered that the situation was getting dangerous and that she and her husband were leaving,” and that Dolores ought to leave, too. Dolores took Miding’s advice and escaped from the garrison at the next opportunity (qtd. in Sancho 100). I find it interesting that Dolores’ testimony does not include any explanation of why she waited until then to leave the garrison despite having had ample opportunity to escape. Was she afraid of being caught and punished? If this was the case, what reasons might Lola Dolores have for not saying so? Was life in the garrison comfortable compared to the deprivation that characterized life during occupation, and what would she be putting at stake if she admitted as much?

Barrios’ poem changes the narrative region of the usual comfort women story by raising the question: What does the illusion of care and domesticity and the language of marriage mean in the context of sexual slavery? For a while I entertained the notion that describing sexual exclusivity as marriage was a way for the comfort woman to mitigate her shame and disguise her situation with the veil of legitimacy. Reading and rereading Barrios’ poem, I have come to believe the opposite: having been wived, the comfort woman is forced across an invisible and dangerous line that separates coercion from collaboration, which in turn leaves her vulnerable to literal and cultural violence at the hands of other Filipinos. Who decides where that line is drawn, and what are the consequences for those who cross it? In the predominantly Catholic Philippines, where there is sex there is also religion. Where Mabanglo described a young girl sifting through myth in search of a viable experiential framework for rape, Barrios tells the story of a nameless female “I” of indeterminate age whose identity seems to have been swallowed

up by her multiple prisons, and who recites the names not of monsters, but of saints, as she waits for rescue.

“Taken to Wife” opens with the physical and symbolic juxtaposition of two colonial institutions: a Catholic church and a Japanese military garrison face one another on opposite sides of the street. At first Barrios seems to be setting the stage for a battle of sorts, with the praying woman (her preyed-upon body? her soul?) as the prize. Alluding to the intercessory prayer structure of Catholicism, the woman says:

I had never set foot in the church  
across the street from my prison  
but the saints heard my prayers anyway.

She never tells us exactly what she had prayed for, but the saints sent her a Japanese officer, a Captain “who needed a laundrywoman, a cook.” Of the women there, he chooses her—not out of affection or attraction, but only out of need. She is thankful, we see, because she needed him, too:

Thank you, *Santa Clara*  
for now I can escape  
the daily routine of twenty-one violations.

*Santa Clara* is special to Filipinos. Come the month of May in the town of Obando, Pangasinan, men and women dance with abandon in the annual procession in her honor. Those who dance are asking for large gifts; their rhythmic movements embody their desire to have a family. Single men and women pray for a spouse, while those who are already married are there to pray for children. It intrigues and surprises me that *Santa Clara*, patroness of family and fecundity, is the first saint to be named in a poem about a comfort woman’s bleak circumstances. Is this truly the saint to whom she prayed? Even the fact of her gratitude is puzzling. A rapist, high-ranking though he may be, is not a



husband. Beggars cannot be choosers, however, and the life she has with him is, if nothing else, an improvement over what she had before.

In the morning I cook, I clean.  
 At night I do my work in bed.  
 Isn't it better to serve one and not twenty-one?  
*Santa Rita de Casia*, I thank you.  
 There is food on the table.  
 And if I am very, very good  
 I will not feel the slap of a cruel hand on my cheek.

Despite her doubts—*is it better to serve one and not twenty-one?*—the woman goes from questioning *Santa Clara's* wisdom in sending her this “husband” to thanking *Santa Rita* for the unfamiliar bounty of her new table. Now, *Santa Rita* is a busy saint; she is patroness to many different groups of people, among them the victims of abuse and those in desperate situations. It is with the introduction of this second saint that the woman's words begin to make sense; her gratitude begins to feel sarcastic and sad rather than sincere. What the saints in their wisdom have sent her is the *imitation* of a marriage, and an abusive one at that. As the two institutions are juxtaposed, so are their sacraments: the Catholic Church and its sacrament of marriage, the comfort system and its sacrament of personal slavery.

This change in her situation is accompanied by a change in language. She used to suffer “twenty-one violations” but now she does her “work in bed,” because is it not better to “serve” just one? It is in this shift in language that we see the nameless woman pushed across the invisible line from conscription to collaboration.<sup>85</sup> The comparative

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<sup>85</sup> See Chapter I on how the routine nature of the comfort system shaped the comfort women's experiences of sexual violation. Henson's autobiography, for example, describes intercourse with the Japanese soldiers interchangeably as “work” and “rape.”

ease of her life as a “wife” makes it look like she has chosen to be with the enemy, a curse in the guise of a blessing which effectively leaves her friendless.

In my isolation  
I say out loud:  
Thank you, friendly saints.  
Though it is sad to avoid and be avoided  
I still have you to talk to.

I wonder if she still believes they listen, and if she thinks it is her fault if they mishear.

I wanted to thank *Santa Regina*  
when the war ended.  
But when the Japanese fled  
I found myself running with them  
Into the hills.  
*Santa Regina*, keep me safe  
for how can I turn and face  
my countrymen?

*Santa Regina*, the virgin martyr who chose to die rather than to marry, is also the patroness of torture victims. For once the invocation seems appropriate and sincere, even when the woman’s gratitude turns into a plea for safekeeping once “I found myself running with them.” Though she had thought to thank *Santa Regina* for freedom from captivity, she instead finds herself in the different, but no less torturous, position of having to flee *with* her captors.

Even the passive phrasing of her flight is consistent with her situation, for this is not a woman who *does*; rather, people *do unto her*.<sup>86</sup> In fact, at no point in this poem is she free, as the opening lines show her to be already a prisoner, gazing through the

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<sup>86</sup> I wonder about the absolute lack of control implied by the poem. The woman prays and prays but not once does she choose; not once does she take anything for herself. Perhaps this lack of action is related to the way that giving up control (or having it taken from you) is a characteristic of life in both the comfort system and the church. How many times during my Catholic upbringing was I told to lift up all my burdens to Heaven, to ask the saints for their intercession, to wait for prayers be answered?

window at the church across the street. At no point along her steep slide from violation, to work, to service has she had any control over her situation, and now she suffers a final indignity at the hands of her own people.

Oh *Santa* Clara, they surrounded me,  
pulled my hair, chopped it off,  
and threw each strand to the ground.

This verse marks a gap in what is known about wartime in the Philippines. The act of chopping off her hair, the symbolic force of throwing the strands on the ground—both are strikingly reminiscent of what was done to female collaborators in Europe after the war was over. Women accused of having collaborated with the Nazis were snatched bald and paraded around in public, scorned and humiliated. I can find no records of similar occurrences in the Philippines; I cannot even find any mention of *female* collaborators. As far as the public record is concerned, all the *makapili* were male—a highly unlikely state of affairs. Was sexual collaboration with the enemy, even only for the sake of surviving a bad situation, lumped in with the sexual violence that survivors and the culture at large kept silent about for decades after World War II?

The final verses further imply that this silence came from anger as well as shame.

*Santa* Rita, their knives are so sharp,  
Their eyes so cruel,  
Their words so hurtful.  
Quick, plunge the blade into my chest!

Oh *Santa* Regina, novenas cannot help me  
For the wife of the enemy will never be free.  
In war, and after it, a prisoner always.

As I have mentioned before, Culbertson describes the trauma narrative as a way to make bodily memories at least somewhat communicable. By putting events, emotions, and physical pain into story form, the traumatized individual is theoretically able to “return

the self to its legitimate social status as something ... that recounts its own biography” (178). The idea is that to construct a narrative is to construct agency out of memory and in doing so, reclaim one’s identity. But this poem does not demonstrate a successful reconstruction; rather, it illustrates the irresolvable crisis of identity experienced by this woman who has been swallowed whole by the comfort system. She has no name, no options, and no identities except those assigned to her: “wife” to the Japanese and “traitor” to other Filipinos. Without the correct touchstones, whatever self she manages to reconstitute in the telling of her story would *not* be considered legitimate in postwar Philippine society.

Herein exists the paradox of the comfort woman’s testimony freed from the restraints of our juridical unconscious: her story can exist, even if her legitimate self cannot. Hers is a narrative that traces her assimilation—by necessity and not by choice—into the society of the enemy. It is with the recognition of her impossible position that in the final verse she calls herself, for the first and only time in the poem, “wife.” Having finally named herself thus, she immediately equates “wife” with “prisoner.” Marriage, then, is the final prison, “in war, and after it.” Knowing that she will never be free, she seeks the ultimate intercession: “Quick, plunge the blade into my chest!” It is unclear whether she asks this of *Santa Rita* or of the sharp-knifed, cruel-eyed Filipinos.

Female suffering in the form of the *mater dolorosa* is yet another popular figure in Philippine literature. Evasco explains,

As mother, wife, lover, sister, or daughter, [the martyr] is molded after the image of the ideal woman: the Virgin Mother who suffers in silence and denies her wounds for the sake of love. This silent suffering or martyrdom has its own compelling power because of its psychological implications. For in the face of powerlessness in

a society where the men make the choices for her, she affirms her strength by enduring her pain and her loss (“Roots”).

The woman in this poem does indeed suffer and, not counting her conversations with the saints, she suffers silently. But Barrios demonstrates that where sexual violence, wartime, and religious paternalism intersect, the “compelling power” of the woman martyr falls apart. The presence of *Santas* Clara, Rita, and Regina in this poem only highlights the absence of the Lady whose intercession Catholics covet the most: the Virgin Mary. The Virgin does not make an appearance here because for this poor, nameless woman, the Virgin’s intercession is not even within the realm of possibility. Saints at least were once fully human; they suffered and sinned, found redemption and died. Even *Santa* Regina, the virgin, had to martyr herself to protect that vaunted purity. For the unsainted woman, her sexuality is only acceptable within the very rigid constraints of marriage and motherhood, and even then, sexuality is inextricable from death.<sup>87</sup> Tracing the development of the cult of the Virgin, Kristeva explains how the Immaculate Conception and later, the Ascension, were the bases of the asceticism of the fourth century Catholic Church, based on “a simple logical relation: the intertwining of sexuality and death. Since they are mutually implicated with each other, one cannot avoid the one without fleeing the other” (165). Alone of her sex, the Virgin ascended to heaven without first having to die. The woman in Barrios’ poem, first raped and then trapped in a mockery of a

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<sup>87</sup> See my discussion in Chapter II on the paradigmatic depictions of the comfort women only as virginal young girls or old, asexual grandmothers, avoiding the possibility of their engaging in mature, satisfying sexual relationships.

marriage (all under the not so watchful gaze of the church across the street), is irredeemable in this life, and so seeks death.<sup>88</sup>

**Monsoons: “Pantoum: The Comfort Woman”**

There is a sense in which Bino A. Realuyo is the dark horse in this race. Because of the comfort women story’s sensitive subject matter and its tendency to conform to conventions of androcentric pornography, I am automatically wary (though perhaps unfairly so) of any male writer who assumes the voice of a comfort woman. Mabanglo took a living survivor’s testimony and rendered it into poetry; Barrios created a character with no identifiable real world correlate. In a twist that, in and of itself, demands that I pay attention to his work, Realuyo crafts a poem twice removed from its source.

“Pantoum: The Comfort Woman” is based on Lola Rosa Henson’s autobiography, *Comfort Woman: Slave of Destiny*, which I discussed in the previous chapter.<sup>89</sup> Henson takes her own limited juridical testimony and expands it, situating her time as a comfort woman on the larger map of what it means to grow up a poor woman in the Philippines. In his poem, Realuyo takes that map and folds it along new lines, working with the scant materials at hand to collapse the distance between himself and his subject.

Like Mabanglo’s “Ballad,” “Pantoum” is dedicated to a survivor. Realuyo writes, “For Mrs. Rosa Henson, the first Filipina woman to accept Japanese reparation payment for her suffering, as a comfort woman for Japanese soldiers in a brothel for nine months

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<sup>88</sup> The Filipina comfort woman narrative is, for all intents and purposes, a Catholic one, given that an overwhelming percentage of the country’s population is Catholic and that the line between religious and secular culture is nominal at best.

<sup>89</sup> This poem won the Poetry Society of America’s Lucille Medwick Memorial Award in 1998.

during World War II.” The poet is referring to the so-called “atonement money” that a handful of Filipina comfort station survivors accepted from the Japan-based Asian Women’s Fund (AWF, created in 1995). Though arguably well intentioned, these lump sum payments were problematic—according to survivors and advocates—in that the AWF was a non-government entity. The AWF solicited donations from corporations, non-profit organizations, and private citizens. These funds were then divided into payments of US\$18,500 per survivor, plus a personal letter of apology from the Japanese Prime Minister. The leftover monies were earmarked for welfare and medical treatment programs for the survivors. Realuyo’s acknowledgement of Henson is unusual in that every other mention of her I have come across describes her as being the first Filipina to have publicly identified herself as a former comfort woman. Instead of the expected praise—or because I have come to expect *only* praise—Realuyo’s dedication reads almost like an accusation, as if he is calling her out for having been the first to betray the movement’s goal of redress and reparations from the Japanese government.

In a chapter of *War Crimes on Asian Women*, Sancho raises the question, “Is the Asian Women’s Fund a Just Settlement?” (268). The consensus seems to be that it was not a settlement at all. At best, the AWF offer was charity; at worst, it was an attempt to buy the survivors’ silence. The comfort women organizations rejected the AWF disbursements on the grounds that this was sympathy money: charity from well-meaning private citizens and not reparations from the Japanese government. In the case of the South Korean comfort women, the decision to reject the money was not theirs but their government’s. Controversy arose when a few Filipina survivors, among them Henson, decided that given their poverty, advancing age, and poor health, they could not afford to

turn the money down. After much debate, the Philippine redress movement modified its stance on the issue, explained here by Sancho:

[We are] opposed to the position of total rejection of The Asian Women's Fund being advocated by support groups in Japan, Korea and Taiwan. *While stating that the Fund cannot be accepted as the just and final solution to the problem of Japan's wartime military sexual slavery, and while clearly stating that the Fund does not realize the right to individual legal compensation of each survivor/victim, LILA Pilipina and AWHRC respects and supports the individual and personal decisions and life choices of the survivors with regards to acceptance or refusal of the Fund* (269, emphasis in original).

At first glance, Realuyo's choice to call attention to Henson's acceptance of the Fund money seems iconoclastic. The woman most often credited with opening the floodgates of comfort women testimony in the Philippines is instead called upon the carpet for having been first to break ranks and take hush money. However, the movement's final word on the issue indicates a much more nuanced and practical approach to justice. Unlike the South Korean government, which made that decision for its many Halmoni, the Philippine organizations followed their Lolas' lead and prioritized the survivors' health and well-being—two things that, until the late 1980s, were no one's priorities. By writing his dedication as he did, Realuyo moves the focus away from the distant promise of closure presented by the juridical narrative and fixes it on to easing some of the survivors' suffering in the present. Such a move effectively paints Henson's acceptance of the AWF money, and the self-care that it facilitated, as an act that was just as courageous as her decision to break her personal silence about having been a comfort woman.

Now on to the poem itself, which differs in form from those previously discussed. Mabanglo plays fast and loose with the ballad form and Barrios writes in free verse. In



contrast, Realuyo chooses the discipline of the pantoum, a poetic form in which each verse consists of four lines. The second and fourth lines of a verse become the first and third lines of the verse that follows. Such a poem, then, does not move forward in a straight line. Rather, it builds by first folding back upon itself, taking up the fragment of an earlier idea or image and carrying the past into the present, expanding its meaning.

The poem begins not with a person but with a place:

Monsoon country, so expectedly, wind uproots memory.  
Rain is the voice of a storyteller, one without pause  
like my nightly return to the hundred days of bulb light  
and curtains, laughter and weight of soldiers outside, lined up.

This first verse introduces the image of memory uprooted and borne on the wind, unusual among texts in which the memory of pain is something embedded in the body. Here also is the notion of the rain as storyteller. This, on its own, is nothing radical; the sound of rain on the ground, on a roof, easily lends itself to personification. However, the second verse takes this conventional figure of speech to an unusual place, simultaneously calling attention to and disrupting the rules of narrative ownership.

Rain, tell me the story once again; mine, don't pause—  
sounds of belts unbuckle, dawn; blood gorges to a rush downward.  
Let me weigh their laughter one by one, past rooms of curtains,  
where my body tilts, reaching out, upward, tied to a post

with a belt, the dawn of memory, the rush of sound:  
“Tanaka—,” I scream. My husband awakens, “Who is he—Tanaka?”  
My body tilts upward, reaching you, untying a dream.

There is a tacit understanding in the comfort women discourse community that a survivor's story is hers alone to tell. Despite the ways in which various interviewers, with their various agendas, influence how a story takes shape, all parties involved preserve the appearance that a former comfort woman's testimony is her own truth. This

possessiveness grows out of both the testimonies' sensitive content and the long period of silence that preceded the redress movement. Having once broken their silence, the survivors were encouraged to tell their stories again and again. This is not the first time I have discussed the implications of the phrase "silence broken," and it likely will not be the last, but I must point out that this trope makes the survivor's story seem like a heavy, solid object. The physical heft of that narrative had never concerned me until I encountered this particular text, in which a survivor asks to be on the receiving end of her own narrative. If the first telling of the comfort woman's story breaks the silence, what kinds of damage are done by subsequent retellings, and to what?

In the poem, Rosa (for that is her name) desires to hear her story "without pause." As described in the first verse, she returns nightly to the curtained rooms of the comfort station. Far from wishing for forgetfulness—a wish many survivors have expressed—Rosa seems to *want* to remember. "Let me," she says, "weigh their laughter one by one." In this poem, memory is tied to sound, whether it be the drumming of rain, the metallic click of belt buckles being undone, or the heavy laughter of soldiers lined up outside, and Rosa seems to seek out, or at least listen for, these aural triggers. Beyond simply being *unable* to forget, she is an active participant in revisiting her traumatic past. Destructive as it may first seem, this proves to be an act of self-preservation. As she dreams, her body tilts itself upwards in a reenactment of how she had been tied to a post at the comfort station. As she wakes from her dream, she unties herself.<sup>90</sup> This act of self-rescue is possible because Rosa has some semblance of a life after the comfort station. She has a husband to reach for when the dream threatens to tie her down. Mabanglo's Amonita and

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<sup>90</sup> Realuyo gets this image from an illustration in Henson's book.

Barrios' nameless woman do not, and they mourn the theft of their futures even as they indict their own people for the crime. Unlike them, Realuyo's Rosa is not held completely captive, but neither is she living happily ever after. In answer to her husband's query she says,

Tanaka, my dear, he and the darkness are one, always waiting  
and awake, a whisper at night, a husband to his wife, a soldier  
to me, a Japanese soldier without a choice, breathing through limbs.  
Tanaka in the darkness was as dear as the wait to escape.  
Tanaka in the morning was as cruel as the smell of his peers,

In another departure from the usual comfort woman story, here Rosa gives us a Japanese soldier who has a name. No protean monster, no Captain in search of a live-in maid, Rosa's Tanaka is both dear and cruel. He is her rapist and another woman's husband. Rosa's refusal—the poet's refusal—to caricature the man who raped her is tied to her ability to visit the traumatic past without losing herself in it.

In the poem's final verses, Rosa the survivor offers her husband a challenge. She asks him to share her memory and surrender to it in the way she does.

If I tell you how it was, will you hold my hands, surrender to memory?  
Soon I will disappear, running naked in a hut, pursued by ropes, shadows.  
Nine months: a war for the rest of my life, for the rest of nothing,  
telling the rain, the wind, voices of storytellers, ones without pause,  
  
how I disappeared to be naked as rope, naked as its shadow,  
in this hut of fears, hands limp and tied, slipping into thoughts;  
I told the rain to carry my voice, the wind to hold it without pause.  
Now, in my monsoon country, so expectedly, wind uproots memory.

Much has been said about how the comfort women kept their ordeal a secret for years, out of fear that their loved ones would reject them if the truth came to light. Rosa flies in the face of that fear; she does not ask her husband to accept her past. She asks him to *surrender* to her memory: to share rather than judge, to experience rather than observe.

“Soon I will disappear,” she says, referencing the advancing age and infirmity of the remaining survivors, and underscoring the need for her story to be taken up and told, “without pause,” by other voices. Our voices, those many drops of rain, will carry her story across this monsoon country which she (re)claims as hers.

Unlike the previously discussed poets who use Philippine belief systems as frames for wartime sexual violence, Realuyo entrusts his words to the weather. The monsoon is a feature of Filipino life that is different from, but no less authentic than, our folklore and our faith, and I find the way it is used here to be at least as illuminating as those first-come monsters and saints. Forgoing the familiar similes that liken women to the more destructive and unpredictable forces of nature, Realuyo has Rosa *harness* the monsoon as a vehicle for her story. Just like her story, the monsoon is powerful and potentially dangerous, but its yearly visitation is reliable and necessary for the continuation of life on the islands. This is why she tells it to carry her voice; even after she herself has disappeared, the destructive yet nourishing rain will continue to come. Using language and form, Realuyo enacts how, for a survivor such as Rosa Henson, the past is always present. As the title so explicitly states, the comfort woman *is* that pantoum, the embodiment of looping back in order to move forward.

At the beginning of this chapter I made the claim that poetry has the potential to open up new narrative regions for the comfort woman story. Where international comfort woman discourse has tended to homogenize and strip away cultural specificity in the service of the juridical unconscious, Mabanglo, Barrios, and Realuyo write that specificity back into being using myth, religion, and monsoon to anchor the women in their poems to the nation that bears their name: *Filipinas*. In providing different ways to

tell the stories of the comfort women, poetry also provides different ways to listen to and take up those stories. Rather than fixating on the violated female body, these poems unpack what it means to be the victim of wartime sexual violence in a patriarchal culture and what it means to be always defined by the grasp of the perpetrator.

Ironically (or should I say predictably?), turning to literature to balance out the deficiencies of juridical testimony has brought me to yet another paradox. These poems demonstrate that the landscape of home—myth, religion, monsoon—can reverse the homogenizing force of international, juridical comfort women discourse. And yet Amonita's parents give her up for lost, and the officer's wife realizes she can never return to her people. Despite the potential they carry within them, these poems ultimately reveal that the landscape of home, in its turn, exerts a proprietary patriarchal logic that is itself another form of harm. They reveal the truth of Barrios' words: to be a woman is to live in a time of war.

## CONCLUSION

They are the human face of wartime violence against women. Their words reflect not just history but the continued pattern of organized abuse of women in conflict.

Michael M. Honda, U.S. Congressman,  
“Protecting the Human Rights of Comfort Women”

More than twenty years into the comfort women redress movement, the survivors, their advocates, and their detractors are still stuck debating the facts of the comfort system. Those who seek redress for the many atrocities of the comfort system have had to rely on survivors’ testimony as evidence of several things: that the comfort system existed at all; that those women now seeking reparations had been coerced into being comfort women; and that these acts of sexual violence were war crimes, and not just “natural,” “unavoidable,” or simply “regrettable” accompaniments to war. Much of the controversy regarding this issue has been about the value—or lack thereof—of the survivors’ testimony as evidence, in the legal sense, of the criminality of the comfort system and of Japan’s culpability for it. Although the former comfort women and their advocates doggedly continue their work, much of the public fascination with and support for the cause has long since faded.

In the Introduction to this study, I observed that the international community had once again become interested in the comfort women issue in 2007. That year, the governments of the U.S.A., Canada, the Netherlands, and the European Union passed resolutions calling upon the Japanese state to accept responsibility for the comfort system. The Taiwanese and South Korean governments and the city councils of Osaka, Tokyo, and Hokkaido in Japan passed similar resolutions in 2008. Using by-now familiar language, the various statements issued by these nations, unions, and local governments

spoke of an unambiguous apology and reparations from the Japanese government as essential to ending the comfort women's suffering and restoring their dignity. These very public exhortations sparked yet another debate about the facts, during which Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe stated publicly that no evidence exists proving that the Japanese military forced women into prostitution or sexual slavery during the Asia Pacific War. This declaration countermanded the weakly worded "letter of remorse" by then-PM Keizo Obuchi that had accompanied the atonement money distributed by the Asian Women's Fund in 1995.<sup>91</sup> Abe's retraction of that hard-won apology happened in March 2007, and it was supported by a full-page advertisement in *The Washington Post*. The advertisement, sponsored by comfort system deniers, was entitled "The Truth About Comfort Women." The following month, the Korean American National Coordinating Council took out its own full-page ad in *The New York Times* featuring an open letter addressed to Abe. The letter was bordered with photographs of comfort women from the 1940s and the present day, as well as with details taken from paintings done by Korean survivors. June saw the final volley of this public dispute, another *Post* full-page declaration entitled "The Facts." Five "facts" refuting Japanese accountability for the comfort system are enumerated in the ad, which concludes:

Sadly, many women were made to suffer severe hardships during the wretched era during World War II, and it is with profound regret that we contemplate this tragic reality. At the same time, we must note that it is a gross and deliberate distortion of reality to contend that the Japanese army was guilty of "coercing young women into sexual slavery" in "one of the largest cases of human trafficking in the 20<sup>th</sup> century," as the House Resolution claims ... We are interested, foremost, in sharing the truth with

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<sup>91</sup> In this vaguely worded personal apology, a letter in which he made it clear that he was speaking as a private individual and not as the Prime Minister of Japan, Obuchi managed to acknowledge the suffering of the comfort women while evading any admission of legal responsibility on the part of the Japanese government (Field; Hicks; Y. Park).

the American public. Criticism for events that actually occurred must be humbly embraced. But apologies over unfounded slander and defamation will not only give the public an erroneous impression of historical reality but could negatively affect the friendship between the United States and Japan (“The Facts”).

Endorsed by a “Committee for Historical Facts” comprised of political commentators Taro Yayama and Nobuaki Hanaoka, journalists Yoshiko Sakurai and Kohyu Nishimura, and musician Koichi Sugiyama, this paid public comment refers to H.R. 121.

As I have stated several times in this dissertation, the comfort women movement’s primary goal of redress through legal avenues has heavily influenced the way the survivors tell their stories. In the face of the Japanese government’s continued denial of responsibility for the comfort system, the Lolos, Halmonis, and Amas of the movement have continued to reiterate the tried and tested spectacular elements of the paradigmatic comfort women narrative—the refrain, as it were, of the comfort women’s song of woe. As demonstrated by the above example, the nature and form of the argument between the concerned parties has, over time, changed hardly at all. While the at times lurid framing of the comfort women story has always succeeded in capturing the public’s attention and in rallying support for the victims and survivors, this attention is always short-lived; the comfort women find themselves fighting the same fight over and over again, singing the same refrain.

The comfort women redress movement has suffered more than its share of loss, most painfully in the deaths due to illness and old age of many of the Lolos. In return, it has seen very little progress toward the fulfillment of its main objectives. This lack of forward movement cannot be blamed on a lack of dedication or effort; the Lolos and their supporters have proven themselves time and again in these respects. The problem seems



to lie with the movement's approach, which deploys a rhetoric relying upon and affirming, rather than overtly contesting, the status of women as objects of sexual exchange in the culture at large. The way that the Lolas' stories have been packaged and marketed as a sort of pornography of pain has been extremely effective in grabbing the public's prurient interests, but this strategy has proven over time not to have been effective in carrying the movement forward to success in the longer-term struggle.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Outside the scope of this dissertation, but certainly worth exploring, is the question of whether or not the survivors of the comfort system should have broken their silence at all. The decade in which the comfort women came to voice was also the decade during which some Indian and Pakistani men and women were being encouraged to break *their* silence about the violence of the Partition of India in 1947. For decades, Partition had been "the unspeakable;" the panicked migration of over a million Hindus and Muslims between Hindu India and the newly created Muslim nation of Pakistan caused uncounted rapes, abductions, and deaths—the final gift of the British Empire as it let go of its most precious colony.

As Urvashi Butalia interviewed survivors for her book, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*, she often encountered reticence, even resistance, on the part of the interviewees. Some women kept silent in protest, while others wondered aloud what good could possibly come of digging up that old pain. Butalia observes,

For women who had been through rape and abduction the reluctance to speak was of another order altogether. Sometimes these histories were not known even to members of their own families ... at other times the histories were known to older members of the family but not to others. Speaking about them, making them public, this not only meant opening up old wounds, but also being prepared to live with the consequences— perhaps another rejection, another trauma. For many women, Partition represented a very fundamental tearing up of the fabric of their lives (284).

This reluctance to speak demonstrates that while there is a real need to retrieve and retell such narratives, such efforts must be undertaken with care, tempered by the knowledge that the survivors of Partition and the comfort stations take risks with each telling of their tales. As writer and Partition refugee Krishna Sobti states, Partition "is difficult to forget but dangerous to remember" (quoted in Pandey 100). The published work of the activist-scholars who find and document these narratives expresses an acute awareness of the paradox of bearing witness, made all the more fraught because of the traumatic nature of the testimony being collected.

In the future I hope to study in greater depth the similarities and differences between the retrieval and treatment of comfort women's narratives and Partition narratives. Such a pairing is not as odd as it may first seem; besides their temporal proximity, both events involved large-scale sexual violence against women. In both cases, rape, abduction, and murder were not simply random, spontaneous acts; rather, the violence visited upon all these women can tell us a great deal about how patriarchal imaginings of nation are mapped onto women's bodies. Finally, such a juxtaposition makes visible that the notion that speaking out is always better than remaining silent is not a universal truth but a Western construct. Sobti's caution that it is dangerous to remember shows us how the West's valuation of speech over silence is very much invested in its own transparency and innocence. This goes hand in hand with an investment in resolution and happy affects, which can serve to conceal—even exacerbate—the very violences they are supposed to erase.

In the first chapter of this dissertation I asked, “Why comfort women’s stories, and why now?” Now that I have come to the end of this particular phase of my work on the comfort women, I find myself rethinking the question. I ask, “Why the ebb and flow of interest in the comfort women, and why does “high tide” (for example, the international rash of resolutions and declarations of support in 2007 and 2008) always look the same? Why have over two decades of effort on the part of the redress movement failed to shift the discussion beyond ‘Were they prostitutes or victims?’” Political interest in and support for the comfort station survivors come and go like fashion, and I suspect that, like much that is fashionable, it is the slick, mass-marketable image of the comfort woman as the perfect victim that is at least partly responsible for these enthused but short-lived and ineffectual surges of international concern. It is easy to be enraged, to call for justice, and to make declarations of support for someone whom everyone can agree looks like a victim. In the case of the comfort women, that victim would be the innocent young virgin whose value as a woman has been utterly destroyed by rape. However, this figure of the perfect victim is extremely fragile and, as has been demonstrated time and again, easy to shatter. The redress movement’s reliance upon a certain uniformity in the survivors’ stories is untenable in the face of the survivors’ complicated circumstances, and it only takes an anomaly here, a divergence there, for the discussion to once again devolve into a debate about the facts of the comfort system.

Although I have found them to be rich texts in many respects, the Lolas’ life stories I have examined in these four chapters are all still built upon the same basic refrain that I have been discussing all along. I, for one, cannot begin to imagine a truly alternative comfort woman story, pummeled over and over again as I have been by the

same sordid details. I am, however, compelled to revisit *The Women of Mapanique*, discussed in Chapter III. In studying the ways in which these civilian and guerrilla survivors of punitive military sexual violence (as opposed to the controlled sexual violence in the name of troop maintenance and morale that characterized the comfort system) appropriated the discourse of comfort women activism, I realized that giving voice to the suffering of the *women* of Mapanique perversely required the erasure of the pain of Mapanique's men. The redress movement has, over the years, managed to create a space in which we can comprehend, talk about, and pursue (if not attain) justice for the female victims of military sexual violence. However, there is no room, no language in this discourse of redress that accounts for the suffering of the war's male victims. By aligning themselves with the comfort women, it might be said that the Lolos of Mapanique inadvertently abandoned their fathers, brothers, and uncles. This particular betrayal points back to the more general issue of how militarism breeds particular kinds of sexual violence that targets both women *and* men.

Even today, after decades of redress activism, the term "comfort woman" is all too easily mistaken to mean "prostitute." Even the strategy of referring to the survivors as Grandmothers, which stirs up a sense of public responsibility, does so by locating the survivors' value as people solidly in the familiar, familial female roles of childbearers and caregivers, or conversely by reminding the public of how the women's capacities for childbearing and caregiving were sullied or destroyed by the comfort system. The movement's insistence on pursuing already established legal avenues of redress has likely resulted in lost opportunities for reexamining women's still subordinate status in patriarchal society and for throwing into question the undergirding values that make

institutions like the comfort system possible in the first place. What other, perhaps more enduring and productive opportunities might have presented themselves, had the survivors' stories been elicited in a context other than the juridical?

That last, highly fraught issue is one that I would like to unpack and pursue in a future research project. For now, what I *can* say is that the literature I have examined here, far from being simply a form of propaganda art expressly geared towards pushing the movement's agenda, provides many more opportunities to break out of the repressive teleology of redress. The three poems discussed in Chapter IV demonstrate that it is possible to create connections between the trauma survivor and her witness that move beyond the dynamics of spectacle and spectator. By tapping into cultural metaphors, religious iconography, and even the weather, these Filipino poets have found paths—narrow and tenuous for now, but promising nonetheless—around the absence or destruction of language brought about by trauma. Honoring the memory of the Lolas while simultaneously taking up the daunting responsibility of telling and retelling those stories, these poets and others like them, help generate future remembrances of the comfort women that celebrate the fullness of their lives and not just the depths of their losses.

APPENDIX A  
BALADA NI LOLA AMONITA

Ruth Elynia S. Mabanglo

*Pinunit ng liyab at dagundong ng pulbura  
Ang dilim.  
Dumating sila.  
Mga lalaking sombreroohan,  
Marurusing,  
May natatanging lansa ang pawis,  
Singkit,  
Sunog sa araw, tulad ng kanilang anino,  
Tiyak ang malalaking hakbang,  
Tukoy ng pakay.*

*Iniluluwa sila ng mga parang at gubat,  
Umiibis, kung minsan, sa mga trak.  
Nilalason ang hangin ng kanilang hininga,  
Nilalabusaw ang kapayapaan  
Sa mababalasik na mura.*

*Kami,  
Pupungas-pungas,  
Inagaw sa tulog ng aming ama't ina.  
"Dali, dali, pinapababa tayo,  
Luminya raw tayo sa tabing bakod!"  
"Natatakot ako, Inay!"  
"Nandito kami, anak,  
Hindi ka namin pababayaan."*

*Manhid at liyo pa man din sa antok.  
Sa malamig na lupa'y  
Itinapak ang paa.  
Humagip sa pandinig  
Ang iyakan-ingitan ng laksang bata.  
Sumigaw ang kapitan,  
Hindi ko naintindihan.  
Hindi maalala hanggang ngayon  
Ang mura—  
Sumugat sa hangin,  
Tumarak sa tainga,  
Tumimo sa kaluluwa.*

*Sinino kami ng mga lalaki,  
Isa-isa.  
Gumapang sa galugod ang kilabot  
Nang ihaplos niya ang daliri  
Sa aking pisngi.*

*Iyon ang kamay  
Na dumakma ng manok sa silong,  
Lipaking kamay,  
Lalaking upaw,  
Maitim ang balintataw.  
Parang lahong lumalamon ng bata  
Sa kuwento ng matatanda.  
Kapre siguro, wala lang tabako.  
Malinaw pa sa alaala ko ang kuwento.*

*Kaaahon ko lang kasi sa pagiging musmos,  
kailan lang nagsimulang umagas  
ang pagkakagulang.  
Gusto ko pang magluksong tinik  
Kahit kinagagalitan.  
Hindi ko pa maunawaan kung bakit sinasabi nila  
“Dalaga ka na.”  
At nagagalit si Lola pag bumubungisngis ako.  
Pinagtitikom din niya ang mga hita ko  
Tuwing uupong nakabukaka.  
“Dalaga ka na.”  
Paulit-ulit parang litanya.*

*Nakita kong tinutop ni Ina ang bibig  
Nang ihaplos ng lalaki ang daliri  
Sa pisngi.  
Napamulagat din si Ama.  
Si Lola, bumunghalit ng dasal, nakapikit.*

*Iyon ang lalaking dumakma ng manok sa silong,  
kakulay ngayon ng gabi.  
Iyon ang lalaking dumakma sa akin,  
ang lalaking humila sa akin sa silong,  
Kakulay na kami ng gabi.  
Kakulay na kami ng gabi,  
Gabing walang bituin.  
“Masarap ang bagong daraga!”  
Magagaspang ang kamay na tumakip sa aking bibig.  
Naggalaw ako,  
Inihiga ako ng pilit.*

*Itinutop sa hita ko ang mga hita niya,  
 Marahas na nagaapuhap  
 Ang mga kamay.  
 Bumiyak sa akin ang ari niya,  
 Parang labaha,  
 Ibinuka ako,  
 Ibinuhaghag,  
 Parang nagliliyab na liwanag,  
 Humihiwa ng dilim.  
 May mainit na agas sa nabiyak na sugat,  
 Dugo ng ligis na bulaklak.*

*Ako ang kanyang hapunan.  
 Katorse pa lamang,  
 walang laban sa labanan.  
 Siya parang asong ulol,  
 Urong-sulong,  
 Akyat-manaog,  
 Umangil-umangal  
 Nagkikimbot, di mapalagay,  
 Hanggang ari'y malusaw.  
 Sa kahihyan, namaluktot ako,  
 Isinubsob sa lupa ang ulo.  
 Iyon ang gabing walang pangalan.  
 Iyon ang gabing walang larawan.*

*Lumatag sa isip ko:  
 Ito siguro ang kuwento ng Lola—  
 Mga engkantong kampon ng gabi,  
 Aswang,  
 Tikbalang,  
 Duwende,  
 Manduduro,  
 Ay, pare-pareho na sila sa isip ko.  
 Hindi ko maalala kung paano ko sila ginalit—  
 Sa dilim ba, ako'y nagwalis?  
 Hindi ba ako nagpaalam nang magtanim ng sili?  
 Lumapit ba ako sa punong baliti?*

*Hinahanap ko pa ang sagot  
 Nang muli'y hilahin niya ako palabas sa silong.*

*Kamatayang naglalakad ang aking ina  
 Nang magtama ang aming mata;  
 Bilasang isda ang aking ama,  
 Hindi makatingin sa akin.*

*Ngayon alam na niya,  
Hindi niya kayang panindigan  
Ang pangako—  
“Hindi kita pababayaang!”  
At alam na rin ng Lola,  
Ni si Maria, ni si Hesus,  
Hindi ako kayang iligtas.*

*Nakabunton sa kamay ng Diyos  
Ang mga sunog na buhok,  
Sugatang lalamunang nawalan ng kapangyarihan  
Sa salita,  
Luhang inalkansiya ng gabi  
Sa tigang na lupa.  
Iyon ang simula ng isang siklo—  
Ang paghahanap ng puntod  
Na paglilibingan ng kirot.  
Hindi pa nasusumpungan hanggang kasalukuyan  
Ang huling hantungan.*



APPENDIX B  
THE BALLAD OF LOLA AMONITA

Ruth Elynia S. Mabanglo  
Translated by Katharina R. Mendoza

The fire and thunder of gunpowder  
Tore into the night.  
They arrived.  
Men in hats,  
Grubby,  
Sour with sweat,  
Slant-eyed,  
Burnt by the sun, shadow-dark,  
Their strides long,  
Purposeful.

Emerging from amid the trees,  
Alighting from buses,  
Poisoning the air with their breath  
And disrupting the night's peace  
With loud curses.

Eyes heavy,  
We were snatched from sleep  
By our mothers and fathers.  
"Quick, go outside,  
They want us to line up by the fence!"  
"Mother, I'm scared!"  
"We are here,  
We will protect you!"  
Dazed and drowsy,  
I planted my feet  
On cold earth.  
My ears caught  
The cries and whimpers of many children.  
The captain yelled out something  
I could not understand.  
Even now I cannot recall  
The curse  
That wounded the air,  
That stabbed the ear,  
That sunk deep into my soul.

The men looked into each of our faces,  
Learned who we were.

A hand touched my cheek  
And fear ran up my spine.

The rough and callused hand  
Of a chicken thief,  
Of a balding, dark-eyed man.  
He made me think of the monsters  
In the stories that old people tell.  
The *laho* that devours children,  
Or a *kapre* who has lost his cigar.

I remembered these tales clearly  
Child's mind in an adolescent's body.  
Getting scolded for still wanting to play children's games,  
Not knowing why my giggles angered Grandmother,  
Or why she pulled my thighs together  
When I sat with legs apart,  
Or why she said, "You are a woman now"  
Over and over, like a litany.

I saw my mother cover her mouth  
As the soldier caressed my cheek.  
I saw my father's fright,  
Heard my Grandmother's whispered prayers.

This man who had dragged  
Chickens out from beneath our house  
Was now the color of night.  
This was the man who grabbed me,  
This was the man who dragged me  
Beneath our house  
And made me the color of starless night.  
"A virgin tastes so sweet!"  
He pinned me down,  
His rough palms over my mouth,  
His thighs on my thighs,  
His violent hands seeking.  
His penis breaking me open.  
Like a razor  
It cut me.  
Sliced  
Like blazing light  
Through the darkness.  
Warmth flowed from my wound,  
The blood of a crushed flower.

I was his meal.  
 Only fourteen,  
 No strength to fight.  
 The mad dog  
 Moved to and fro  
 Up and down,  
 Moaned,  
 And then went limp.  
 Ashamed,  
 I hid my face in the ground.  
 That was the night without a name.  
 That was the night without a face.

I thought:  
 This must be one of Grandmother's stories.  
 The night monsters—  
*Aswang,*  
*Tikbalang,*  
*Duwende,*  
*Manduduro,*  
 They are all the same in my mind.  
 I couldn't remember making them angry—  
 Did I sweep the floor at night?  
 Did I plant pepper without permission?  
 Did I wander too close to a banyan tree?

I was still searching for answers  
 When he dragged me out from underneath the house.  
 My mother was death walking  
 When our eyes met.  
 My father, a rotting fish,  
 Looked away.  
 He knew  
 He had failed to keep me safe,  
 And Grandmother knew  
 Neither Mary nor Jesus  
 Could save me now.

A pile of burnt hair  
 In God's hand.  
 A wounded throat unable to form words.  
 Tears disappearing  
 Into the parched earth.  
 And so began the cycle—  
 The search for a grave  
 In which to bury my pain.

I have not yet found  
My final resting place.

APPENDIX C  
*INASAWA NG HAPON*

Joi Barrios

*Hindi man ako nakapasok  
 sa simbahan sa tapat ng bahay-kulungan  
 Narinig ng mga santo ang aking pagsamo.*

*Isang araw, may kapitang dumating.  
 Kailangan daw niya  
 ng labandera't kusinera.  
 Ay, Santa Clara, salamat,  
 ngayo'y makakatakas  
 sa bawat araw na dalawampu't isang gahasa.*

*Sa umaga, ako'y nagluluto't naglalaba.  
 Sa gabi nagsisilbi sa kama.  
 Ngunit di ba't higit na mainam  
 na magsilbi sa isa  
 kaysa sa sundalong dalawampu't isa?  
 Ay, Santa Rita de Casia, salamat.  
 May kanin at ulam sa hapag.  
 At dahil ako'y mabait na mabait,  
 di sumasayad sa pisngi  
 ang kamay na malupit.*

*Sa mga sandali ng pag-iisa  
 ako'y napapawika:  
 Ay, kaibigang mga santa, salamat,  
 kaylungkot ang iwasan at umiwas,  
 kayo na lamang ang nakakausap.*

*Natapos ang giyera,  
 gusto ko sanang magpasalamat  
 kay Santa Regina.  
 Pero ng lumikas ang mga Hapon  
 natagpuan ko ang sariling  
 kasamang tumakbo sa kabundukan.  
 Ay, Santa Regina, samahan ako sa paglikas,  
 paanong ha harap kapag naabutan  
 ng humahabol na kababayan?*

*Ay, Santa Clara, sila'y pumaligid,  
 buhok ko'y hinablod, hinila, tinapyas,  
 at sinalo ng lupa*

*ang bawat hibla.*

*Ay, Santa Rita, kay talas ng patalim.  
Kaylupit ng kanilang mga mata.  
Kaysakit ng kanilang mga salita.  
Bilis, bilis,  
itarak na ninyo sa aking dibdib.*

*Ay, Santa Regina, wala ng talab ang nobena  
Ang inasawa ng kaaway ay walang kawala.  
Sa simula't wakas ng giyera  
ay bihag.*

APPENDIX D  
TAKEN TO WIFE

Joi Barrios

Translated by Katharina R. Mendoza

I had never set foot in the church  
across the street from my prison  
but the saints heard my prayers anyway.

A captain arrived one day  
who needed a laundrywoman, a cook.  
Thank you, Santa Clara  
for now I can escape  
the daily routine of twenty-one violations.

In the morning I cook, I clean.  
At night I do my work in bed.  
Isn't it better to serve one and not twenty-one?  
Santa Rita de Casia, I thank you.  
There is food on the table.  
And if I am very, very good  
I will not feel the slap of a cruel hand on my cheek.

In my isolation  
I say out loud:  
Thank you, friendly saints,  
Though it is sad to avoid and be avoided  
I still have you to talk to.  
I wanted to thank Santa Regina  
when the war ended.  
But when the Japanese fled  
I found myself running with them  
into the hills.  
Santa Regina, keep me safe  
for how can I turn and face  
my countrymen?

Oh Santa Clara, they surrounded me,  
pulled my hair, chopped it off,  
and threw each strand to the ground.

Santa Rita, their knives are so sharp,  
Their eyes so cruel,  
Their words so hurtful.  
Quick, plunge the blade into my chest!

Oh Santa Regina, novenas cannot help me  
For the wife of the enemy will never be free.  
In war, and after it, a prisoner always.



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