OUR ONLY VOICE:

The Korean 'Comfort Women' & Surviving the Noise of Nationalism

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"Even today I feel numb and cannot sleep when I remember"-Pak Du Ri (Schellstede 70)

The Battle for (Her)story

History never rests. This certainly can be said in the case of the 'comfort women'[1] known as one of the most notorious instances of government institutionalized sexual slavery in world's history (Sancho 145). Conquering land, then resources, the Japanese military during World War II went on to systematically conquer bodies. Here, Korean women, as imperial subjects were a target, and made up around 80% of Asian women forced into being sex slaves. Therefore, for many, this is seen as largely a Korean tragedy (Howard 1995: V). The ghost of these historical atrocities have drifted into the present. First, due to the dominance of a patriarchal culture in East Asia, the majority of victims remained silent for fear of destroying their identity as women, as mothers, and as wives. However, the 1990's was characterized by the onslaught of societal transformations that encouraged 'past' 'comfort women' to come forward to give testimonies that broke fifty years of silence. This was the beginning of a redress movement that would constitute years of campaigning in order to demand recognition from Japan on the war crimes committed and to receive rightful war reparations.

Now, another battle has begun, this time it is a 'clash of remembering' as the historical memories that are orally put forward by Korean survivors are contested against the documented history of Japan that has excluded any existence of the 'comfort women' system. Now, this discourse has rested on the contestation of nations; the issue of war time atrocities and Japan's subsequent revisionist history is linked to a continuation of Korea's colonial 'past' where Korea

[1] This term is contested; these women were also referred to as Korean *wianbu* and Japanese *ianfu* both euphemisms for 'comfort women'. Various literature also uses the Korean term, *chongshindae*, that translates into 'voluntarily offered body corps' (Howard 1995:6)

views itself as being held hostage under a neo-colonialist agenda. Primarily, the 'comfort women' are trapped between projecting their own voices and allowing other members who participate in the movement to fight for them. It seems as though other agents have more 'say' in the discourses that are put forward to the international community. Consequently, different dimensions of authority can be witnessed as the 'comfort women' survivors are undermined by renditions of nationalist historical remembering, while gendered violence is neglected. This paper employs the critiques made by Anne McClintock in her work, "The Angel of Progress: The Pitfalls of the Term 'Post-Colonialism'" (1992) that challenges the linearity of history in post-colonial nations. It will explore the drawbacks of historical linearity in regards to the feminist movements in Korea and the position of women's struggles within the nation. This paper attempts to answer the question, to what extent are 'comfort women's' voices able to effectively be heard through these several layers of political, social, or institutional dominance?

The structure of this paper is as follows: In Chapter 1| I outline the context of the 'comfort women' issue in regards to the general approaches both Korea and Japan have taken to negotiate this matter| Chapter 2 presents theoretical and methodological approaches used to approach my research question. In Chapter 3| I carry out an analysis of images, texts, and conferences on this matter, in which I highlight the significant obstacles to the survivors' ability to have their voices heard. In Chapter 4| I bring to light some of the optimisms for the 'comfort women' issue in regards to transnational feminism and suggest alternative methods of approaching this issue. I end with the question of how does the participation of agents in the 'comfort women' issue reveal the limitations of the survivors' propensity to 'remember' the past?

This research aims to contribute to the understanding of post-colonial processes that still prevail in Korea. It will diffuse the general understanding of the different ways both history and identity can be constructed. Moreover, the purpose of this study is to highlight the contribution of NGO's, scholars, and other agencies that aid in shaping the 'comfort women' discourse as a means of receiving appropriate attention for the abuse endured under colonial rule. In particular, how have these women been incorporated into fabricating historical narratives for the purpose of Korean nationalism?

Due to issues of scope, this paper addresses namely the conflict with respect to government action and movements between South Korea and Japan; North Korean relations with Japan will not be mentioned. Throughout the paper 'Korea' is referenced to avoid side-lining views and

participation of the North Korean state in this matter. Further, it is due to the fact that the North and South divide was not demarcated until after the war and does not change the atrocities women faced.

Overall, it is vital for this research to reach a broader and more general audience in order to highlight the power struggles that are inherent in global politics and to highlight the progress still needed in human rights discourses.

Chapter 1: Contextualizing the 'Comfort Women' Issue: Perspectives between Japan & Korea

During World War Two the Japanese set up military brothels known as 'comfort stations' in every Asian country they had invaded (Sancho 145). These 'comfort stations' throughout the duration of the war were to host so-called 'comfort women' that were forcibly recruited or deceived into sexual slavery for the Japanese soldiers. Of approximately 200,000 women the majority were Korean; Japan carried out a notorious annexation of Korea and subsequently the women became objects to colonize. However other nationalities that constituted this number were Chinese, Filipino, Malaysian, Indonesian, Dutch, and were assigned to various stations situated in all occupied territories including the Philippines as well as Okinawa and Ogasawara Islands in Japan (ibid 147)

Military sexual slavery was part of Japan's wartime policy and strategy. In fact, the 'comfort system' was seen as necessary to minimize rape in the occupied territories. It was believed that by not aggravating the local populations the Japanese military could continue to advance (ibid). Instead, the 'comfort women' would 'service' soldiers as a way to reduce these disturbances, as well as lessen the likelihood of disease and importantly to keep the morale of soldiers elevated (ibid). At the end of the war, the International Military Tribunal was held, but focused only on war crimes against prisoners or citizens of America or Europe, and neglected any mention of the military 'comfort women' (ibid 146). It was only in the early 1990's that Yoshimi Yoshiaki[2] released several documents with evidence of this coercive recruitment which prompted women's organizations in Korea to further investigate (ibid).

[2] Historian at Chuo University, Tokyo

Japanese initiatives in the matter have followed a diverse path. For one, Japan has asserted that all war reparations have been settled with post-war treaties. Although several statements of regret have been issued by the Japanese government to the survivors, none have directly admitted that Japan was the main instigator of this war crime (Sancho 151). Furthermore, in 1995, the Japanese government initiated the Asian Women's fund that provoked a public uproar. This was a private fund with donations made by citizens as well as corporations; the goal was to raise millions of Yen for the 'comfort women' (ibid). However, seen as jeopardizing their dignity, survivors rejected the funds; since the assets weren't coming from the Japanese government directly they viewed it as a way for Japan to sneak out of responsibility. Lastly, the textbook controversy[3] in Japan represents the ongoing denial of their war time 'past'. Japanese high school textbooks exposed that the history of the 'comfort women' was intentionally omitted due to conservative politicians of the Liberal Democratic Party arguing that existing texts reflected anti- Japanese thought (Schneider 108). This notably highlights the denial of historical events by both the government and historians as they have closely adhered to Liberalist history[4] (Sand 1999). Nevertheless, these arguments triggered discussions on the legitimacy of the Japanese government and provoked a rising of consciousness from other neighbouring states in the matter.

In the case of Korea, namely, The Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan (The Korean Council)[5] has aimed to demand and retrieve official acknowledgement of the 'comfort women' tragedy followed by an official apology. Moreover, a movement to retrieve compensation from the state government is a primary focus encouraging survivors to travel internationally to urge other countries to help make their pleas heard. For the 'comfort women' as victims of war time abuse as well as 'past' colonial subjects, this discourse mainly rests on the idea that the Korean state continues to be suppressed by Japan.

Incidentally, Japanese colonialism in historical remembering is discussed as a key component in Korean construction of national identity. Lee suggests that Korea often rejects approaches by Japan to deal with war reparations because it re-commemorates key historical

[3] In 1982 the Ministry of Education in Japan ordered history textbook authors to make various revisions to the content describing Japanese military action during the war (Schneider 109). Since then debates concerning Korean and Chinese perspectives on history have been continuously contested.

[4] 'mainstream' history that posits 'comfort women' as ordinary prostitutes and denies military coercion (Sand 1999)

[5] Defend the rights of both North and South Korean survivors

moments when Korea was compromised; this works to strengthen their identity (5). Specifically, Japanese revisionist history refers to the attempt to erase historical facts. Softening the brutality of events is also prevalent in Japanese revisionism in an attempt to diffuse the lines between the victim and the aggressors (Oh & Ishizawa-Grbic n.pag). These acts become detrimental as revisionism silences atrocities claiming that they never occurred. Japan's reluctance to face historical crimes means that there is the potential for history to be repeated.

In this case, history is seen as largely a male affair. According to Ueno & Sand we should question the idea of a consistent history and understand that history is selectively chosen by those in power (140). Henceforth, this research paper will explain the positionality of 'comfort women' in this ongoing contestation of historical 'facts'.

Chapter 2: Theoretical and Methodological Frameworks

2. A: A Theoretical Approach

The 'comfort woman' issue has become the main discourse in the ongoing conflict between Korea and Japan. The issue as a story of brutality against women has been downplayed by the historical trope that the Korean nation has rendered more important. Therefore, the context of this paper will also involve the notion of post-nationalism. The term 'post-national' according to Park is used to critique the gender politics of nationalism that denies women as *equal* national subjects (2007:189). This paper will further draw on such fields of research on gender, nationalism, post-colonialism, third world feminism as well as transnational feminism.

I will begin with McClintock's critique of linear temporality which will be central to approaching this question. In, "The Angel of Progress: The Pitfalls of the Term 'post-colonialism' she challenges the ritualistic use of the 'post' words in academia (85). The words such as 'post-colonialism', 'post-apartheid', 'post-modernism' and other 'post' words, suggest a historical 'progress' that is pre-maturely celebrated (ibid). History has been naturalized to being centred on elite 'euro-centric' time where history is marked by a false notion of development and perpetuates the binary opposition: colonial/post-colonial (ibid). This embedded structure of historical 'development' marks a return of colonialism, as world cultures and their history are undermined by this temporality the dominant culture has privileged (ibid 86). Consequently, the imbalances of

power are highlighted with the denial of various histories that otherwise exist and thus is largely connected to the problem of the linear imaginaries that constrain discourses of post-colonial nationalism. In fact, it discredits the various kinds of 'post-colonialism' that exist. The suggestion is that post-colonialism is different in every country, and this linear time umbrella's the 'condition' of every post-colonial nation under the same historical continuity.

As a result, oral histories are often undermined and placed second next to documented history. The problem with oral testimonies is that they are subject to falsification, as historians find problems with inconsistency and misremembering events; therefore subaltern collectives are often found fighting for their own legitimate history.

In relation to McClintock's point, Song seeks to understand how women's rights are spread too thin when combined with other nationalist issues in redress campaigns (388). She proposes that we need to better question where "I" speaks from without excluding the apparent relationships that exist between feminist and ethnic diasporic 'imagined communities' (ibid 392).

In addition, Chuh highlights the 'postcolonial condition' inherent in feminist discourses that emerge in the post-colonial context of a nation(2013). Retrospectivley, McClintock's critique would suggest that the postcolonial term in Chuh's work is being conceptualized by a polarized time frame of the past and the present. We need to understand how to move beyond this accepted linear timeframe. Therefore, McClintock's critique adds another dimension to scholarly work on the 'comfort women' issue.

The question posed by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?' (1988) further relates to the elite dominance of documented history over the subaltern word. This is a discourse related to the imbalances in socio-political power. As nationalism is often a gendered affair, it leaves women to be undermined by a dominant 'elite' in political discourses. Hence, Spivak suggests, that an epistemic asymmetry is at hand when it comes to historical remembering. Alternatively, Ueno & Sand rejects the notion of "we" among the subaltern, because it neglects the different accounts of individual suffering within that collective (145). Often the projects of memorialization are identified with privileging ethnicity and nationality and exudes a gender bias. The deployment of "femininity" in these discourses becomes resourceful for perpetuating nationalism and therefore a collective identity can be seen as a trap (145).

In order to contribute a different perspective, discussions on transnational feminism include discourses presented by Chandra Talpade Mohanty, in "Feminism without Borders" (2003).

Mohanty suggests, women need to acknowledge the gender discrimination inherent in their own political institutions as well as need to renegotiate how we often conceive relations of self and collective consciousness and agency (83). This approach will be used to analyse the 'comfort women' through a transnational feminist perspective. Possibly to analyse the epistemological issues concerned with the politicization of consciousness and resistance.

2. B: Methodological Approaches

The methods in my research will be a discourse analysis that draws on primary testimonials from the last surviving 'comfort women' themselves. Although 'comfort women' encompass all young women from several regions of East and South East Asia, this paper will focus on the issues centred on the Korean 'comfort women'. The primary testimonials analysed are those compiled by The Korean Council in the book named, "True Stories of Korean Comfort Women", edited by Howard (1995). These testimonials are translated; their individual stories are denoted. Subsequently, I will analyse the representations of 'comfort women' by other scholars who write on this issue, to observe how subjectivities of these women are reflexive. Excerpts from the book, "The Comfort Women: Sex Slaves of the Japanese Imperial Forces" by George Hicks (1995) will be used in order to concretely highlight the nationalist agencies that 'comfort women' may be constrained to. Furthermore, the article titled, "In/fertility among Korea's 'Comfort Women' survivors: A Comparative Perspective" by Sara Soh (2006), will contribute to this suggestion.

Media and images have a significant presence in how these survivors are portrayed. I incorporate segments of two conferences held at the Kupferburg Holocaust Centre in New York. The conference was titled, "In the Face of Tyranny, I Will Not Be Silent: Comfort Women Survivors Speak"; one held in 2013 where former 'comfort woman', Oksun Lee[6] gives testimony of her experiences. Additionally, Lee speaks at the second 2014 conference with former 'comfort woman' Kang II Chung. Here, I analyse to what extent they can independently speak of their experiences.

Moreover, the participation of organizations, mainly The Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan as well as Amnesty International Australia will be assessed by their efforts to spread knowledge of the issue as well as actively participate in political and legal dealings in this matter.

[6] The spelling varies throughout different references; Oksun Lee in some media is spelled Oksun Yi

Lastly, photographs combined with interviews of 19 survivors in the book "Comfort Women Speak: Testimony by Sex Slaves of the Japanese Military" (2000) compiled by the Washington Coalition for Comfort Women issues, provide supplementary visualizations of how survivors are depicted by and for what purpose. The expected outcomes in the next part of this research may suggest that it is difficult for 'comfort women' to 'speak' through the embedded historical discourse of the Korean state. This leads to a critique on other feminist concerns on a regional level as well as worldwide.

Chapter 3: How Could You Do This to Us! Bodies of the Nation & Icons of Post-colonial Violence

In July 2014 in Geneva, The World Council of Churches (WCC)[7] hosted a conference on sexual slavery during World War Two. Representatives included the Korean Council for Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery[8] by Japan as well as representatives for those participating in WCC's program on the 'Just Community of Men and Women'.

Among the guest speakers, a former Korean 'comfort woman' named Gil Won-Ok was present. At 87, Gil Won-OK shares her traumatic experience as a 'past' 'comfort woman'. Becoming an avid activist for her own cause, Gil encourages future generations to become involved and further explains that she has trust in the younger generations to help seek justice for the 'comfort women'. After all, Gil Won-Ok asserted at the WCC conference, "It is important for youth to keep the collective memory of our country alive and keep calling for the Japanese officials to apologize" (WCC 2015). Can Gil Won-ok be accredited to creating the movement to solidify the collective memory of the 'comfort women'?

The power of Gil Won Ok's voice can be questioned with the rise of various organizations that aid in the advocacy of the 'comfort women' issue. In 2009, Amnesty International Australia hosted a conference on this matter. Advertisements begins with stating, "On Friday 13 August 'comfort woman' survivor will speak out in Sydney about her experience of sexual slavery"

[7] Worldwide fellowship of churches based in 110 countries with the common goal of spreading Christian faith. For more information see http://www.oikoumene.org/en/about-us/wcc-history

[8] A Korean non-governmental organization founded in 1990; collaborates with various countries and organizations including United Nations in order to gain a formal apology and proper war time reparations from Japan (The Korean Council 2012)

(Amnesty International Australia n.d). Further along the web page it is clarified that translation and support will accompany Gil Won Ok. In exact words, "speaking alongside Gil Won Ok will be Ms Youn Mee Hyang, Director of the Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan" (ibid). In the same text, Gil Won Ok's liberation to *speak out* is quickly clouded by those who *speak alongside* of her. Already the truism in Gil's words will be intercepted by both a translator and a prominent Korean figurehead for the publicizing of the 'comfort women' matter that may influence the way Gil's story is related to the receiver. Gil Won Ok's example poses the question of how much power these women have to *speak through* the different layers of support that accompany them in seeking justice. As Spivak suggests, we must ask in transforming 'text for knowledge' who the 'real receiver' is in relaying history (287). As she works to answer the question 'does the subaltern speak?' this question can be extended to explore how 'comfort women' are often engulfed by an imperialist project; where historiography has been embedded by the elite (283). Spivak states, "In the colonialist and neo-colonialist historiographies these achievements are credited to…colonial rulers, administrators…institutions, and culture" (1988:283). In this debate, the case of the 'comfort women' issue is often cast-off as ransom by the Korean government against the Japanese. These women's' voices become reduced to whispers as their history is swiftly shaped by other organizations or political entities to be used as collateral in order to successfully mobilize the redress movement against Japan.

With the aid of institutional participation, Gil Won Ok has developed into a consequent representation of post-colonial violence. Her identity has been shaped by the different campaigns she has participated in with activists strategically deciding how to frame the 'comfort women' issue. For one, Australian campaigns surrounding the redress movement, are exemplary of how the 'comfort women' need different agents to 'speak for' them. In fact, Korean activists acknowledged their fruitless attempts to reach out to the Japanese government and asked countries such as Australia, USA, and Canada to help as they may be more effective in their attempts to retrieve a proper resolution (Song 382). Thus, Gil Won Ok's pleas were reinforced by external efforts of activism, such as the conference in Australia that facilitated a global awareness of the violence against women during armed conflict (ibid 386). Incidentally, a conference in Korea would not have rendered the same results. As other countries become involved, a new platform of universal understanding of the issue is created and provokes international players to join the fight.

Consequently, a particular trope of victimhood has filtered in 'comfort women' campaigns

and has continued to frame the women themselves as powerless victims. Powerless both from what Lenit refers to as the 'genocidal rape' (5) these women endured but also in their helplessness regarding their current conflict with the Japanese government. The success of the campaign's reparation movements further depends on the extent to which organizations can mobilize public emotions. In other words, the widespread discourse of 'comfort women' as victims of wartime atrocities, Hung suggests, allows the general public to be able to access the emotions involved and bring them to support based on compassion and empathy (108). Due to the impactful use of symbols, actions and stories the 'comfort woman' issue allows for 'far away' viewers to make sense of and 'feel for' a situation from a distance (Chou 155). As this emotional mobilization prevails, the enduring subjectivity of powerlessness and victimhood travels to any place that the 'comfort women' decide to 'speak out'. Although we know that these women have truly suffered, it is the subsequent emotions that agents use to effectively participate in the 'comfort women' issue that renders importance. Ultimately, Hung suggests that emotionally invested speakers for the 'comfort women' tend to take on those emotions as their own property (109). Of course the latter situation has connotations of various imperialist and ethno-centred agendas. In this case, the idea of 'comfort women' as vulnerable representations who are objectified by emotional degradation, lay the groundwork for other nations to 'reach out' and 'save' them from this struggle.

The aforementioned methods of drawing on 'comfort women's' vulnerability invites the American state to pursue its own nationalist agenda. Media images highlight how the fragility of 'comfort women' have become a shared representation for those who participate in this issue. In the conference hosted by the WCC named "Pilgrimage of Justice & Peace: Testimony of a Survivor of Sexual Slavery during WW2"[9] , an American member of the council takes a fragile Gil Won Ok by the arm, she walks with him incredibly slowly towards the conference room; a brief moment captures Gil Won Ok holding his hand at a table as she presents him with a miniature sized sculpture of the 'comfort woman' monument[10] that stands across from the Japanese embassy in Seoul, South Korea. She speaks while a translator communicates to the man, a melancholic

[9] The conference was an International consultation on Justice, Peace, and Reconciliation on the Korean peninsula; the testimony gave context for the WCC quest for justice and peace in Korea (Youtube, WCC 2012)
See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lv471h3z6Uc

[10] A bronze statue of a young girl that was erected outside the Japanese embassy in Seoul, South Korea as a commemoration to the 'comfort women' and has been labelled a 'peace monument' (Schrank 2013)

melody plays in the background as he nods with a sympathetic expression on his face. Aside from the fragile Gil Won Ok, feeling is further emphasized by a construction of national difference; the vulnerable Asian 'comfort women' versus the empowered nations to help. Here, Gil Won Ok is the only one wearing a traditional Korean Hanbok[11] during the conference that works to distinctly mark her as a symbol of national identity.

The 'comfort women' as a signifier of a fragile 'other' can also be attributed to Kim Soon Duk, whose interview is published in "Comfort Women Speak: Testimony by Sex Slaves of the Japanese Military" (2000) where her published interview ends with the statement, "now I wish the Korean Government would be more forceful in representing our interests, and help us regain our dignity. I wish they would pursue it vigorously until our goals are achieved" (Schellstede 2000:41). Kim Soon Duk's awareness that her words can only travel so far is highlighted by her emphasis on asking governments to take affirmative action. For some agents, pictures may speak louder than the 'comfort women's' words. A photo of Kim Soon Duk is incorporated next to her published interview. Here, vulnerability is further characterized in a black and white picture of her. She is visualized wearing a traditional Korean hanbok; a representation of national tradition. Her arms folded over her lap, as she stands in an empty room, with a tired expression that gazes out to the viewer. Incidentally, 'comfort women' as symbols of national tradition align with McClintock's suggestion that women are utilized as figures that are responsible for upholding patriarchal and cultural norms; this highlights the constructed nature of gendered national identities (1993: 64). This book was published in 2000 by the Washington Coalition for Comfort Women Issues (WWCW) [12] an independent non-profit organization that describes itself as educational for persons of every nationality (WWCW 2015). As this book is published in America and caters to a wide range of different collectives, we can see that the emphasis on national identity deploys a marker of cultural difference that is often integrated into historical narratives. In the case of the 'comfort women', this 'othering' allows viewers to understand who is in a position of power and who is a victim, and subsequently depicts America as coming in to solve a grander cultural dispute; this allows them to pursue their own nationalist agenda. Ultimately, the multitude of specific identity constructions are essential for organizations to effectively 'spread the word'.

[11] Traditional Korean dress that dates back to the Three Kingdom's Period (57 B.C-668 A.D). Characterized by vivid colors and consists of a two piece outfit closed with strings, belts, or chords (Korea.net 2012)

[12] Founded in 1992 to advocate rights of wartime victims and their lawful reparation (WWCW 2014)

American imperialist agendas can be identified by the efforts of various American institutions that participate in the redress movement. As McClintock explains, often the politics of memory are entangled with the power of institutions (1995:326). Consequently, the issue becoming a contestation between nations that prevails with 'comfort women' depicted as state possessions for nationalist discourses. At the Kupferburg Holocaust Centre[13], in 2013, Oksun Lee appeared to tell her tragic tale. Before speaking, introductions by American representatives who run the centre present a glimpse into how the 'comfort woman' issue is driven by what Chuh describes as, nationalist needs of the present (18). The idea that America is 'here to save' was a main thread in several of their discourses. The conference at the Kupferburg Holocaust Centre was titled "In the Face of Tyranny: I Will Not be Silent: Comfort Women Survivors Speak[14] however, more appropriately it should be changed to 'comfort women' survivors are *spoken for*. Suggestions for a title change stem from the emotional introduction put forth by the president of the centre who exclaims, "thanks for being here to educate…the world…not just the atrocities of World War II but the continuing pain of not being recognized…together we will ensure that the voices of…victims will be heard" (Youtube, CUNYQueensborough 2013). These words resonate with the viewers as the responsibility for seeking justice for the 'comfort women' seems to shift from the women to other participants in the matter. Of course this derives from Spivak's suggestion that establishing good for society is marked by the espousal of women as objects of protection and therefore bolsters imperialist agendas (299). As McClintock phrases, the 'authority of voice' (1993:326), that is given to those who have more power begs the question -how will this story be re-told and for what purpose? The carrying of voices becomes susceptible to these voices merging and it renders apparent the fact that nationalist movements have sprung from what Ueno refer to as a 'masculinized'(n.pag) memory that the 'comfort women' have been entrapped in. Is the 'comfort women' issue rather a contestation of nationalism(s)? As Charles Laune, member of the New York State Assembly concludes, "It is important for us to remember that the psyche of the axis powers…was that they were superior…they were supermen…it becomes easier to brutalize, it becomes easier to rape…*we are all survivors* and it is our obligation to carry this story forward" (Youtube,CUNYQueensborough 2013).

It is apparent that the 'comfort women' issue becomes a site for the contest of (male)

[13] Part of Queensborough Community College in New York (CUNY)
[14] Interview at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JEkyxXoPdY4

national subjects. Primarily speaking, the reference to Japan's superiority and the analogy to Superman embeds the masculinist history that the 'comfort women' continuously attempt to combat. Here, Ueno & Sand's suggestion that there is a problem with "we" that is attached to the concept of the nation state (145) is apparent. Thus, the gendered 'realities'[15] of the 'comfort women' are shadowed by factual historical discourses that can be attributed in Charles Laune's speech. Interestingly, it appears that a reference to 'everyone' being a survivor of Japanese aggression during World War II legitimizes America's involvement in the 'comfort women' issue. As a result, the situation of these women being victims of sexual violence is undermined by the reference to other nations who were threatened by imperial Japan's aggression at the time. As Charles further exclaims, "it was each and every part of the world[16] that was occupied by the imperial Japanese army and today we can say how did this happen?" (ibid). Here traces of McClintock's concerns become apparent, as the historical itinerary of committing to a specific historical memory is embedded in the way America perceives this issue. As McClintock suggests, this mode of nationalist remembering discredits the feminist aspect of women's gendered abuse (1995). Insofar as multiple histories are being denied, oral histories are being compromised by documented history by those who participate in the redress movement for the 'comfort women'.

Inevitably, nation and gender in the 'comfort women' discourse greatly intersect. On the one hand, survivors' agency is marked by a sense of victimhood and powerlessness but also, their discourse is drenched in nationalist sentiment. Here we begin to understand McClintock's suggestion that the narrative of history is swayed by various subjectivities (1995:63). Furthermore, McClintock posits, that a multiplicity of powers and histories should be able to coexist; this way, the continuities in the imbalances of power are easier to see in the way history is remembered (1992:89).

For the 'comfort women', the continuation of colonial power is embedded in their own historical remembering. In fact, a process that Chuh refers to as 'self-subalternization' (8) emerges and facilitates a way of asserting academic power. In other words, the 'comfort women' submit themselves to a particular narrative that when consistently reinforced by other similar testimonies,

[15] According to Ueno & Sand, 'realities' do not mean 'facts'. Rather, 'realities' refers to various memories where alternate histories emerge (142-143)

[16] This is an exaggeration used to emphasize Japanese colonial aggression. It works to American agents' advantage as it solidifies legitimate grounds to become involved in the 'comfort women' issue. Insofar that America has been victimized, they can step in on legitimate grounds to save other war time victims.

the shared collective sufferings have greater impact. Due to the oppression women face in national communities they find difficulties in highlighting their political identities as women without neglecting their sense of national identity (Enloe 54). For this, 'comfort women's' voiced experiences are inextricably tied to Korea's colonial history. Therefore, the 'comfort women' issue is often cast aside by nationalist agendas that they themselves incorporate into their own accounts. This happens as a result of being limited to the ways they can relay their stories so they can be heard.

Evidence, is highlighted in the public testimonies given by Oksun Lee. Oksun Lee was captured at 15 years old and was taken to China to carry out her life as a sex slave. At the Kupferburg Holocaust Recourse Centre, Oksun Lee came to share her story on a second occasion[17]. In the 2014 conference, Oksun Lee expresses her need for help by the United States, "I have travelled all the way from Korea to ask for all of you here in the United States for help to make our voices heard" (Youtube, CUNY Queensborough 2014). Throughout her talk Lee makes several links between nations and the 'comfort women' concern. For one, she ridicules the lack of efforts on behalf of the Korean and Japanese government. As Lee explains, "because the action of the Korean government was so weak, the Japanese government…never really listened to our voices" (ibid). It is made clear that the 'comfort women' issue is often empowered only through government action. Oksun Lee's personal ties to her nation is further embedded in her explained struggle to return to Korea from China[18]. She not only refers to the fact that it took 60 years to return back to Korea, but she also explains, because "a lot of Korean people resided [in China] I was able to retain my Korean language"[19] (ibid). It is apparent that an emphasis on Lee's connection with her native homeland and subsequently her native tongue intersects with her subjectivity as a survivor of women's' violence.

McClintock suggests that neo-colonialist practices continue even in the post-colonial context (1992: 91). Her reference to a continuation of colonial oppression is voiced in Oksun Lee's speech as she gives contemporary instances in which Koreans continue to be subordinated. Here, Lee mentions that the war continues to manifest in disputes between Korea and Japan, such as

[17] See full interview at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rOzvcepqyUo

[18] Oksun Lee had married in China after falling in love with a Korean who was a conscript for the Japanese military. When he died she lived for yeas in her in-laws home and re-married 10 years later when her husband did not come home. She returned to Korea in 2000 (House of Sharing 2001).

[19] Oksun Lee settled in Baodaozhen-Jilin province in China (House of Sharing 2001)

Dokdo Island[20]. Lee emotionally posits, "It is just ridiculous that the Japanese government is still trying to take over what the Korean people have!"(ibid). The reference to Dokdo Island requires attention. For one, it demonstrates the ongoing colonial oppression from past wars. Furthermore, it highlights how national agendas are inseparable from the 'comfort women' issue. This is in line with Song's analysis, where she questions privileging Korean ethnicity in 'comfort women' campaigns that compromises survivor's voices (388). Consequently, the survivor's stories coincide with the hegemonic presence of Korean nationalism. Hence, the collective memories of 'comfort women' need to be pragmatically communicated as collective Korean suffering from Japanese colonial rule in order for the redress movement to be prioritized.

This sense of privileging Korean ethnicity is further strategized by activists who are active participants in this matter. This notion becomes apparent in the closing segment of Oksun's Lee speech. To conclude, Lee performs a song she wrote based on the Han River[21]. Soon after, as Lee goes to sit down, Soh Yung Lee, a Korean-American involved in the issue pushes the microphone towards Lee as she initiates the start of the unofficial Korean anthem named Arirang[22]. Needless to say, a provocation of Korean nationalism is highlighted. Soon after, Kang II Chung, another survivor decides to join in to sing; the Korean- American woman, and the two survivors find common ground based on the same relation to a nation. In this regard, the nationalistic interpretations taken on by other agents has focused the 'comfort women' issue on nationalist grounds between Korea and Japan. Consequently, Min recognizes that the main issue of the survivors as sexual victims of war has been neglected (939). Surely, the reinforcement of Korean pride by agents have influenced the avenues survivors take to relay their own historical memories.

Understandably, 'anti-colonial consciousness' is embedded in women's speech due to their long duration with experiences of being colonized subjects. Therefore, a strong bond to their nation intermingles with the various other subjectivities of the survivors. Insofar as various agents weave nationalist tones into 'comfort women' discourses, so do 'comfort women' revert to the same form

[20] Since the end of World War II Japan and Korea have been disputing ownership of neighboring offshore islets. The area is claimed and named Dokdo Island by South Korea. The island is named Takeshima Island for Japan and both nations are claiming they own the territory historically and under international law. This dispute has never been settled (Fern 78).

[21] A major river in South Korea; Also known as the Hangang River, it historically was a major trade route and protection from attack. The river runs East to West through various parts of Korea (Exploring Korea n.dat)

[22] A Korean folk song considered the unofficial national anthem of Korea; a symbol of Korea's struggle for independence from Japan and its turbulent modern history (Korea.net 2012).

of remembering. As Kang II Chung[23] exclaims, "Why did the Japanese government take us away by force? We are not your sisters we are not your brothers" (Youtube, CUNYQueensborough 2014). Necessarily, Kang makes the distinction between national identities here in order to formulate an ethnocentric narrative of powerlessness that strengthens the redress movement. The idea that the 'comfort women' have become bodies of the nation is further internalized into their own discourses. In fact, it can be said that women feel that their nation is the relationship they have left in their widowed lives, and thus it becomes a central point in their pleas for redress. In the conference, Kang exclaims, "the Japanese government only prayed on the weaker countries during the war and the situation hasn't changed much to this day" (ibid). Here it is made clear that Kang speaks to her nation as being prey for the Japanese military. Evidently, her subjectivity of a victim of violence cannot stand independent of post-colonial nationalist discourses.

Evidence of national identity and politically charged statements are constructed within the 'comfort women' discourse and further perpetuated by scholars who write about the issue. In his book titled, "The Comfort Women: Sex Slaves of the Japanese Imperial Forces" (1995). Hick's shortly narrates Kim Young-Shil's story that is based on her testimony of a poor North Korean girl who accepted work from a Japanese man in civilian clothing, only to be coerced into military prostitution (216). Hick's final statement hinges on the day of Kim Young-Shil's testimony that ends with Kim Hak Sun[24] stepping up to the podium to embrace her. Hick's concludes this was representational of 'north south solidarity' (217). Was this embrace symbolic of an internal conflict regarding Korea? Rather the women's embrace represents the shared pain between former 'comfort women'. At the time, no division of North and South existed when the 'comfort system' was created. Therefore, the North and South divide is a contemporary historical construction. In fact, Meyer has recognized this new technique of adding on to 'comfort women' accounts for various personal motives (2001). Here, a nationalist point of view takes priority in reiterating former 'comfort women's' pain.

How about the Washington Coalitions' efforts to relay Kim Young-Shil's story? A close up picture of her face is placed next to her written testimony, her eyes shedding tears and her mouth open in unforgettable anguish as she concludes her interview with the words,"I felt like a living

[23]Kang is the youngest Korean 'comfort woman' survivor; like Oksun Lee she also married and resided in Jilin province China and returned to Korea in 2000 (House of Sharing 2001)

[24]Kim Haksun was one of the first 'comfort woman' to publicly break silence of her past; she came forward in 1991.

corpse…it was done to a lifeless body. Again. And again. And again…" (Schellstede 2000:51). The bodily grievance in her testimony becomes central to Kim's interview and greatly contrasts Hick's approach to her struggle. Certainly, there is a danger in sharing one historical perspective as seen in the written approaches to relaying the 'comfort women' issue, as written history can downplay the severity of their experiences.

Potential outlets for survivors to 'speak through' wear thin, and further become tainted by the various representations of former 'comfort women' in this discourse. The monumental embrace between Kim Hak Sun and Kim Young- Shil depicted by Hicks, represents a political perspective. Over the years, Kim Hak Sun's[25] testimonials have been utilized to demand war time reparations from Japan. As different people have put forward Kim's story however, her agency as a woman, as a victim, and as an icon of Korean solidarity fluctuates as her testimonial moves from hand to hand. In one case, ethno-centred agendas are depicted by Kim Hak Sun's narrative in, "In/fertility among Korea's 'Comfort Women' Survivors: A Comparative Perspective" (2006). In her work, we can analyse Soh's construction of Kim's first-person narrative to understand what she decided was important to represent. An importance on Korean identity can closely connect to her own Korean roots. Therefore, a form of self-invested interested has prevailed behind the narratives of Kim:

> I was born in Manchuria in 1924, and had the misfortune of losing my father soon after my birth, depriving me, among many other things in my wretched life, of the opportunity to receive the traditional celebration of the one-hundredth day feast (paegil chanch'i) for newborn babies (Soh 75).

Kim's lamentation of her traditional birthday celebration as depicted by Soh marks the contribution towards Kim's wretched life. What is important here, is this detail is absent in other published first-person narratives of Kim Hak Sun. Although we cannot distinguish clearly between the actual account and the aspect of 'narritivization'[26], here, we can identify with what Chuh describes as a 'liberal multiculturalist rationale' (11). This rationale tries to maintain representations of 'authentic' diversity and can be witnessed in Soh's work. That is to say, because

[25] Written in various literature as both Kim Haksun or Kim Haksoon

[26] The extent to which the account intersects with fictional narratives that external agents may use together with testimonials.

Soh has studied intensely and worked closely with several American universities, she therefore may be writing in order to appeal to the American curiosity of cultural diversity. As a result, Soh stretches the construction of an 'Asian' identity that can be easily digested by the Western imagination while still appearing to be 'authentic' in nature. After all, Soh mentions that her aim is to contribute to a deeper understanding of the internationally politicized 'comfort women' issue (68). Therefore, representations of diversity are favourable for attracting prospective attention from the international community. Thus, 'comfort women's' words are subject to re-interpretation to fit the mould of a nationalist discourse. Consequently, women's experiences of sexual violence become lost in nationalist representations. Alternatively, we can ask, what has the urgency of the 'comfort women' issue made possible?

Chapter 4: Time to Celebrate? Transnational Feminism & the Comfort Women Issue

Achievements with respect to the 'comfort women' issue cannot go unnoticed. In fact, this matter has brought to light progress in the realm of transnational feminism and activism that have created more connections that break embedded historical hegemonic discourses. How do we begin to view the 'comfort women' issue as a step forward? It is no question that the survivors themselves have been prominent figureheads in re-articulating history that had been silenced by masculinist nationalisms. In breaking long silence, the 'comfort women' survivors have been able to mobilize the international community to acknowledge the severity of these war crimes. In doing so, transnational feminist activism has allowed to create more visibility for this issue. There has been some progress in the re-dress movement such as the Women's International War Crimes Tribunal[27], in 2000, that allowed for the 'comfort system' to be internationally recognized as a war crime (Suzuki 207). Importantly, to an extent Korean feminism has been able to challenge the trajectories of neo colonial powers and has helped to highlight contemporary issues of sexual coercion even in contemporary society. On another note, The Korean Council organized the Asian Women's Solidarity Forum in 1992 (Chou 172). The forum is a yearly meeting of participating

[27] Located in Tokyo Japan. Established to consider the criminal liability of leading high-ranking Japanese military and political officials and the separate responsibility of the state of Japan for rape and sexual slavery as crimes against humanity arising out of Japanese military activity in the Asia Pacific region in the 1930's and 1940's (Chinkin 335)

NGO's in the 'comfort women' issue who come together to discuss the best solutions for retrieving reparation (ibid). The forum focuses on strengthening women solidarity activities of victimized countries in East Asia (ibid 174) and therefore a new foundation to discuss women's rights has emerged.

Discussions on the 'comfort women' issue within the forum not only facilitated more activity by NGO's in the redress movement but has also aided in creating a link with present day sex tourism in Korea frequented by American troops and Japanese businessmen. As a matter of fact, Kim celebrates the 'comfort women' issue as revelling in new acts of 'consciousness raising' with more awareness of other matters of women's abuse being highlighted (2009:114). Definitely, there has been possibilities of affective feminist solidarity movements that create frameworks for redressing the harm and trauma caused by military sexual slavery, in the case of the 'comfort women'. For Kim, nationalism and feminism need to coexist in order to mutually fuel each other. Here, she claims that feminism needs to hone in on nationalist sentiment as a driving force for change and attracting state aid in the issue (2009:115).

In a sense, nationalism has created a space for women to be international actors and to take confidence in being advocates for their own cause (Enloe 61). This can be seen in the consistent visits to the United States by Oksun Lee, Gil Won Ok, as well as Kang II Chung in order to fight for justice. International recognition of the issue has allowed women's voices to travel across borders. Lest, we cannot forget that they are also seen as representations of a nation.

Although the 'comfort women' issue is one step forward in transnational feminist activism it is also two steps back. I cannot help but see only an apparent 'perceived' successful transnational movement; there are still drawbacks inherent in the 'progress' perpetuated by transnational feminists. Here, I turn to the core belief of transnational feminism, which Herr describes as seeing nationalism as detrimental to feminist causes (2). The purpose of highlighting this concept is to outline a missing thread in the 'comfort women' discourse. Yes, survivors feel injustice from Japanese oppression and often refer to their sufferings in the post-colonial context of Korea. However, the 'comfort women' discourse does not incorporate the discussion of the political consequences of being a woman in the world. Specifically, recognizing, for instance, sexism and misogyny that Mohanty refers to as fuel for social and political institution of rule to exude violence over women (3), is rarely mentioned. As she suggests, if discourses include the articulation of how class, race, gender and imperialist hierarchies intersect with their subjectivity of victimized

women, then new strategies can be attained for realizing visions in women's movements (25).

These ideas can be applied to the challenges faced in determining a plea for universal women's rights. As it stands now, the 'comfort women' issue only focuses on specific collectives and neglects other women who have been subject to violence. For instance, the ongoing weekly Wednesday demonstrations[28] held outside of the Japanese embassy in Seoul do not speak for women of all nationalities who are victims of rape (Park 2010:210). Instead, they fight for justice for the Korean survivors who have a personal conflict and historical past with Japan. But what about the 'comfort women' survivors who may be underrepresented? For instance those from the Philippines or those silenced in China? How can the current Korean 'comfort women' discourse 'speak' for the victims in the Rape of Berlin[29]? I agree here with Mohanty that 'proof' of universality and cross cultural validity is required (22), in regards to the 'comfort women' issue. It could avoid difficulties such as that observed in the conferences at the Kupferburg Holocaust centre that had both the 'comfort women' and the Holocaust survivors as guests that shared experiences as victimized women. Yet, both the survivors as well as those who conducted the conference found difficulties bridging the gap between the two atrocities; a sense of harmony of the larger picture of women's violence seemed to be missing. The Korean 'comfort women' looked to their translators who found solace speaking in their own native tongue. As a result, Holocaust survivors could not directly correspond with former 'comfort women'; a sense of women's solidarity completely absent. The commentators struggle to address both collectives at the same time, as they referred to Japanese imperialism and the 'comfort women' and German aggression in relation to women of the Holocaust separately. But where is the bridging discourse on the brutality that women and their bodies experienced? Where did their bodies stand in(dependently) in relation to their nation-state?

Lastly, the relevance of the 'comfort women' issue to other feminist movements in Korea needs attention. Surely, there are other external concerns that need to be addressed. Yet, this discourse seems to dominate the other social alarms that need attention. For instance, Korean society is still heavily patriarchal; not only are women subject to the pressures of upholding duties in the family, but they are also discriminated in the work place, domestic space, as well as their

[28] Weekly protests in Seoul where past 'comfort women' demand for an apology. More than 1000 protests have taken place.

[29] Mass rapes instigated by primarily Soviet troops during the occupation of German territory in the latter stages of World War II

own bodily space[30]. Where are the women fighting for these causes? Of course, the stagnant feminist movements could be tied to the fact that the historical aspect of the 'comfort women' discourse is prioritized because it helps to fuel the national morale of the state. This coincides with Lee's argument that Korea often uses approaches to re-commemorate key historical moments when Korea was compromised as a strategy to strengthen their identity (5).

To combat some of the previous difficulties I outlined in regards to transnational feminism in relation to the 'comfort women' issue, some suggestions are in order. First, for the 'comfort women' subject in Korea to become a more successful transnational movement it is necessary to incorporate the voices of other nationalities. As a matter of fact the focal point of their pleas should be broader in scope, to address the brutality that other Asian women faced during World War II. It is without question, as the case is with all women collectives that a great deal of fragmentation exists within the 'comfort women' union. That is to say that the experiences faced of women depending on ethnicities, and class differ. Henceforth, the Korean 'comfort women' issue needs to be contextualized with different narratives and trajectories to avoid it being an exclusionary political matter with Japan. Mohanty's vision can be applied to this matter when she claims, "I outline a notion of feminist solidarity as opposed to vague assumptions of sisterhood or images of complete identification with the other" (2003:3). Therefore, a transnational activism that involves a collaboration of women of different nationalities who can relate globally but maintain roots in their own communities would be beneficial.

I mentioned earlier the need to initiate other feminist movements in Korea I suggest because other feminist matters in Korea require more attention. In fact, the 'comfort women' issue can facilitate a starting point to addressing the subordination of women in different aspects of Korean society, creating a platform to influence change in social structures. As we can see here, the ability to 'speak' beyond boundaries is necessary, but the ability to gain foothold within state borders as well is crucial to facilitate prominent change.

[30] Here I am referring to the plastic surgery 'craze' that has pressured young girls to undergo procedures in order to become a prospective bride or a more successful employee. Bodily 'space' shaped by societal and media pressures.

How Much Power do 'Comfort Women' have over their own Historical Remembering?

I go back to the question, to what extent are 'comfort women's' voices able to effectively be heard through the several layers of political, social, or institutional dominance? In order to answer this question I drew on McClintock's critique of historical linearity and its subsequent problems with disallowing other 'less dominant' histories to be heard. Subsequently, I defined the different obstacles survivors must face in their ongoing feminist movement to seek justice from Japan. Inevitably, it appears that the 'comfort women' discourse is limited to the way it is publicized both in Korea and the international community; its effectiveness can be undoubtedly questioned. Here, we can use Spivak's claims to conclude that the subaltern can 'speak', but, only through channels that are accepted by the nation state and the political or institutional entities that aid in publicizing the 'comfort women' issue. To a large degree the matter is undermined by nationalist and ethno- centred elitist agendas that are prioritized over discussions of gendered violence. For one, nationalist agendas can be seen in the case of Gil Won Ok, where her portrayal as a frail Asian 'other' who has been a victim of war emerges. This play on frailty consequently casts women as symbols of gendered violence and not necessarily the leaders in their own cause. Subsequently, imperialist agendas are depicted in conferences at the Kupferberg Holocaust centre where Oksun Lee and Kang II Chung are constructed as victims who cannot progress without the help of America. In turn, the speeches put forward by American scholars whom participate in the debate proclaim reasons that fulfil their own revenge as a result of announcing themselves as subjects of Japanese imperialism. We can say here, that the importance of the feminist concerns prevalent in the 'comfort women' matter has been subdued because of this. Here, women as unequal national subjects becomes apparent as a result of adhering to a common 'post-colonial' history that has impeded progress for women in the redress movement.

In addition, a source of nationalism in the survivors' discourses derives from their perceived connection with the state, but also their recognition of the fact that their voices can be better heard if they suit the post-colonial climate of Korea. These notions are reinforced by various organizations such as The Korean council, or other participants that feel a sense of solidarity through sharing Korean ethnicity can also propagate the relegating of feminism discourses in the 'comfort women' issue.

However we cannot deem the 'comfort women' issue completely fruitless. Progression in

transnational feminism and the creation of new advocacy networks bears recognition. For one, the collective activity of survivors have pursued various international legal channels in order to gain more voice in the matter. International human rights groups have promoted advocacy papers and The Korean Council has formed numerous campaigns and tribunals in order to expand the international scale of the 'Comfort Women' issue (Kim 2007:228). Most importantly, strengthened relations between different women's networks and a perceived step forward for Korean survivors have led to potential to realize their goals of receiving monetary compensation and an official apology. Overall, notions of solidarity are becoming strengthened and these continuing attitudes of addresses global gendered violence can aid in gaining help in transnational issues.

However, we regress back to McClintock's concern with the singular binary axis of time that assumes the discourses of development in postcolonial nations and the subsequent discontinuities in imperial power (8). This problem is witnessed in these transnational movements, where even then this sense of progress, I claim, is to an extent a false perception.

In approaching my conclusion I suggest that the discourse on the 'comfort women' matter needs to develop another dimension. They need to broaden their scope of argument so as not to exclude the other survivors that share different, but a universal struggle of women's violence. Lastly, the 'comfort women' issue should shift away from continuously referencing a historical or colonial past and move towards referencing contemporary issues in Korean society. As McClintock (1992) posits, the blame for women's continuing plight cannot rest just with colonial dilemmas (92).

Let's hope that one day the voices of survivors will be effectively heard within and across borders, but for now their shouts are reduced to whispers drowned in the powerful noise of state nationalism.

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