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# Lola's story: Writing comfort women in World War II history of the Philippines

Krishna Ignalaga Thomas

*Eastern Illinois University*

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LOLA'S STORY: WRITING COMFORT WOMEN IN WORLD  
WAR II HISTORY OF THE PHILIPPINES

THOMAS

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LOLA'S STORY: WRITING COMFORT WOMEN

IN WORLD WAR II HISTORY OF THE PHILIPPINES

(TITLE)

BY

KRISHNA IGNALAGA THOMAS

**THESIS**

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS IN HISTORY

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CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

2008

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the origins of the Japanese-imposed comfort station system in the Philippines during World War II. In order to show that the Filipino former comfort women (*lolas*) are not marginalized victims, but are active agents instead, I illustrate how successfully the *lolas* have used various strategies to keep this issue at the forefront. This thesis analyzes their testimonies and other genres, (legal proceedings, newspaper articles, poetry, dance and language usage) highlighting the growing need for outlaw genres to bridge the gap in a contemporary landscape where history needs to cross national, cultural and language barriers. By presenting these outlaw genres as complementary, and not oppositional, to the official statist narrative of World War II history in the Philippines, I conclude that the *lolas* are not just victims that demand justice, but active shapers of history.

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## INTRODUCTION

*"Without warning, a Japanese soldier entered my room and pointed his bayonet at my chest... and then he raped me... twelve [more] soldiers raped me in quick succession... He was very angry and he grabbed my hand and forced me to handle his genitals... before going out, he hit my breast, and pulled my hair."<sup>1</sup>*

In 1942, just months after the Japanese Imperial 14<sup>th</sup> Army invaded Manila, Philippines, 14-year old Maria Rosa Henson was brutally attacked and raped, forced into becoming a "comfort woman," a euphemism for women who provided sexual services for Japanese military troops, in Japanese-occupied countries during World War II. In 1992, Henson became the first former comfort woman to testify of her treatment at the hands of the Japanese military in the Philippines.

Rape in wartime is by no means an isolated historical event. The use and misuse of sex in wartime situations has been discussed comparatively by seminal researchers (Amir, 1971; Abler, 1992; Allen, 1996; Ball, 1986; Grossmann, 1995; Niarchos, 1995; Ryan, 2000 and Seifert, 1996). The case of the comfort women involves the systematic planning and forcible drafting, or abduction of these women in addition to the establishment, control, and management of army brothels called "comfort stations." Based on the testimonies given by surviving comfort women, it is evident that more than one crime has been committed against them, with evidence pointing to crimes of rape, murder, forced labor, kidnapping, sexual slavery, torture, and racial discrimination. The ensuing rape of Filipino girls and young women by Japanese officers and soldiers, is by

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<sup>1</sup> Maria Rosa Luna Henson, *Comfort Woman: Slave of Destiny* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1999): 36-39.



no means an exception. The principle objective of my research is to analyze the origins of the Japanese-imposed comfort station system in the Philippines, and to understand the development of the Filipino movement of former comfort women, in order to fully explore the historical legacies of comfort women in post World War II Filipino society.

*Lola* Rosa, as she is called according to Filipino social tradition, was among estimated 200,000 girls and young women across East Asia and Southeast Asia coerced into providing sexual services the Asian Pacific War.<sup>2</sup> The issues involved in any discussion of the comfort women stir up the question of military prostitution, transforming into one of violent sexual slavery based on race, class and gender. While the number of comfort women has been debated throughout the scholarship, many scholars now agree that at least 80% of the women 'drafted' were Korean.<sup>3</sup> With the end of World War II, the only military tribunal concerning the sexual abuse of comfort women took place in Batavia (today's Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia) in 1948.<sup>4</sup> The Batavia trial convicted several Japanese military officers for having forced into comfort stations the thirty-five Dutch women in the Semarang Incident case.<sup>5</sup> However, the same trial completely ignored similar ordeals suffered by native Indonesians and women of other ethnic backgrounds. C. Sarah Soh (2001) argues that this was a highly political move,

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<sup>2</sup> *Lola* is the Tagalog term for grandmother, and a term that the former comfort women employ to refer to themselves. *Lola* is also a term of respect used to refer to an older woman not necessarily related by family. Historians roughly estimate that the number ranges from 80,000 – 280,000. The range cited is from the "*Halmeoni, gunwianbu ka muyeyo?* (Grandmother, what is 'military comfort women?'), (Seoul, South Korea: Korean Research Institute for Jungshindae, 2000), 30.

<sup>3</sup> Pyong Gap Min, "Korean Comfort Women: The Intersections of Colonial Power, Gender and Class," in *Gender & Society*, 17 no.6 (2003), 940 – 641.

<sup>4</sup> George Hicks, *The Comfort Women: Japan's Brutal Regime of Enforced Prostitution in the Second World War*, (New York: W.W Norton & Company, 1994), 58-59.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 58-59.

meant to secure and promote the rights of nationals, (i.e., the Dutch women) as opposed to the native women.<sup>6</sup>

Despite ubiquitous knowledge of the comfort women since World War II, these rapes only came to the forefront of media attention in 1991 when Kim Hak-soon, a Korean former comfort woman, testified of how she had been forcibly abducted and forced to provide sexual services for Japanese soldiers.<sup>7</sup> The comfort women issue in the Philippines did not initially receive support.<sup>8</sup> Immediately following the discovery of a Japanese medical report, detailing comfort stations in the Philippines,<sup>9</sup> the Philippine government launched an investigation, spearheaded by the Presidential Commission on Human Rights and the University of the Philippines in 1992.<sup>10</sup> The report announced that no other evidence had been found, and there had never been any sex slaves in the Philippines.<sup>11</sup> In addition, the investigation also concluded that the 1956 Treaty and Reparations Agreement between the Philippines and Japan precluded any need to seek further apologies from Japan.<sup>12</sup>

As a response to these developments and the growth of the redress movement in Korea, testimonies from Filipino former comfort women came trickling in. In 1992, suspecting that the government-sponsored investigation was either a cover-up, grossly incompetent or both, the Task Force on Filipino Comfort Women (TFFCW) was formed

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<sup>6</sup> C. Sarah Soh, "Japan's Responsibility Towards Comfort Woman Survivors" in *Japan Policy Research Institute Working Paper no. 77* May 2001, available from <http://www.jpri.org/publications/workingpapers/wp77.html>, accessed October 2, 2007.

<sup>7</sup> C. Sarah Soh, "The Korean Comfort Women: Movement for Redress," in *Asian Survey* 36, no. 12 (1996), 1233.

<sup>8</sup> Nelia Sancho, *War Crimes on Asian Women – Military Sexual Slavery by Japan During World War II: The Case of the Filipino Former Comfort Women Part II*, (Manila, Philippines: Asian Women Human Rights Council, 1998), 10.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>10</sup> George Hicks, *The Comfort Women: Sex Slaves of the Japanese Imperial Forces*, (St. Leonards, NSW, Australia: Allen & Unwin Pty Ltd., 1995): 201.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

in the Philippines with *Lola Rosa's* testimony breaking out a few short months later.<sup>13</sup> According to the Asian Woman Human Rights Council (AWHRC), approximately 200 Filipino women have since come forward to present their testimonies of rape and torture by Japanese Imperial soldiers,<sup>14</sup> and have been instrumental in the global movement to seek redress from Japan.

According to a 2002 collaborative research report from the Philippine Department of Social Welfare and Development and the Asian Women's Fund, a non-profit organization established to compensate former comfort women, the majority of surviving Filipino former comfort women are of advanced age, have attended four years of formal education, already-widowed, in addition to still providing for various members of their immediate family, while suffering from various forms of post-traumatic stress.<sup>15</sup> Despite this and the on-going scholarly research, the public support and financial assistance afforded to these former comfort women is precarious at best.<sup>16</sup> Yet, these survivors remain diligent in their petition to both the Japanese and Philippine governments for an official apology and compensation for undue suffering. I hope that my research will enable the general public to have a better understanding of the plight of the comfort woman, and contribute to future study.

Recent work on the comfort women issue addresses the relationship of memory, culture, class, race, ethnicity, power gender to this hot topic (Chizuko, 1999; Hicks, 1994; Kim, 1997; Mendoza, 2003; Tanaka, 2001; Thoma, 2000; and Yoshiaki, 2000). Drawing on the lessons from Joan W. Scott that gender is both a constitutive element of social

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<sup>13</sup> Sancho, 12.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 259.

<sup>15</sup> Department of Social Welfare and Development and the Asian Women's Fund, "*An Evaluative Research in the Implementation of the Assistance to Lolas in Crisis Situation (ALCS) Project*" (2002).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 42.

relationships based on perceived difference between sexes and as a signifier of power relationships,<sup>17</sup> the comfort women issue that emerges is remarkably open-ended. Ruth Seifert writes on wartime rape as a symbolic expression of the humiliation of the male opponent, additionally carrying significant messages for their absent 'protectors,' that their masculinity was wounded and they were judged incompetent.<sup>18</sup> In brief, the abuse of their women is seen as compromising their masculinity and as such, can be seen as a direct attack on them, and not the violation of women.

Furthermore, symbolism plays a dynamic role, characterized by a mixture of violence with eroticism and sexuality, especially in language. In studying the history of the comfort women themselves, there is a distinct connection between sexual symbolism and militarized masculinity. Perhaps one of the most disturbing elements of the Asian Pacific War is the goal of the total destruction of an opposing culture. With such an ideology in mind, it is no wonder that the comfort women, and just women in the war in general, were seen as tactical objectives, in their traditional roles as mothers and perpetrators of culture and family structure. There is a distinct focus on how the female body itself functions as a symbolic representation of the social body, of the community, and ultimately of the nation. As such, "the violence inflicted on women is aimed at the physical and personal integrity of a group,"<sup>19</sup> and can be seen as the symbolic rape of the social body, and thus, the rape of Filipino masculinity.

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<sup>17</sup> Joan Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," in *Gender and the Politics of History*, First Edition, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988): 28-52. Scott focuses on four interrelated elements: culturally available symbols, normative concepts, social institutions and organizations and subjective identity.

<sup>18</sup> Ruth Seifert, "War and Rape: A Preliminary Analysis," in *Mass Rape: The War Against Women in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, ed. Alexandra Stiglmayer (Lincoln, NB and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1994): 54-72.

<sup>19</sup> John Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), 63.

Along the same lines, John Dower delineates the patterns of a race war, the cultural concept of otherness and how these racial, or racist, stereotypes are used in government-sponsored propaganda and policy on both sides of the Pacific. According to Dower, the Japanese spent more time wrestling with the question of what it really meant to be 'Japanese,' how the Yamato race was unique among the races and cultures of the world, and why this uniqueness made them inherently superior. As such, "the Japanese presented themselves as being purer than others - a concept that carried both ancient religious connotations and complex contemporary ramifications."<sup>20</sup> It is this very condescension toward other Asian races that stimulates the origins of the Japanese comfort station system, as evidenced by the system of licensed prostitution in Japanese-occupied Korea.

Much of the scholarship on the comfort women point to Japan's negligence of its responsibility towards the aging former comfort women. George Hicks argues that the Japanese case represents a most ghastly instance of abuse, involving "the legalized military rape of subject women on a scale ... previously unknown in history."<sup>21</sup> At the same time, however, the comfort women's movement for redress has tended to assign Japan the part of the Asian twentieth century delinquent whose grave abuse of human rights makes it fair game for questions about its political and social legitimacy in the region. This assignment however not only misconstrues the political development of the Japanese state, but also reduces the stories of the comfort women to an unfortunate occurrence in history, tending towards the descriptive rather than the analytical.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 232.

<sup>21</sup> Hicks, xv.

Others interpret the comfort women issue as a "civil war over memory."<sup>22</sup> Highlighting the controversy surrounding the inclusion of comfort women in Japanese elementary and high school textbooks, Ueno Chizuko and Hyun Sook Kim prioritize the need to provide an outlet for the sub-altern (i.e., the comfort women) to speak openly without being delegated as a forgotten and regretted historical incident. For Kim, the testimonies of former comfort women serve as a counter-memory to official written history: "the women are challenging us to question the received 'truths' about imperialism, colonials, nationalism and gender oppression and patriarchy and to revise the narratives of national history through which we have come to understand our collective past."<sup>23</sup>

The scholarship on the use of testimony by the former comfort women portrays what Naomi White refers to as "testimonies of darkness."<sup>24</sup> The stories force us to ask questions of the spoken version versus the unspoken and whether or not there are words to describe these atrocities, a question that Katharina Mendoza and Pamela Thoma also ask us to consider testimony for meaning as well as experiences or events. Thoma writes that the testimonies of former comfort women, even when translated and widely distributed and published, still serve as discrete hybrid autobiographical texts or outlaw genres themselves,<sup>25</sup> drawing lessons from Caren Kaplan<sup>26</sup> and Sidonie Smith and Julia

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<sup>22</sup> Ueno Chizuko, "The Politics of Memory: Nation, Individual and Self" in *History & Memory*, Volume 11, Number 2 (Summer 1999), 132.

<sup>23</sup> Hyun Sook Kim, "History and Memory: The Comfort Women Controversy," in *Positions* 5, no. 1 (1997), 102.

<sup>24</sup> Naomi White, "Marking Absences: Holocaust testimony and history," in *The Oral History Reader*, eds. R. Perks and A. Thomson, (London & New York: Routledge, 1998), 172.

<sup>25</sup> Pamela Thoma, "Cultural Autobiography, Testimonial and Asian American Transnational Feminist Coalition in the Comfort Women of World War II Conference," in *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 21, no. 1/2, Asian American Women (2000), 35.

Watson<sup>27</sup> who highlight that testimonies become autobiographical forms that constitute strategic political moves for women, ethnic and immigrant authors who do not wish or are unable to write their lives according to culturally available scripts, which in turn become identity practices. Thoma goes on to highlight that the narratives of former comfort women share "a connection to a specific collectivity that has been or is oppressed, and is attempting to build support for its struggle,"<sup>28</sup> speaking to the similar stories of 200,000 women forced into being comfort women.

Mendoza argues that the Philippine comfort women movement employs discursive strategies that respond directly to the gender and race ideologies underlying imperial Japan's practice of military sexual slavery during the Pacific War.<sup>29</sup> Comfort station survivors, including *Lola* Rosa, came forward and employed these same discursive strategies. Indeed, it is not uncommon for the word *lola* to figure so prominently in the names of comfort women organizations in the Philippines. The Filipino public insistence of the survivors' status as grandmothers is both social convention and tradition as well as a strategy to overcome the stigma of rape and prostitution. For Mendoza, it is this particular strategy, of focusing on women, family and children, that actually replaces one type of value with another, reinscribing the distinction between worthy and unworthy women, of willing prostitutes versus coerced girls and young women. This implies that the victims, the women, could really have been both mothers and grandmothers, and thus, the criminal nature of the comfort station system is

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<sup>26</sup> Caren Kaplan, "Resisting Autobiography: Out-law Genres and Transnational Feminist Subjects," in *Colonizing the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography*, ed. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992).

<sup>27</sup> Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Getting A Life: Everyday Uses of Autobiography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

<sup>28</sup> Thoma, 36.

<sup>29</sup> Katharina Mendoza, "Freeing the Slaves of Destiny: The *Lolas* of the Filipino Comfort Women Movement," in *Cultural Dynamics* 15, no. 3 (2003).

even more criminalized because it poses a threat against the traditional and valuable family unit.

While the human descriptions of particular events are important, the personal meaning of the events provides us with deep stories of individual and collective memory. The words of witnesses who lived through oppression encourage us to ask questions about both the past and the present and to find meaning in personal stories that nurture a non-official collective point of view. Testimony blends method and meaning and presents a counterpoint to the official narrative through the stories of these comfort women who had been traditionally invisible. In addition, I draw from debates on trauma memoirs and autobiographical outlaw genres, such as personal essays, poems and cinema, which suggest that autobiography is moving from a generally textual narrative form into a range that encompasses oral, textual, visual and performance practices that explore the challenge of identity and representation.

I interpret the studies of Chizuko, Kim, Mendoza, Thoma, Kaplan, Smith and Watson together with my own readings of the Filipino comfort women to justify the supposition that the testimonies of the Filipino *lolas* are a rich source from which to glean cultural understandings about post-war Filipino society. In order to show that the *lolas* are not marginalized victims, but are active agents instead, I attempt to illustrate how successfully the *lolas* have used various strategies to keep this issue at the forefront. To demonstrate and document these strategies, I examine their testimonies and other genres: legal proceedings, newspaper articles, rallies, protests, poetry, dance and language usage. While the term "strategy" necessarily connotes a thoroughly planned movement, I argue that whether this was a conscious or unconscious choice to use these genres, the



*lolas* effectively use these routes to raise awareness and to address the issue of sexual slavery despite their impoverished statuses. I highlight the growing need for outlaw genres to bridge the gap in a contemporary landscape where history needs to cross national, cultural and language barriers.

In Chapter One, I look at the context and the establishment of the comfort station system in the Philippines. Chapter Two looks at the official narratives about the former comfort women while Chapter Three examines different outlaw genres and how the *lolas* have expressed themselves and their cause. I conclude by analyzing how these sites or forms shed light on the nature of post-war Filipino society, in terms of nationalism, feminism and the gendered nature of Filipino politics.

The criminal natures of the comfort station system cannot be mitigated by the fact that several military histories attest to this wartime sexual exploitation of women. Rather, the extremities of the Japanese system must be thoroughly examined through a logical and non-biased investigation of the comfort women issue. I aim not just to provide an overview of the comfort women movement, but rather to complicate the history of post World War II Filipino society. Perhaps even more importantly, this research opens up new questions: What impact have the *lolas* had? How are they being recorded in history? How effective is their movement? What does this mean for the Philippines' relationship with Japan? The key to the answers to these questions lie in the assessment of what made it possible for such a system to actually operate and to be forgotten.

## CHAPTER ONE:

### THE JAPANESE COMFORT STATION SYSTEM IN THE PHILIPPINES

*I am his dinner  
Only fourteen  
No match for anybody's battle  
He, like a mad dog  
Moves to and fro  
Goes up and down  
Shouts-yell  
Moves about  
Till his penis melt  
In shame, I recoil  
And hide my face in the ground  
It is a night without name  
It is a night without image.<sup>1</sup>*

The extraordinary scale and brutality of the organized sexual violence committed by the Japanese Imperial Forces against women is a powerful example of Japan's nationalistic and patriarchal goal to liberate the rest of Asia from the traps of Western colonialism. Japan's military leaders sincerely believed that they were protecting the moral and physical character of their troops, and in turn, the Asian peoples as well, thinking that their conduct was extremely honorable.<sup>2</sup> The progression of sex into one of a source of brutality and oppression is truly significant, a misuse that morphs into an ideology of control. While there has been a heavy silence on the issue of comfort women

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<sup>1</sup> Ruth Elynia S. Mabanglo, "Balada ni Lola Amonita" cited in Nelia Sancho, ed. *War Crimes on Asian Women: Military Sexual Slavery by Japan During World War II – The Case of the Filipino Comfort Women Part II*, (Manila, Philippines: Asian Women Human Rights Council, 1998). Translated from: *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/ Iyong ang gabing walang larawan.*

<sup>2</sup> Andrew Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan*, (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 203.

from the age of World War II, there is an overwhelming need to understand the systematic infrastructure of comfort stations. The question of the abuse of comfort women must be examined ultimately within the context of the Japanese Imperial Empire and its militant expansion into Southeast Asia. The origins of the comfort station system and its establishment in the Philippines is yet another important facet of this issue and provides a glimpse into the intertwined ideologies of masculinity and militarism.

### SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AS PART OF THE WAR MACHINE

#### *A System of Licensed Prostitution*

The question of how and why the Japanese Imperial Army created a system of sexual servitude in its occupied areas during the course of the Asia-Pacific War deserves to be seen from a broader perspective than that of sheer wartime aggression. Administered prostitution dates back to the late sixteenth century, if not earlier in Japan.<sup>3</sup> From the beginning of the early modern period, usually dated from 1600 to 1868, the Tokugawa shogunate attempted to create segregated areas within cities for the sole use of prostitutes and brothels.<sup>4</sup> Prostitutes who had been living scattered around the urban centers of Edo [later, Tokyo], Kyoto and Osaka were gathered into one place, complacent with the need for maintaining social order within the samurai society. Even with the heralding of the Meiji Restoration, a time of economic success and liberal democracy for the rest of Japan, the licensed prostitution system continued and even flourished.<sup>5</sup> However, an infamous 1872 case, the *Maria Luz* Incident, which dealt with a case of trade of coolie laborers bound for Peru, brought global attention to the Japanese licensed

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<sup>3</sup> John Lie, "The State as Pimp: Prostitution and the Patriarchal State in Japan in the 1940s," in *The Sociological Quarterly* 38, no.2 (1997), 252.

<sup>4</sup> Sheldon Garon, "The World's Oldest Debate? Prostitution and the State in Imperial Japan," in *The American Historical Review*, 98 no.3 (1993) 712.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

prostitution system.<sup>6</sup> As a result, Official Order Number 295 of the Japanese government banned the trafficking of people, released prostitutes from former non-negotiable contracts and even settled their debts.<sup>7</sup>

Despite this initial ban however, it soon became apparent that this was not an attempt to abolish the licensed prostitution system altogether, with brothels only changing their names to 'houses of assignation or relaxation' and many prostitutes continuing their livelihood.<sup>8</sup> Even with the rise of movements to abolish prostitution and the enacting of laws to regulate it in 1900, prostitution continued to flourish. The ability of a prostitute to quit her livelihood was rendered even more difficult by the justified legal claims of loans advanced to them by brothel proprietors.<sup>9</sup> Regulation of the prostitutes themselves became the province of the central government in 1900, giving police extensive powers to arrest unlicensed prostitutes and order them to undergo medical examinations.<sup>10</sup> By 1916, the number of licensed prostitutes peaked at 54,049, and with geisha and barmaids, 1 out of approximately every 31 young women was working as a prostitute in 1925.<sup>11</sup>

Interestingly enough, despite calls for abolishing this system, the central government consistently cited two reasons for maintaining the licensed system – the regulation of public morals and public hygiene.<sup>12</sup> Likening the licensed prostitutes as a 'public latrine,' the central government believed that a tightly-regulated system would not only protect civil society morally and hygienically, but would also preserve 'daughters of

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<sup>6</sup> Yoshimi, Yoshiaki, *Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery in the Japanese Military*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 202.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 203.

<sup>10</sup> Garon, 712.

<sup>11</sup> Kusama Yasoo, *Tomoshihi no onna yami no onna* (1937), cited in Garon, 714.

<sup>12</sup> Garon, 721.

good families' from such behavior.<sup>13</sup> In another twist, the central government also applauded the licensed prostitute as a paradoxically asexual daughter who honored the Japanese tradition of filial piety, stemming from "a lofty desire to help her poor parents or relations; and when she forsakes the life [of a prostitute], by good conduct, she is readmitted to society."<sup>14</sup>

With the growth of the Japanese empire, the licensed prostitution system was transplanted even across seas to Taiwan and Korea, to leased territories in Kwantung and even in mandated territories in the South Seas.<sup>15</sup> In 1916, the 'Laws Regulating Houses of Assignment and Prostitutes' nationalized and consolidated prostitution throughout Korea, with Korean women soon being made into prostitutes themselves through a system of indentured slavery.<sup>16</sup> While there are many similarities between prostitutes in Japan and Korea, there were stark differences between the regulations that protected them. For example, it was illegal to employ Japanese women under eighteen to work as prostitutes, whereas the Korean minimum age requirement was seventeen.<sup>17</sup> In addition, Korean prostitutes were "isolated by language and literacy as well [and] in reality, their situation was as if there was no such legal freedom."<sup>18</sup>

Furthermore, at the same time that the Taishō democracy movement was expanding throughout the country, there was a widespread movement to bring

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> *The Daily News* (London) (July 2, 1896): 7; Cited in Garon, 723.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Yamashita Yong-e, "Chosen ni okeru koshosei no jissai," in Yun Jung-ok et al., *Chosenjin josei ga mita "ianfu mondai,"* (Tokyo: San'ichi shobo, 1992): 147-154; Cited by Yoshimi, 203.

<sup>17</sup> Chin Sung Chung, "Korean Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan," in Keith Howard, ed. *True Stories of the Korean Comfort Women*, (New York: Cassell, 1995), 17.

<sup>18</sup> Song Yon-ok, "Nihon no shokuminchi shihai to kokkateki kanri baishun," *Chosenshi kenkyukai ronbunshu* 32 (October 1994): 41; Cited by Yoshimi, 203.

prostitution, once a luxurious commodity, within the reach of lower classes. Indeed, a letter to the editor of a local Japanese newspaper argued this very point, stating that:

Those of the middle class and above can enjoy themselves with geisha (even without brothels) and can even do it easily every night. But lower-class laborers can't even enjoy themselves [with geisha] once in ten years. Out of sympathy with them, I support the building of brothels.<sup>19</sup>

### ***Japanese Expansionism and Militarism & the Greater Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere***

The systematic exploitation of women all over the Japanese Empire as comfort women serve as an adjunct to the phase of Japanese expansionism, particularly after the Fifteen Years' War, during 1931-1945. Japan's initial military and industrial buildup of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, also known as the Meiji Restoration, had been stimulated by the campaign to abolish the five-power unequal treaties that had followed those that had been imposed onto China.<sup>20</sup> An earlier phase of Japanese expansionism, at the turn of the century, had led to the acquisition of Taiwan (Formosa), Korea (Chōsen) and southern Sakhalin (Karafuto) as well as a League of Nations' mandated territory in Micronesia.<sup>21</sup> In 1904, the national victory in the Russo-Japanese war, the first war in which an Asian power successfully took on a Western one, resulted in a strategic foothold in Manchuria, China.<sup>22</sup>

Unlike other authoritarian regimes, Japan's military power suffered very slightly during World War I and during the years 1910-1933, Japan experienced a twelve-fold

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<sup>19</sup> Shigematsu Masashi, "Kogai kaihatsu ronso to shisei," *Nihonshi kenkyu* 359 (July 1992): 10; Cited in Yoshimi, 205.

<sup>20</sup> Gordon, 204.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 187-192.

<sup>22</sup> George Hicks, *The Comfort Women: Japan's Brutal Regime of Enforced Prostitution in the Second World War*, (New York: W.W Norton & Company, 1994), 36.

increase in manufacturing and a three-fold increase in the production of raw materials.<sup>23</sup> Most importantly, this economic success brought along with it an unshakeable belief that the modern economy needed to be spearheaded by the state. In Japan, the government fostered the emergence of huge business conglomerates, known as the *zaibatsu*, of which Mitsui and Mitsubishi were the largest private economic empires in the world, comparable to today's Wal-Mart.<sup>24</sup> At the same time, suffrage was expanding in 1925 to all males over twenty-five, increasing the electorate from around 3 million to 12.5 million.<sup>25</sup> However, even with this democratic measure and economic success, laws were enacted to harshly punish participants in organizations advocating a change in the political system or in the abolition of private property, mostly leftist-oriented parties such as the Japanese Communist Party, founded in 1922.<sup>26</sup>

However, with trade barriers, surging unemployment and the cataclysmic Great Depression of 1929, came calls for stronger leadership, eagerly provided by military leaders. The economic dangers facing Japan made the solutions offered by the military incredibly attractive and indeed, the seizure of Manchuria and the creation of the puppet state of Manchukuo in 1931 was portrayed as an emergency measure to protect Japanese treaty rights, leading eventually to Japan's expulsion from the League of Nations.<sup>27</sup> In Japan, the success of Manchuria generated Right-wing radicalism and expansionism.<sup>28</sup> New patriotic societies professed dedication and lifelong devotion to the emperor and nation, using mob violence to intimidate and assassinate leading members of political

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<sup>23</sup> Robert Tignor et al., eds. *Worlds Together: Worlds Apart – A History of the Modern World from the Mongol Empire to the Present* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002): 370.

<sup>24</sup> Gordon, 234.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Gordon, 190.

<sup>28</sup> Hicks, 39.

parties.<sup>29</sup> Military control at the grassroots level was exercised through a network of local bodies called 'neighborhood associations', and indeed, indoctrination through the media and the education system was regulated and intensified.<sup>30</sup> Figure 1 illustrates Japan's Empire in Asia, through a series of acquisitions and occupations from 1895 through to 1933.

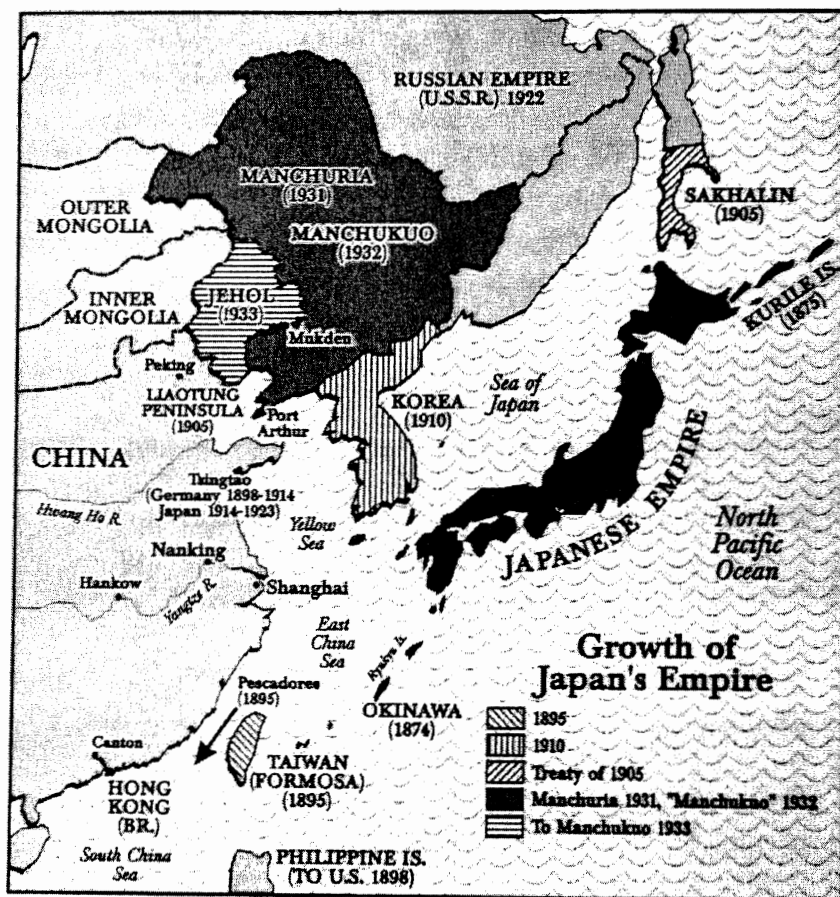


Figure 1: Growth of the Japanese Empire 1895-1933. Reprinted from Anne Booth, "Did It Really Help to be a Japanese Colony? East Asian Economic Performance in Historical Perspective," in *JapanFocus*, retrieved from <http://japanfocus.org/>

After concluding a pact with Germany in 1940, the Japanese Imperial Army went on to occupy French Indochina in 1941 and made demands on the Dutch East Indies for

<sup>29</sup> James L. Huffman, *Modern Japan: A History in Documents*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 134.

<sup>30</sup> Hicks, 13.



oil and rubber.<sup>31</sup> With the assumption of power by a group of military leaders, led by General Tojo Hiddeki, the Japanese war-machine concentrated on the United States' competing claims in the Pacific region, launching a full-scale surprise air attack on the American naval base at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.<sup>32</sup> In the months after Pearl Harbor, however, Japan's expansionism shifted into high gear, invading the Philippines, the Dutch East Indies, Hong-Kong, Singapore, Malaya and Burma as well as threatening the British in India.<sup>33</sup> Figure 2 is a map showing Japanese occupied territories in 1942-1943.

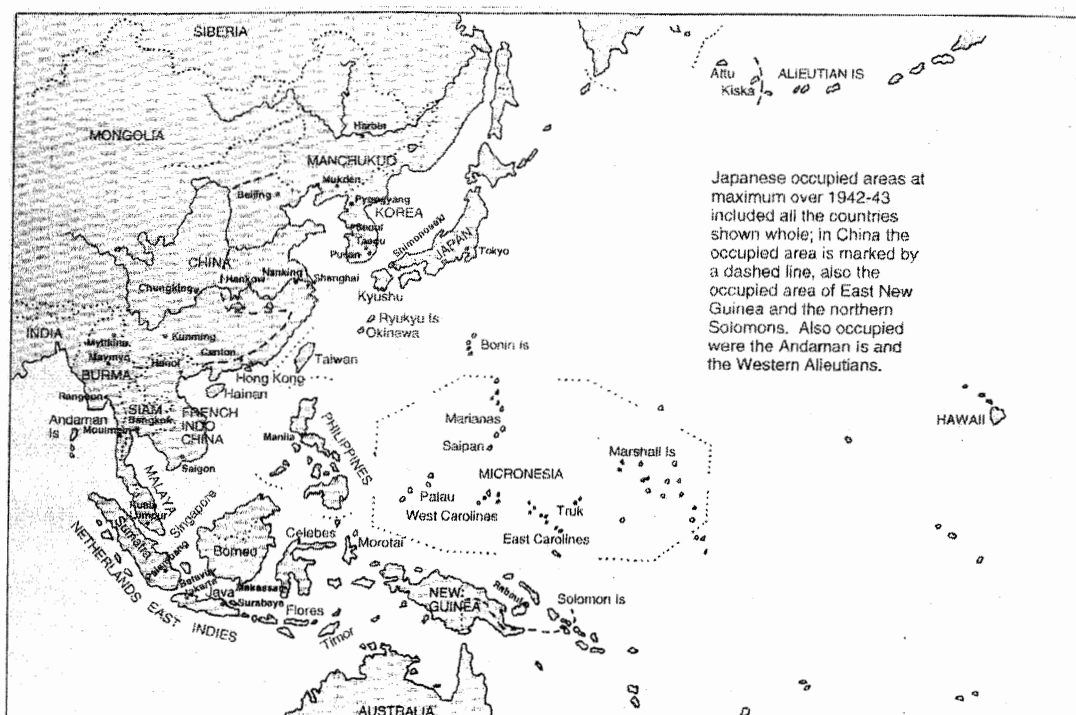


Figure 2: Japanese occupied areas by 1942-43. Reprinted from Yoshimi, Yoshiaki, *Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery in the Japanese Military*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), inset.

In a gesture towards anti-colonialism, Japan sponsored nominally independent states in Burma, Thailand and the Philippines, while Japanese occupying forces ruled

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Gordon, 210.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 211.

Indochina and Indonesia more directly.<sup>34</sup> Japan christened its new empire the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, dressing its aggression in the garb of anti-colonial, pan-Asianism. In practice, however, this scheme thinly veiled the Japanese demand for natural resources and labor to serve the growing war-machine. In addition, the Japanese developed their own myth of Japanese racial purity and supremacy (the Yamato race), comparable to the German Aryan myth.<sup>35</sup> Fukuzawa Yukichi, founder of Keio University and celebrated intellectual, highlighted this need for supremacy:

Although our country is situated at the eastern edge of Asia, the spirit of our people has already abandoned Asia's hidebound ways and embraced Western civilization. We have here two unfortunate neighbor countries – China and Korea. Although their people in former times shared with Japan a similar nurturing in Asian-type doctrines and customs, now either because of some difference in race or because of some difference of mode within that inherited education... these do not comprehend the path of national reform... In framing present policies, we have no leisure to await their awakening and together revive Asia... We cannot treat them with special consideration just because they are our neighbors... we must treat them as Westerners do.<sup>36</sup>

What followed from this rationale was the imposition of a ruthless military regime on Korea, depriving Korean citizens of even limited civil rights, inducing the general adoption of Japanese names.<sup>37</sup> In addition, conscription into mines and factories was introduced in 1942, and thousands of Korean men left for war work in Japanese

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 203.

<sup>36</sup> Fukuzawa Yukichi, "Abandoning Asia and Joining Europe" (1885), cited by Takeuchi Yoshimi (1963); Cited by Hicks, 11.

<sup>37</sup> Keith Pratt, *Everlasting Flower*, (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2006), 225-226.

industries.<sup>38</sup> The general Japanese concept of Greater East Asia was one in which Japan herself stood forth as the leader in all walks of life – military, political, economic and cultural.<sup>39</sup> Colonial government policies aimed at incorporating Asian peoples within a Japanese colonial identity. At the same time, complete assimilation was the ultimate aim, evidenced by the mass distribution of four-character slogans depicting, ‘Japan and Korea of common ancestry’, ‘Korea and Japan indissoluble’ and ‘All viewed with even benevolence’.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, the Japanese state religion, Shinto, was widely promoted throughout Japan’s territories, emphasizing loyalty, mutual devotion and solidarity with the Imperial State, particularly through endurance and discipline. In 1925, for example, a national Shinto shrine, Chōsen Jingu, was built in Seoul, Korea, a decision made by the Japanese central government.<sup>41</sup>

### ***Relations with the Philippines***

Philippine-Japanese relations prior to the 1942 invasion was based rather loosely on the interchange of culture and commerce. During the 1930s, the pace of contact between the Philippines and Japan quickened considerably, particularly after the United States’ promise of independence to the Philippines embodied in the Tydings McDuffie Act of 1934 and of Japan’s general interest in the South East Asia region. Many manifestations of such attempts at cultural understanding took the form of Philippine-Japanese university student exchanges, the growth of the Philippine Society of Japan and ultimately, professorial exchanges from each of the respective countries.<sup>42</sup> While each of

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 226.

<sup>39</sup> F.C Jones, *Japan’s New Order in East Asia* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), 333.

<sup>40</sup> Hicks, 15.

<sup>41</sup> Pratt, 223.

<sup>42</sup> Grant K. Goodman, “Philippine-Japanese Professorial Exchanges in the 1930s” in the *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 9, No. 2 (1968): 229-240; Cited in Wolf Mendl, *Japan and Southeast Asia, Volume I – From the Meiji Restoration to 1945*, (London and New York: Routledge Press, 2001): 79.

these instances were limited in scope and nature, they still contributed to meaningful interchanges between the two countries, albeit at a heralded though unofficial level. Perhaps most importantly, the 1930s were a time of intense activity for both independence-minded Filipinos and expansion-oriented Japanese, and as such, the willingness of private citizens and educational institutions to know more about the other was even stimulated and encouraged by respective governments.

Another key feature of the Philippine-Japanese relationship was the establishment and growth of a Japanese colony in Davao, a southern-most Filipino island, from 1904-1941. Indeed, the number of Japanese settlers in these southern islands numbered about 10,000 in the first part of the seventeenth century.<sup>43</sup> The Spanish conquest of Manila in 1571 heralded the beginning of Japanese immigration, with some 3000 Japanese settlers estimated to be living in Manila just fifty years later.<sup>44</sup> Towards the later years of the Spanish rule, Japan made several proposals to purchase the Philippines, with a considerable number of instances wherein Japan had shown a great deal of interest from 1894-1898 in acquiring the archipelago through purchase or outright annexation.<sup>45</sup>

Despite this failure and the steady American occupation of the Philippines, prior to the outbreak of World War I, there were approximately 60 Japanese corporations formed under existing Philippine laws. According to a 1934 official report, these Japanese-controlled corporations held about 25,086 hectares of agricultural lands, 19,072 hectares of which were leased from private individuals, 4,716 purchased from the

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<sup>43</sup> Serafin D. Quiason, "The Japanese Colony in Davao, 1904-1941" in the *Philippine Social Sciences and Humanities Review* Volume 23, Number 2, 4 (June/ December 1958): 215-230; Cited in Wolf Mendl, *Japan and Southeast Asia, Volume I – From the Meiji Restoration to 1945*, (London and New York: Routledge Press, 2001): 90.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

Philippine government and 1,298 hectares bought outright from private individuals.<sup>46</sup> Despite the surge of nationalistic feeling, however, "little Japan or Davaokuo"<sup>47</sup> continued to prosper, a well-organized Japanese community with various institutions set in place to perpetuate this feeling of community, such as the Davao Japanese Association, the Japanese primary schools, Japanese language schools, Japanese newspapers and even Davao Buddhist sects.

Accordingly, this Japanese mini-colony played a vital role in the economic development of Davao, and indeed, their influence was a way of maintaining Japanese aggression in South East Asia's economy. In the midst of prosperity which came from abaca, hemp and sugar-cane plantations, more and more Japanese had settled in Davao. In the period 1904-1941 alone, there were more Japanese immigrants that lived in the Philippines compared to any other country in the South East Asia region.<sup>48</sup> Of the entire Japanese population in the Philippines, numbering close to 19,000, almost three-fourths of these were concentrated in Davao.<sup>49</sup> The initial development of this region was attributed to this tiny colony, despite relative segregation and non-assimilation with the Filipino natives. There was a relative tendency not to intermarry with Filipino natives. Whether this was a personal choice or a social norm is depicted in the fact that there was no sizeable community of Japanese-Filipino *mestizos*.<sup>50</sup> As such, the colony tended towards adhering to Japanese customs and traditions, dress, movement and language, much to the Filipino natives' annoyance. At the same time, however, many felt that:

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 93.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Jones, 358.

<sup>50</sup> Mestizo is defined as "half-blood" in Tagalog, similar to Spanish term.

Modern Davao is primarily a Japanese achievement. In this great frontier region, the Japanese have caught the torch of progress from the hands of the American pioneers. If they have created a little "Japan" in Mindanao, they have done it by means within the law and by methods that have benefited all settlers in the region.<sup>51</sup>

## **"MILITARY COMFORT WOMEN CORPS"**

### ***The Establishment of the Comfort Station System***

Exactly when the Japanese Imperial Army systematically established military brothels is unknown, primarily because of the vast number of relevant official documents that were destroyed immediately after Japan announced its surrender in 1945.<sup>52</sup> While Imperial Japan had a system of licensed prostitution that was even transplanted to Korea, most evidence strongly suggests that the first Japanese military brothels were set up for the Japanese Navy in Shanghai, during the Shanghai Incident of 1932.<sup>53</sup> In official documents dating from 1938, the Consulate General of Shanghai stated that "with the great increase in military personnel stationed in the area [China] due to the sudden outbreak of the Shanghai Incident, the navy established naval comfort stations as a means to aid in supporting the comfort of those troops, and those stations have continued to operate up to the present."<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Joseph Ralston Hayden, "China, Japan and the Philippines," in *Foreign Affairs* Volume II (July 1933), 714.

<sup>52</sup> Chung, 11.

<sup>53</sup> Yuki Tanaka, *Japan's Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery and Prostitution during World War II and the US Occupation*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2002): 32.

<sup>54</sup> "Showa jūsanennjū ni okeru zairyu hojin no tokushu fujo no jokyo oyobi sono torishimari narabi ni sokai tokyoku shisho torishimari jokyo" [In regard to the current state of regulations on private prostitution in the concession and the regulation of special prostitutes reserved for Japanese citizens in Shanghai during 1938], cited in Yoshimi, *shiryoshu*, 184; Cited in Yoshimi, 44.

The naval comfort stations established at this time were large enough to occupy several buildings. Indeed, by 1936, there were ten restaurants employing comfort women, of which seven were reserved exclusively for naval personnel.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, the comfort women's medical examinations were performed twice a week by medical specialists in the presence of naval personnel or police officers from the consulate, similar to the government's earlier stance on examining licensed prostitutes for venereal disease.<sup>56</sup> Additionally, in cooperation with the navy, regulations were strictly enforced to prevent sexually transmitted diseases, exemplified by the continuous production of rubber condoms, branded "Assault No.1," despite the low supply of rubber.<sup>57</sup> The Japanese Army soon followed suit, setting up their own brothels in the same city in March 1932. Figure 3 is a map of major military brothels set up by the Japanese Army.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 92.

<sup>56</sup> Garon, 721.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.



Figure 3: Map of Major Military Brothels set up during the Asia Pacific War 1939-1945. Reprinted from *Japan Times*, August 5, 1992.

### *The Rationale Behind the Stations – Prevention of Rape*

Interestingly enough, the purpose explicitly given in the war memoirs of several leading officers was the prevention of mass rape, showing sensitivity to global attention.<sup>58</sup> Okamura Yasuji, Vice Chief of Staff of the Shanghai Expeditionary Force, recalled how acts of rape were being committed by Japanese military personnel in Shanghai, forcing him to call on Nagasaki Prefecture's governor to create a "military comfort women corps".<sup>59</sup> The key point here, and probably the most ironic, is that the justification for comfort women was the prevention of rape. Indelibly marked on the minds of Japanese leaders was the negative international coverage of the 1937 Nanjing

<sup>58</sup> Lie, 253-254.

<sup>59</sup> Inaba Masao, ed., *Okamura Yasuji taisho shiryō: senjo kaisōhen* (Tokyo: Hara Shobo, 1970): 302; Cited in Yoshimi, 45.



Massacre when Japanese soldiers raped and assaulted Chinese women.<sup>60</sup> Okabe Nasosaburo, Senior Staff officer in the Shanghai Expeditionary Force, Okamura's peer, wrote the following entry into his diary:

Recently, soldiers have been prowling around everywhere looking for women, and I often heard obscene stories [of their behavior]. As long as conditions are peaceful and the army is not engaged in fighting, these incidents 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.<sup>61</sup>

In fact, a key feature of the Japanese invasion of the Philippines was the high incidence of rape, although a rather lame excuse was given for these rapes, primarily "because the women are more appealing to Japanese."<sup>62</sup> At the same time, even throughout the course of World War II, there were no occupied areas where rapes completely stopped with the introduction of the comfort station system. Okamura himself, while pushing the idea of comfort stations, noted that:

At present, almost all units [of the 11<sup>th</sup> Army in Wusan, China] are accompanied by comfort women corps. It has reached the point where [these women] are just one more line of communication corps. But even though such units as the 6<sup>th</sup> Division march with a comfort women corps, there is no end to the rapes.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Okabe Nasosaburo, *Okabe Yasuji taisho no nikki*, (Tokyo: Chikuma shobo, 1989): 420-423; Cited in Yoshimi, 45.

<sup>62</sup> Kinbara Setsuzo, "Rikugunsho gyomu nisshi tekiroku," entry for 9 May 1942 *Boeicho boei kenkyujo toshokan*; Cited in Yoshimi Yoshiaki, *Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery in the Japanese Military During World War II*, trans. Suzanne O'Brien, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995): 80.

<sup>63</sup> Yoshimi, *shiryoshu*, 228-232; Cited in Yoshimi, 66.

Rape committed in combat areas or occupied territories were “punishable by at least seven years of penal servitude and at most, life imprisonment when women were raped while the crime of looting is being committed,”<sup>64</sup> according to Paragraph Two of Article 86 of the Army Penal Code. Here, I must emphasize that the prosecution of rape could only occur if and when the “crime” of looting had occurred, this neglect only being compensated for later in February 1942, when the crime of rape became a separate article of the penal code itself. Furthermore, laws were commonly used in either delaying prosecution or bringing an end to it altogether.

The question of why Japanese women themselves were not conscripted as prostitutes lays in the nationalist and patriarchal ideology of the Japanese state. Japanese proponents of the licensed prostitution system had earlier warned that repressing the sexual desires of men would lead to rape and other sex crimes,<sup>65</sup> but at the same time, encouraged a pro-natal policy, which required Japanese women to bear ‘pure’ Japanese offspring.<sup>66</sup> As such, ‘ordinary’ Japanese women could not serve men as prostitutes. By organizing divisions of Korean and other Asian ‘comfort women’ for the sexual gratification of military officers and soldiers, the central government utilized both an ideology of patriarchy and nationalism in its pursuit of military goal.

### *The Rationale Behind the Stations – Prevention of Venereal Diseases*

Another key rationale behind the establishment of comfort stations was the prevention of the spread of venereal diseases. The crippling of whole battalions by venereal disease was not unknown, and in the period 1918-1922, during the Siberian Intervention against the revolution in Russia, the equivalent of one division of seven was

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<sup>64</sup> Cited in Yoshimi, 66.

<sup>65</sup> Garon, 721.

<sup>66</sup> Lie, 254.

incapacitated by such diseases.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, hospitalization and recovery periods were extremely lengthy and costly for the military, and according to the North China Area Army's "Procedures for the Hygiene Education of Key Officers," published in 1940, the average number of days required for recovery from gonorrhea was ninety-one, from soft chancres fifty-eight, from syphilis seventy-six and from lymphogranuloma inguinale 1,012.<sup>68</sup> As such, special attention was ensuring that "fighting power" was not hindered by such diseases. Indeed, the Japanese Army forbade troops to use civilian brothels for fear of venereal disease, and officially mandated the creation of the comfort stations, managed by army personnel, to be a suitable alternative. To further regulate these stations, the Japanese Army ordered military doctors to conduct regular examinations of comfort women for venereal disease and regulated soldiers on such preventative measures as condoms. One such important document stated that:

Social diseases [venereal disease] damage the body, destroy the family and ruin the country... [these diseases] are contracted primarily through sexual intercourse. Almost all *geigi/ shogi* [comfort women] are infected. Therefore, the following precautions should always be practiced when having sexual intercourse... (1) Don't have sexual intercourse after drinking alcohol; (2) Check the [woman's] health papers [proving that she had been examined by a military doctor; (3) Make the woman wash before sexual intercourse; (4) Always use a sack [condom]; (5) Use Secret Star Cream [a disinfecting lubricant to be used after intercourse]... (6) Promptly urinate or wash...<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Hicks, 7.

<sup>68</sup> Yoshimi, *shiryoshu*, 228-232; Cited in Yoshimi 69.

<sup>69</sup> "Procedures for the Hygiene Education of Key Officers – Section on Prevention of Social Diseases" cited in Yoshimi, *shiryoshu*, 235; Cited in Yoshimi, 70.

Here, the comfort women themselves were considered to be agents of infection, and with the high spread of venereal disease even in the comfort stations, women were automatically blamed for such high counts. For example, First Lieutenant and military doctor Hayao Torao asserted that:

While the military comfort stations were set up in order to prevent the contraction of sexually transmitted diseases from Chinese people, and women from the home islands and Korea were brought over as prostitutes, it's ironic that those women ended up spreading sexually transmitted diseases.<sup>70</sup>

Even with the vigilant examination of comfort women, medical examinations of soldiers and officers were not conducted regularly. Furthermore, contracting such a disease was considered a dishonor and thus, many of those afflicted would try to conceal their disease, indicating that the military themselves were often the sources of infection. The number of army personnel officially documented that had contracted sexually transmitted diseases were as follows: 11,983 in 1942, 12,557 in 1943 and 12,587 in 1944.<sup>71</sup> As such, not only were military comfort stations rendered ineffective in preventing the spread of diseases, but actually facilitated their spread even further.

### ***The Rationale Behind The Stations – Provision of Comfort***

Perhaps the most controversial rationale behind the establishment of the comfort stations is found in its name, as a provider of 'comfort'. In comparison to the European and American armies during the World War, the Japanese Army did not grant leave, and subjected their soldiers to strict supervision and arbitrary discipline by their commanding officers, resulting in much discontent and unruly behavior. This, however, did not escape

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Rikuo jietai eisei gakko, ed., *Daitoa senso rikugune eiseishi*, Volume I (Tokyo: Rikuo jietai eisei gakko [Ground Self-Defense Force Medical School, 1971): 605-607; Cited in Yoshimi, 72.

the attention of the Japanese Army. The second article of the comfort station regulations of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Independent Mountain Artillery Regiment directly stated that:

The purpose of the establishment of special comfort stations is to pacify and moderate the troops' brutal temperament and to aid in the promotion of military discipline. Therefore, it is necessary to control strictly behavior that degenerates into encouragement or promotion [of this behavior].<sup>72</sup>

Military doctors had long since suggested that troops be provided with opportunities for wholesome comfort and entertainment facilities that were distinct entities from the comfort stations.<sup>73</sup> These facilities would be equipped with leisure facilities for music, libraries, movies and sports. Interestingly enough, the way the Japanese army did not implement this idea and instead, chose to control this brutal temperament through offering opportunities for sexual intercourse at the comfort stations. Accordingly, the number of military comfort stations kept increasing in order to maintain both troop morale and cohesion as a fighting unit. The comfort station became known as the "sole pleasure" a soldier would have in the quagmire of the battlefield.<sup>74</sup> Tragically, the only real sense of fulfillment and release of battle stress occurred in the comfort stations. One soldier recounted his experiences:

[After returning from a long battle, the soldiers] were jumping for joy and headed immediately over [to the comfort station]... [lining] up with numbers in hand... [wanting] to be freed from the stress of the singular experience of having walked the line between life and death... [The soldiers] stood there waiting, with their

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<sup>72</sup> Morikawa butai (Dokuritsu san hohei daisan rentai), "Morikawa butai tokushu ian gyomu ni kansuru kitei," dated November 14, 1939, in *Jinchu nisshi* (November 1939), Dokuritsu san hohei dai 3 rentai; Cited in Yoshimi 73.

<sup>73</sup> Hicks, 68.

<sup>74</sup> Hicks, 73.

pants unbuttoned, fumbling with loincloths... and fidgeting – is it my turn yet? Is it my turn yet? [The soldiers] thought there was no sense of fulfillment that burned as intensely as this.<sup>75</sup>

## COMFORT STATIONS IN THE PHILIPPINES

### *Official Reports on the Establishment of Comfort Stations*

According to official documents, in 1943, in Manila alone, there were seventeen comfort stations for rank-and-file soldiers, with 1,064 comfort women. In addition, there were four officer's clubs with more than 120 women.<sup>76</sup> While there is no hint as to the nationality of these women, an educated guess would probably rank Filipino women as at least 50-75% of the comfort women that served rank-and-file soldiers. Other locations were scattered throughout the Philippines: Iloilo, Butsuan, Cagayan de Oro, Masbate, Ormoc and Tacloban.<sup>77</sup> While none of the official documents disclose much else about these women, at the Iloilo comfort stations, there were several girls aged between 16 and 20 years old.<sup>78</sup> Figure 4 is a map showing known comfort stations in the Philippines.

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<sup>75</sup> Koromo dai 3040 butai kinen jigyo jikko iinkai, ed., *Kodo: hokushi haken koromo dai 3040 butai no sokuseki* (Tokyo: Koromo dai 3040 butai kinen jigyo jikko iinkai, 1977): 210-211; Cited in Yoshimi, 74.

<sup>76</sup> Sancho, 35.

<sup>77</sup> Yoshimi Yoshiaki, ed. *Guan Ianfu Shiryo-shu*, (Tokyo: Otsuki Shoten, 1992): Documents 67-74.

<sup>78</sup> Hicks, 124-125.

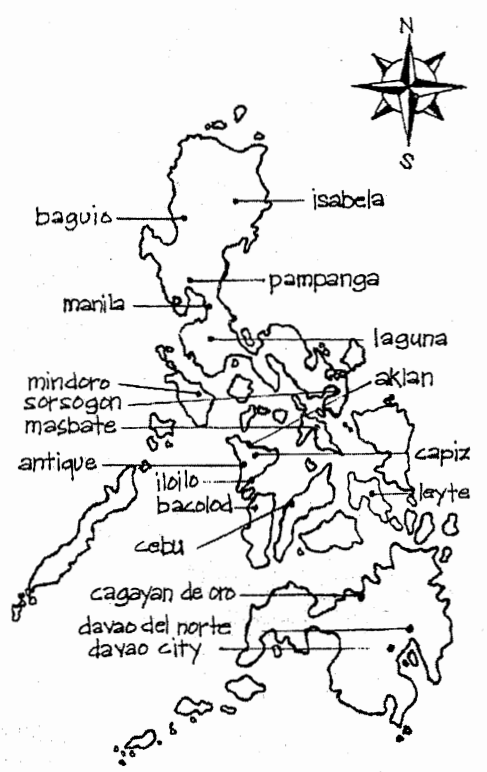
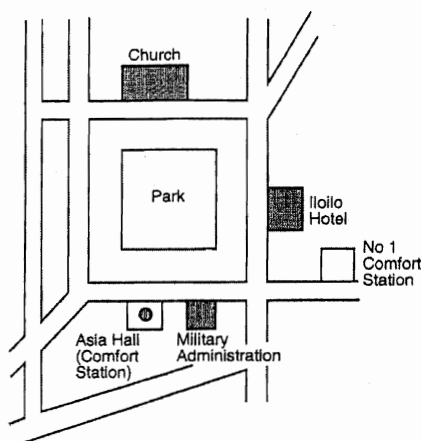


Figure 4: Known comfort stations in the Philippines. Reprinted from Nelia Sancho, ed. *War Crimes on Asian Women: Military Sexual Slavery by Japan During World War II – The Case of the Filipino Comfort Women Part II*, (Manila, Philippines: Asian Women Human Rights Council, 1998), 16.

A *kempitai* [Japanese medical report] states that at the Tacloban comfort station, charges were broken down as follows: one and a half pesos for privates, two peso for paramilitary and NCOS, three pesos for officers, all these charges by the hour.<sup>79</sup> However, an entire night's stay would cost five pesos. In Iloilo, there were two main comfort stations, called No.1 Station and Asia Hall, with the latter being designed for higher-class clientele. Figure 5 is a map of the comfort stations in Iloilo City. Fifty years later, investigators would find aged residents who recalled how truckloads of women were brought to what is now known as the Paris Hotel, adjacent to both No.1 Station and

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

Asia Hall. While no women have come forward with their testimonies from this area, the residents also remembered vague references to all these women being killed en masse.<sup>80</sup>



Comfort stations and surrounding area in Iloilo, Panay Island, Philippines.

Figure 5: Map of Iloilo City in 1942-43. Reprinted from George Hicks, *The Comfort Women: Japan's Brutal Regime of Enforced Prostitution in the Second World War*, (New York: W.W Norton & Company, 1994), 101.

Cecile Okubo Afable, editor and writer for the *Baguio Midland Courier*, reiterated the story of how her childhood home was seized by the Japanese Army to serve as a comfort station, after executing her father, a prominent Japanese businessman in the long-standing Japanese-Filipino community.<sup>81</sup> Afable, however, had no recollection of what happened to the 100 comfort women at the house, only having heard that some had escaped and some had been killed to preserve secrecy. In Cebu, an application was made to the Cebu military administration for official recognition of a number of businesses to operate under the Panay Business Control Administration. One of these businesses was to be a combined bar, cinema, hotel and comfort station, catering solely to the needs of Japanese servicemen and paramilitary.<sup>82</sup> The financial aspect of this business was to be

<sup>80</sup> Hicks, 84-86.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 87.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 88.



controlled by the Control Association, a common Japanese practice, particularly during wartime.

A cursory glance of the comfort women issue shows that the basic humanitarian value of these girls and young women were neglected and even blatantly ignored by the imposition of military sexual servitude. On closer examination, however, it is apparent that the way sex was used and abused to maintain military organization was ultimately about control. The growth of Japanese expansionism and militarism had direct consequences for both its Davao colony and for the 1942 invasion of the Philippines. Here, the conquest of the Filipinos, symbolically charged through the brutal violence towards and humiliation of these comfort women, was a military tactic of the Japanese Imperial Army and reminiscent of the Japanese system of licensed prostitution.

## CHAPTER TWO:

### OFFICIAL NARRATIVES OF PHILIPPINE HISTORY

*Narration is a manner of speaking as universal as language itself, and narrative is a mode of verbal representation so seemingly natural to human consciousness that to suggest that it is a problem might well appear pedantic. But it is precisely because the narrative mode of representation is so natural to human consciousness, so much an aspect of everyday speech and ordinary discourse, that its use in any field of study aspiring to the status of a science must be suspect.<sup>1</sup>*

Hayden White's profoundly influential discussion on the use of narrative has paved the way for how historical discourse and historiography have been both formed and conceptualized. At the same time, interest in history and memory has also ignited discussions of narrative use, critical to the methodological and epistemological concerns of historians interested in history and memory within the context of state power and legitimacy.

The existence of comfort women in the Philippines was described more as an urban legend rather than established fact. For the most part, the Japanese occupation of the Philippines was seen as a period of extreme suppression and of mass wanton rape, but not as a systematic process of government-sanctioned sexual slavery. In this chapter, I examine the official Philippine narrative of World War II and the comfort women, as evidenced in history textbooks, in tribunals, trials and treaties to analyze why the comfort women issue was obfuscated in official narratives of the war.

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<sup>1</sup> Hayden White, "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality," in *Critical Inquiry* 7, (1980), 5-27.

## HISTORY TEXTBOOKS

The 1990s controversy surrounding the adoption of middle-school history textbooks in Japan raises the question of why textbooks should even be considered in the comfort women issue in the Philippines. Historians Laura Hein and Mark Selden tell us that "history and civics textbooks in most societies present an 'unofficial' story highlighting narratives that shape contemporary patriotism."<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, they state, that "because textbooks are carried into neighborhood schools and homes, and because, directly or indirectly, they carry the imprimatur of the state, they have enormous authority."<sup>3</sup> Textbooks, compiled, sponsored and written by the Philippine Department of Education for use in both public and private schools, represent another site in which national, collective history is represented. As such, they are important resources for examining how official history writing and memory are constructed and for identifying the nation's myths, which have been created and transmitted to younger generations. Furthermore, these textbooks rely not just on written narratives, but also on visual representations of monuments and war photographs to exhibits and set limits on the way in which past events can be remembered. These textbooks become an official, dominant national narrative and constitute parts of a nation's collective memory.

The state discourse on wartime history is represented by the vast number of history textbooks published in the Philippines during and after World War II<sup>4</sup>, which contain vast resources on the *Hukbahalap*, a guerilla organization dedicated to the

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<sup>2</sup> Laura Hein and Mark Selden, "The Lessons of War, Global Power and Social Change" in *Censoring History: Citizenship and Memory in Japan, Germany and the United States*, ed. Laura Hein and Mark Seldon (Armonk, NY: ME Sharpe 2000) p.3.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>4</sup> For example, the University of the Philippines uses two textbooks for its Philippine History courses, Teodoro A. Agoncillo, *A History of the Filipino People*, 8<sup>th</sup> Edition, (Quezon City, Philippines: GAROTECH Publishing, 1990) and Renato Constantino, *The Philippines: A Past Revisited*, (Manila, Philippines, 1975).

destruction of Japanese troops, and very few information on the rape of women and even that of the subjugation of girls and young women into prostitutes. Teodoro Agoncillo served as the Philippines' state historian from the end of the war till his death in the 1970s. Agoncillo's *History of the Filipino People*, first published in 1960, remains to date a popular standard textbook in many Filipino universities, and has trickled down into the elementary and secondary levels. In a lengthy discussion of the Japanese occupation, Agoncillo described the danger and brutality of troop presence in the Philippines, but yet glossed over the details of rapes, instead saying that, "in the early days of the occupation, the Japanese and the recruits under their rule raped many women."<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, Agoncillo provides six pages detailing the heroics of guerilla warfare, spearheaded by the Hukbahalap movement. In regards to the Hukbahalap's fierce battles and numerous atrocities, Agoncillo states that:

[while] some of the guerillas committed atrocious crimes, which under the circumstances, can be forgiven for in a tumultuous and abnormal period, there is hardly time to rationalize and to think clearly. Passion rules the moment and reason is pushed into the background... There was only one thought uppermost in their minds and it was to help drive away the invaders from Philippine soil.<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps what is most interesting about Agoncillo's account of this period of Philippine history is his frequent inferences and assumptions, such as on the Filipino-American "democratic partnership". He states quite frankly that "the Japanese knew that the Filipinos loved the Americans"<sup>7</sup> and used this knowledge to propagate the Filipinos'

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<sup>5</sup> Teodoro A. Agoncillo, *A History of the Filipino People*, 8<sup>th</sup> Edition, (Quezon City, Philippines: GAROTECH Publishing, 1990), 404.

<sup>6</sup> Agoncillo, 412-413.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 411.

affection for anything remotely American. He, however, does not provide any primary sources for this inference and blatantly ignores the very origins of the Hukbahalap guerilla movement as a means of ridding the Philippines of American influence prior to World War II.

Another one of Agoncillo's books deals primarily with the Japanese occupation of the Philippines. His *The Fateful Years: The Japanese Adventure into the Philippines (1941-1945)* is seminal in Philippine war histories. However, his approach is largely pro-American, lauding General MacArthur for his self-imposed exile and then his triumphant return and assignment as Supreme Commander of the Asian Pacific (SCAP) region. In addition, Agoncillo's focus is more on the highest levels of national government and politics, on foreign relations and commerce, on the biographies of prominent figures, on the colonial administrations, and on the broadest aspects of World War II. Indeed, local history, and gendered versions of it, has, for the most part, been neglected, even though Philippine society has remained overwhelmingly rural throughout its existence.

Gregorio Zaide, a contemporary of Agoncillo's, was also a prolific historian of Philippine national history. In *Philippine History for High Schools*, Zaide provides three chapters on Japanese-Filipino relations, World War II and its aftermath. While more in-depth than Agoncillo, Zaide also neglects the issue of comfort women, instead stating, "[the Japanese] looted the country, forced the men to work in Japanese military projects, raped the women, and massacred many innocent civilians."<sup>8</sup> In regards to guerilla warfare, Zaide states that "the resistance movement was a people's war against the invaders [including] teachers, students, priests, politicians, landlords, physicians, social

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<sup>8</sup> Gregorio Zaide, *Philippine History for High Schools*, (Quezon City, Philippines: All Nations Publishing Co., Inc., 1978), 337.

workers... and even women took part in it.”<sup>9</sup> It appears that Zaide was more impressed with the interconnections of different classes, rather than the multitude of women that were raped. Furthermore, Zaide highlights that collaboration with the Japanese was nothing more than a pretense for ‘all’ Filipinos, whose loyalties, at heart, lay with the American forces. In *Philippine History: Development of Our Nation*, Zaide continues this same prose, stating that “the occupation was bloodless,”<sup>10</sup> as his only reference to the local population during the war. In addition, Zaide states:

But despite their sufferings, our people remained true to freedom and democracy . They believed that some day the Americans would return and liberate them. In the midst of their hardships, they prayed God for the coming of new dawn – the dawn of their liberation.<sup>11</sup>

Interestingly enough, Agoncillo and Zaide both seem to be so pro-American in their evaluation of national history that only with the Americans’ help could the Philippines become a nation in its own right. Another distinction both Agoncillo and Zaide share is how the graphical representations of the war, in the form of pictures throughout their texts, concentrate on prominent figures in the war, including President Laurel, Prime Minister Tojo and General MacArthur. Indeed, the only picture that accurately shows the atrocities of the war is captioned, “American troops rescuing ravaged Manila.”<sup>12</sup> Here, the photos, or rather the lack of photos, provide a subtle hint as to the construction of national memory. It seems to create the impression that the Americans were the ‘good’ conquerors and that the Filipino people were hardly fazed by

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Gregorio Zaide, *Philippine History: Development of Our Nation*, (Manila, Philippines: Bookman Inc., 1961), 378.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 387.

<sup>12</sup> Zaide, 412.

Japanese occupation, despite the massive number of testimonies from former comfort women that declare the opposite.

Another important and more recent addition to Filipino historical education is *Asya: Noon, Ngayon at sa Hinaharap* (Asia: Then, Now and in the Future), a 316-page textbook used by second year high school students in public and private schools all over the country. In a highly publicized debate, over 430 errors were found in the textbook, full of factual, grammatical and conceptual errors.<sup>13</sup> Not surprisingly, the book hardly mentioned the stories of former comfort women. Despite pulling the textbook off the shelves, the Department of Education continues to approve history textbooks that blatantly ignore the issue of comfort women, or discusses them in a very marginalized manner. Indeed, the textbooks reviewed here illustrate effectively that the plight of the comfort women continues to be glossed over.

It is established fact in world history that wars of conquest are always brutal and cruel. This was true for the American conquest of the Philippines at the turn of the previous century and especially for the Japanese occupation during World War II. According to the history textbooks reviewed here, it seems the most glaring and insulting offense attributed to the Japanese soldiers was the public slapping of Filipinos who had failed to bow or do so properly in their presence. To date, the comfort women issue has not yet been allocated the emotional intensity as being slapped by the Japanese did.

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<sup>13</sup> See Donna Pazzibugan, "Corrections to erroneous textbook fill 100 pages," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 28 November 2004, A4; "Publisher, DepEd execs behind flawed book may face charges," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 16 December 2004, A4; "No People Power revolts happened in this textbook," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 24 November 2004, A1; "Authors in Denial, Stand by Error-filled History Textbook," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 21 November 2004, A1 and Inquirer News Service, "DepEd recalls 1M erroneous textbooks," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 15 December 2004, A11.

In this brief overview of Filipino history textbooks in connection with their treatment of references to the comfort women, it seems that the textbooks fail to give adequate attention to the economic, social and political interrelationships during the Japanese occupation of the Philippines. There is generally a lack of balance and frequent omissions in the presentation of the daily lives of people during the war, while the *Hukbahalap's* activities were given a disproportionate amount of space, without providing supporting background for its origins or its after-war activities. In the earlier books by Agoncillo and Zaide, undue emphasis is placed upon the United States' role as a liberator, and facts appear to have been selected so as to present a pro-American point of view without documentation or cited research.

The comfort women issue is a distinctive part of the Philippines' national memory, especially in regards to World War II. With this certain degree of ambivalence towards the comfort women issue in historical education, it symbolizes a gnawing reminder of Philippine history to address colonial violence and the construction of national memories of war.

### **TRIBUNALS, TRIALS AND TREATIES**

Whereas the comfort women issues has been systematically been neglected or ignored in most former colonies' national histories, the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (the IMTFE from hereon) is perhaps the most eloquent example of an official public history that ignored the question of mass rape. Interestingly, departing from past practice, the Allies chose not to restrict the term "war crime" solely to the violations of laws and usages of war (also known as offenses against civilian populations) and instead, highlighted the plotting and waging of an aggressive war as the "greatest"



crime in the world.<sup>14</sup> In addition, individuals, and not just states or governments, would be held accountable for their crimes.

Article 5 of the Tokyo Charter empowered the tribunal to try and punish Japanese charged with war crimes and also allowed it to exercise jurisdiction over so-called class B and C offenses, conventional war crimes or "violations of the laws or customs of war," and crimes against humanity or "inhuman acts committed before or during the war."<sup>15</sup> Article 13 dealt at length with the question of evidence. Similar to the Nuremberg Tribunal, the IMTFE recognized the unique character of war crimes trials, and consequently relaxed the ordinarily strict rules of evidence. As such, the IMTFE adopted and applied, "to the greatest possible extent expeditious and non-technical procedure and [admitted] any evidence which it [deemed] to have probative value,"<sup>16</sup> in other words, allowing that which appeared "genuine" to the IMTFE, a workable solution to the liberal scattering of witnesses and evidence throughout the region and the Japanese wholesale destruction of key documents.

Rape, however, was not explicitly enumerated as a war crime or a crime against humanity in the Tokyo Charter. The Charter only lists "murder, extermination, enslavement, deportation and other inhumane acts..."<sup>17</sup> as crimes against humanity. However, rape was in effect prosecuted as a war crime as several high-ranking officials were convicted for violations of the laws and customs of war, some of which included widespread rapes and sexual assaults.

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<sup>14</sup> Philip Piccigallo, *The Japanese on Trial: Allied War Crimes Operations in the East 1945-1951*, (Austin, TX and London: University of Texas Press, 1979): 9.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Charter of the International Military Tribunal for the Far East, *A Decade of American Foreign Policy: Basic Documents, 1941-49*, Prepared at the request of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1950).

All Japanese Class A war criminals were tried by the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (IMTFE) in Tokyo from 1946-1948. The prosecution team was made up of justices from eleven Allied nations: Australia, Canada, China, France, Great Britain, India, the Netherlands, New Zealand, the Philippines, the Soviet Union and the United States of America.<sup>18</sup> After analysis of an immense body of evidence, the indictment for the IMTFE describes as "violation[s] of recognized customs and conventions of war" the following offenses:

mass, murder, rape, pillage, brigandage, torture and other barbaric cruelties upon the helpless civilian population over-run countries. This indictment had a separate provision for subjecting civilians to "indignities", the major category in which rape and other sexual assaults against women have been traditionally included.<sup>19</sup>

A substantial portion of the Judgment (approximately 130 pages) dealt with conventional war crimes, and was underscored by several key factors. One of these was that of the 235,000 American and British POWs captured by German and Italian armies, only 4% died in captivity, whereas of the 132,000 captured by the Japanese, 27% died in captivity.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, while Japan had only signed and not ratified the 1929 Geneva Convention on the Protection of POWs, Japan had assured the Allies in 1942 of its application of its provisions.<sup>21</sup>

Though the IMTFE addressed some acts of sexual violence, the tribunal failed to adequately prosecute Japanese officials for its extensive system of sexual slavery, despite

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<sup>18</sup> See John W. Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York: New Press, 1999); Timothy Maga, *Judgment at Tokyo: The Japanese War Crimes Trials*. (Louisville, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2001); Richard H. Minear, *Victor's Justice: The Tokyo War Crimes Trial*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971) and Arnold Brackman, *The Other Nuremberg: the Untold Story of the Tokyo War Crimes Trial*. (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1987).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 27.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

ample evidence of this crime. One of the most critical facts made clear during the trials was that Japanese military officials were well aware of international laws that defined the forcible rounding up of women for the purpose of prostitution as a war crime. Another important point to consider is that a Japanese order during the war not to force women into prostitution was issued in regards to women of European descent, and not Asian.<sup>22</sup>

The Japanese war crimes trials in the Philippines also deserve some space in the question of its importance in the official narrative of World War II. However, any account of Filipino contribution to Japanese war crimes trials must stress foremost the Philippine's unique status as one that lacked national independence as an American colony. Until 1946, the United States influenced the procedure and machinery of the war crimes trials in the Philippines.<sup>23</sup> Paralleling the United States, Nuremburg and IMTFE, Philippine military courts defined war crimes just as broadly as those constituting crimes against peace (the waging of an aggressive war), humanity (offenses perpetrated against non-combatants) and finally, conventional war crimes (violations of laws and usages of war).<sup>24</sup>

Philippine military commissions heard a variety of trials covering a multiplicity of charges, frequently indicting Japanese for perpetrating the "mass murder of unarmed non-combatant" Philippine residents.<sup>25</sup> Of special note is a war crimes trial in Infancia, Quezon Province, Luzon, which tried fourteen former Japanese naval officers for the "murder, rape and deaths of Filipino and Chinese citizens,"<sup>26</sup> a trial that supposedly was the

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 45.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 185.

<sup>24</sup> Adamin A. Tallow, *Command Responsibility: Its Legal Impact*, (Manila, Philippines: ?, 1965), 374.

<sup>25</sup> *China Press*, January 23 and February 20, 1949.

<sup>26</sup> *China Press*, February 20, 1949; *New York Times*, February 19, 1949.

longest-running trial in the Philippines at 113 days! Despite criticism of the procedural aspect of military-supervised war crimes trials, final statistics for trials held in the Philippines are as follows:

<i>Type</i>	<i>Numbers</i>	<i>Percentages</i>
Cases	72	-
Defendants Involved	169	-
Convictions	133	78.7%
Acquittals	11	6.5%
Cases Dismissed/ Trials Adjourned/ Sentences not approved	25	14.8%
Death Sentences	17	12.8%
Life Sentences	87	65.8%
Released due to Insufficient Evidence	182	-

**Table 1: Results of War Crimes Trials in the Philippines.** As reported in Hōmu Daijan Kanbo Shiho Hosei Chosabu, *Senso hanzai saiban gaishi yo* (General History of Trials of War Crimes), (Tokyo, 1973), "Table of Trials' Results of War Criminals (B & C Classes), 266.

At the end of World War II, Allied states were reluctant to impose upon Japan heavy reparations, which arose from its conduct in the war. The San Francisco Peace Treaty, between the Allied Powers and Japan, was signed on September 8, 1951, and focused on Japan's obligations to provide reparations for large-scale violations of international humanitarian law, including the appalling treatment of prisoners of war and other civilians. Extending far beyond reparations sexual slavery, Article 14 of the San Francisco Peace Treaty states:

It is recognized that Japan should pay reparations to the Allied Powers for the damage and suffering caused by it during the war. Nevertheless it is also recognized that the resources of Japan are not presently sufficient, if it is to maintain a viable economy, to make complete reparation for all such damage and suffering and at the same time meet its other obligations....

(b) Except as otherwise provided in the present Treaty, the Allied Powers waive all reparations claims of the Allied Powers, other claims of the Allied Powers and their nationals arising out of any actions taken by Japan and its nationals in the course of the prosecution of the war, and claims of the Allied Powers for direct military costs of occupation.<sup>27</sup>

The treaty provided for limited seizure and liquidation of Japanese property on Allied territory and compensation for damage done during Japan's occupation. Although specific reference is made in Article 16 to indemnifying prisoners of war, no mention was made of the survivors of the sexual slavery system. Under Article 26 of the San Francisco Peace Treaty, Japan committed itself to conclude bilateral treaties of peace with other Allied nations, including the Philippines in May 1956.<sup>28</sup> While estimates of the war damage to the Philippines amounted to about \$US 8 billion,<sup>29</sup> the terms finally settled on were \$550 million in capital goods and services and \$250 million in long-term loans.<sup>30</sup> Needless to say, similar to the Tribunal and the San Francisco Peace Treaty, the issue of the sexual slavery system had not been discussed in the peace treaty between Japan and the Philippines.

#### **WORLD WAR II HISTORY IN THE PHILIPPINES: A STATIST NARRATIVE?**

From this overview of the diverse elements that make up the official memory of the Philippines during World War II, it is no wonder that the issue of the comfort system was not adequately addressed or mentioned in the historical discourse of World War II in

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<sup>27</sup> Department of State, "Treaty of San Francisco," 8 September 1951, 3 UST 3169; TIAS 2490; 136 UNTS 45.

<sup>28</sup> *Reparations Agreement*, signed at Manila on 9 May 1956, UNTS 1956 (Reg. No. 4148).

<sup>29</sup> According to J.L. Vellut, "Japanese Reparations to the Philippines," *Asian Survey* 3, no.10 (October 1963), p. 497, this figure included \$800 million for physical damages, \$1,670 million for the loss of an estimated 120,000 Filipino lives and \$5,500 million for indemnity against commandeered goods and services through the issuance of Japanese military notes.

<sup>30</sup> Vellut, 500.

the Philippines. The problems associated with Philippine historiography delve into broad questions of approach and can be raised in the comfort women issue as well. Larkin has stated that:

The body of Philippine historical writing has so far given us only isolated glimpses of the history of the Archipelago. No writer can yet present a meaningful overview of the progress of all the Filipino people through more than four hundred years of recorded history. The problem is one of approach. Scholars have not treated Philippine society as it has always been, a collection of integrated societies developing at different rates and subject to diverse stimuli. Until each unit is studied as a unique entity and then compared with other regions, Philippine history will remain incomplete. Local histories will supply the necessary building blocks that will someday help in the construction of a substantial edifice for Philippine historiography.<sup>31</sup>

With this view of the production of Philippine history, I agree with Thomas Abercrombie's position that "recollecting and commemorating the past always takes place in contingent contexts where power is at play."<sup>32</sup> As such, alternative forms of social memory or other possibilities for reconstructing the past are always in contention. For Richard Roberts, "the very arts of remembering also entail forgetting... and historians need to be mindful of the landscapes of power that permit both the production of history and the forgetting of the past."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> John A. Larkin, *The Pampangans: Colonial Society in a Philippine Province* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1993), 125. Note: Original edition was published by the University of California Press in 1972 and is now currently out of print.

<sup>32</sup> Thomas Abercrombie, *Pathways of Memory and Power: Ethnography and History among an Andean People*, (Madison, WI:?, 1998, 21, 116-117.

<sup>33</sup> Richard Roberts, "History and Memory: The Power of Statist Narratives," in *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 33, no. 3 (2000), 515.

Statist or national narratives or memories have a powerful presence among constituents precisely because they are linked to the power of the state. The dialogical relationship between the production of a statist narrative of history and the production of a counter-narrative can also be understood in terms of gendered war roles, and specifically in the construction of gender identity in the Filipino society. World War II Filipino history can be constructed as a test or signifier of masculinity/ manhood where victory means affirmation of the male identity while defeat necessarily connotes emasculation. Here, the symbol of the 'man as warrior' is glorified in Filipino official state narratives that focus on the *Hukbahalap* and their successes, perhaps even as a way of justifying the existence of the Philippine state itself. It is integral to note that by World War II, only some forty years had passed since the brutal Filipino-American War at the turn of the century and American colonization, while Japanese occupation from 1942-1945 also treated the Philippines as a pseudo-colony.

At the same time, the state, of course, is by no means hegemonic, and thus, cannot assure that alternative memories or narratives are totally suppressed. Roberts highlights that there are two important consequences of the state's interest in history, namely that statist narratives are constructed within the context of specific challenges to state power, and that they serve to promote the sense of male-centered state power and legitimacy, consequently leading to the silencing of alternative readings and narratives of the past.<sup>34</sup>

In the case of Philippine war memory, there is an overwhelming sense that this is not the complete story, that there are cracks in the hegemony of state power that are disguised by these very narratives. The legitimacy of the Philippines as a national state was very much a question in the minds of Philippine politicians and intellectuals

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<sup>34</sup> Roberts, 516.

immediately preceding the war, especially with the granting of independence from the United States only in 1946.

The rape of women and the structuralized system of sexual prostitution did not become a relevant or even a related issue until the 1990s. Femininity, meanwhile, is constructed as a supporting role – the role and the impact of the *lolas*, for example, has been relegated as a counter or alternative narrative to support the official historical narrative. Piccigallo contends that there were three main reasons for this. First, the issue of collaboration was a decidedly heated topic in the Philippine mainstream after the war, as discussions what to do with those that had served as Japanese puppets, carried out Japanese policies and persecuted fellow Filipinos weighed heavily on the national conscience.<sup>35</sup> Second, with the end of the war, the *Hukbahalag*, the glorified guerilla movement in Agoncillo's and Zaide's histories, returned to its original campaign of overthrowing the Philippine government, and establishing a Communist, anti-American state, and would antagonize the Philippine national government for decades.<sup>36</sup> Finally, the question of national funds exerted great pressure, as four years of war had left the Philippines in complete shambles. With industry and agriculture devastated and the economy in chaos, Filipinos grew predominantly concerned with the question of "physical survival [and] all other considerations had to be judged in this context."<sup>37</sup> Japanese war crimes then occupied a relatively minor level of importance vis-à-vis more pressing Philippine national and international priorities, so much so that President Roxas' state of the nation address in 1946 hardly touched on the war crimes trials, leading

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<sup>35</sup> *New York Times*, September 11, 1945.

<sup>36</sup> Piccigallo, 198.

<sup>37</sup> David Joel Steinberg, *Philippine Collaboration in World War II*, (Ann Arbor, MI: ?, 1967), 114, 122-23.



journalists to contend that, "Filipinos would rather forget war atrocities."<sup>38</sup> With such priorities deflecting Filipino interest in war crimes, it is no wonder that the comfort women system was not adequately mentioned or addressed.

With this discourse in mind, and as the consequence of reading official Philippine narratives of World War II, I find it necessary to ask the question: Where have all the alternative narratives of comfort women gone? This question is a reminder that the production of history must be understood as a "dialogical relationship between the processes of forgetting (remembering and forgetting are contingent and linked practices shaped by the production of history) and the production of counter-hegemonic narratives."<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> *Stars and Stripes*, (Toyko) August 5, 1948.

<sup>39</sup> Roberts, 517.

### CHAPTER THREE:

#### ALTERNATIVE NARRATIVES: WHERE HAVE ALL THE COMFORT WOMEN GONE?

*Knowledge of the past and present is also produced in the course of every day. There is a common sense of the past, which though it may lack consistency and explanatory force, nonetheless contains elements of good sense. Such knowledge may circulate, usually without amplification, in everyday talk and in personal comparisons and narratives. It may be recorded in certain intimate cultural forms: letters, diaries, photograph albums and collections of things with past associations. It may be encapsulated in anecdotes that require the force and generality of myth. If this is history, it is a history under extreme pressure and privations. Usually, this history is held to the level of private remembrances. It is not only unrecorded, but actually silenced. It is not offered the occasion to speak.<sup>1</sup>*

From the brief overview of official Philippine narratives of World War II, it is apparent that the comfort women issue necessarily entails “a history under extreme pressure and privations.” With the discourse on Philippine historiography being primarily statist, it is this creation of “intimate cultural forms” that proves problematic for the *lolas* of the Filipino comfort women movement. Despite the popular resurgence of academic historical accounts of the comfort women in Korea and elsewhere in the Pacific, the *lolas* in the Philippines continue their activism with minimal support from the academic community. Perhaps more importantly, their testimonies of rape and abuse by the Japanese 14<sup>th</sup> Army continue to be neglected by mainstream Filipino history textbooks at all educational levels, and only now are gaining some kind of recognition.

Other alternative sites of memory (the intimate cultural forms) offer a major reassessment of the Filipino comfort women and their suffering. Looking anew at

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<sup>1</sup> Popular Memory Group, “Popular Memory: Theory, Politics, Method,” in Richard Johnson, Gregor McLennan, Bill Schwarz and David Sutton, eds., *Making Histories: Studies in History-Writing and Politics*, (Minneapolis, MN, 1982), 252.

remembrance and the ways in which the former comfort women endeavored to find collective solace and recognition opens up unofficial but nonetheless relevant avenues for research. Reflecting the diversity of constituencies that often have a hand in historical production, the comfort women employ varied formal and informal techniques to transmit their collective memories. In this chapter, I look at the published testimonies of several *lolas*, whose stories have emerged from activist non-governmental organizations, primarily the TFFCW (Task Force on Filipino Comfort Women) and several women's rights groups, both in the Philippines and in Southeast Asia. In their testimonies, it is blatantly apparent that rape and humiliation were used as highly effective weapons against the masses in a Japanese military strategy, denouncing even more the Japanese government claim that it had not known of the comfort station phenomenon. From there, I look at the evolution of alternative sites of memory that the *lolas* have utilized to bring attention to their plight.

## NATIONALISM IN THE PHILIPPINES

### *The Growth of Filipino Nationalism and Historical Amnesia*

The comfort women movement coincided with the intensifying of Filipino nationalism in the early 1990s. Prior to World War II, the Philippines had been set on the road to independence. The Tydings-McDuffie Act of 1934 established the semi-autonomous Philippine Commonwealth government, which would serve as a transition government towards independence in 1946. Independence had long been fought for by Filipinos since the time of Spanish colonial rule. Not everyone was happy with the Commonwealth government, however, although these were in the minority: some sectors wanted immediate independence, others wanted social reforms with independence, others

doubted the Americans and sought assistance from Japan. When the Japanese occupied the Philippines during the Pacific War in 1942, they thus came across varied reactions.<sup>2</sup>

The majority reaction was resistance, direct and indirect. These tied in with the Filipino tradition of fighting for independence were seen as patriotic and the height of nationalism. Many of these groups were strongly allied with the American forces, who were seen as Philippine allies. Other armed groups however, allied themselves with socialism or communism, while others remained independent. Prewar politicians saw themselves as being patriotic by joining the Japanese-sponsored government and standing up to Japanese demands from within the system. Still others equated the Asian spirit of the Japanese with nationalism, and thus sided with the Japanese. The variety of reactions thus led to a confusing definition of nationalism, a confusion which persists to the present.

With such a confusing definition of nationalism, diverse elements in Philippine society were united in opposition to their common history of foreign subjugation, first by the Spanish, the Japanese and then the Americans, and this opposition often carried an anti-American and anti-imperialist undertone. Leftists have long held that Philippine history is a story of failed or betrayed revolutions, with native compradors selling out to foreign invaders.<sup>3</sup> In the post-Marcos years, this thesis received wide acceptance across the political spectrum. The middle class was deeply disillusioned because five successive

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<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of Filipino Nationalism, see Prosy Abarquez-Delacruz, "The Man in the Outhouse: How Western Colonization Silenced the Filipino Imagination." *Amerasia Journal* 25:2 (1999): 157-67; Austin Coates, *Rizal: Philippine Nationalist and Martyr*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), Jessica Hagedorn, *Dog eaters* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990); Stanley Karnow, *In Our Image: America's Empire in the Philippines* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1989); Usha Mahajani, *Philippine Nationalism: External Challenge and Filipino Response 1565-1946* (Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1971) and Stuart Creighton Miller, *"Benevolent assimilation": the American conquest of the Philippines, 1899-1903*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982).

<sup>3</sup> See Renato Constantino, *The Poverty of Memory: Essays on History and Empire*, (Quezon City, Philippines: Constantino Foundation, 2007).

United States administrations had acquiesced to Marcos's dictatorship, and Filipino conservatives nursed grievances long held by the left.

At the same time as this growth in Filipino nationalism, especially directed at the Americans, there has also been a baffling historical amnesia of sorts, leading to increased trade and not much offense associated with the comfort women movement, despite the fact that an estimated one million Filipinos, of a wartime population of 17 million, were killed during the war. But for a people wounded by Japan like no other in Southeast Asia, Filipinos are now very friendly toward Japan, a phenomenon that baffles many historians and sociologists considering that, in countries like China and South Korea, anti-Japanese sentiment still smolders and occasionally flares. As a result, it seems that Filipinos are not as offended as the Chinese or the Koreans are, for example, about the fact that these atrocities are given only fleeting attention in Japanese classrooms, if at all.

According to Jose, the Philippines have never had an official history of the war. Most of the literature on the war was written by foreigners, many of them by American veterans and Japanese scholars.<sup>4</sup> The first book on the Japanese occupation written by a Filipino was published in 1994, nearly half a century after the war's end. Not surprisingly, hardly anybody protested, except the group of women raped by the Japanese during the war, when the tourism office in the town of Mabalacat a few years ago put up a memorial for Japanese kamikaze pilots. The town is in Pampanga, a province north of Manila that was the center of an anti-Japanese rebellion during the war. Among the pilots

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<sup>4</sup> Ricardo Jose, *Rebuilding Bridges: 50 Years of Philippine-Japanese Relations 1948-1998*, (Manila, Philippines: Yuchengco Center for East Asia) 1999.

honored was a lieutenant that the memorial hailed as the “world's first official human bomb!”<sup>5</sup>

*Nationalism and Patriotism: Two sides of the same coin?*

In the 1990s, there was no more fundamental line of inquiry challenging us in the Asian Pacific debate concerning nationalism and gender than that of the military comfort women issue. This same issue has forced upon us fundamental questions regarding historical methodology in the construction of public memory. When considering the background to the paradigm shift that led to the military comfort women problem emerging as a sexual crime, the influence of the women's movement in the Philippines since the 1980s should not be forgotten.

What is shocking about the testimony of former comfort women is firstly the cruel historical fact itself and second, the fact that the victims felt compelled to remain silent for a period of 50 years. Until very recently, most former comfort women treated their experiences as their personal shame and buried them in the depths of their memories, as a kind of personal *hiya*, or shame. It was this past that these women made public and redefined as assault. Here, we had a drastic change in historical understanding and a paradigm shift.

The paradigm used for discussing the military comfort women issue has changed rapidly in a very short time. The first to appear was the patriarchal paradigm of the nation's shame. The patriarchal paradigm denies women's agency, and reduces the infringement of women's sexual human rights to a dispute over property rights between fellow men within the patriarchal system. What is more, here lies the exact cause of the

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<sup>5</sup> Carlos Conde, “Letter from the Philippines: Long afterward, war still wears on Filipinos”, in *International Herald Tribune – Asia Pacific*, 13 August 2005, available from <http://www.iht.com/articles/2005/08/12/news/phils.php?page=1>

second crime, that of silence being forced on the victims. Initially, a truly patriarchal voice of suppression arose in reaction to the testimony of the women's suffering in the Philippines, and some even argue that the Philippine government has still not gotten past this paradigm. First, this reaction can be explained in terms of a patriarchal ethic, which turns the fact of having suffered sexual abuse into the women's shame or *hiya*. Second, the women's testimony is exposed to the public gaze as the cowardice of men, who had not been able to protect the chastity of their country women. Third, there is the loss of face associated with not being able to suppress indictments of this nature by women that put men to shame.<sup>6</sup> Here, chastity emerges as a form of male property, with the focus of discussion the interests of the patriarchal system, regarding the infringement of these property rights, and the dignity of the women totally ignored.<sup>7</sup>

The shift in our understanding of the comfort women issue from national shame to gender discrimination and national discrimination was one of the many achievements of the women's movement. Nevertheless, from the very beginning the tendency was to construct this within a nationalist discourse. The first thing here, as already discussed, is the distinction between "forced" and "voluntary" and which itself is based on prostitute discrimination. Here, the military sexual paradigm was mobilized for the purpose of anti-Japanese nationalism.

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<sup>6</sup> Here, I employ Yamashita's methodology for understanding nationalist discourse. See Y. Yamashita, "Korean Women's Studies and Nation: The Nationalistic Discourse on the Comfort Women Issue," (trans.), *Joseigaku* 4 (1996): 35-38.

<sup>7</sup> For discussions on chastity as male property and patriarchal systems, see Matthew Somer, "The Uses of Chastity: Sex, Law, and the Property of Widows in Qing China" in *Late Imperial China* 17.2 (1996) 77-130 and Pierre Bourdieu, "Marriage Strategies as Strategies of Social Reproduction," in R. Forster and O. Ranum, ed., *Family and Society: Selections from the Annales*, (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

The nationalist tendency within the Filipino women's movement is a survival strategy aimed at having the women's movement acknowledged within the national democratizing movement. Compared to its enthusiastic reception as a women's issue within the international solidarity movement, the comfort women issue's influence on the domestic women's movement and human rights movement has been relatively small. The reason for this is that it was approached primarily as a nationalist issue within the Philippines. On top of that, there was little effort made to overturn the nationalist discourse.<sup>8</sup>

According to Korean feminist Kim Eun-shil, who Yamashita introduces:

By conferring greater symbolic meaning to the significance of sexual violation, the nationalist discourse denies the specificity of the women's experiences and universalizes it into a national issue. To rephrase this, it was not the women but the [Asian nations that were] sexually violated by the rapist Japan. Due to the fact that it was the nation itself that was of issue here, the crime of rape was not endowed with any meaning until perpetrated by the Japanese empire.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, by subsuming women within the national subject, or more precisely through the unification of women's interests with men's, the nationalist discourse could be used to mobilize nationalism. It is also a cliché among the right wing in Japan to use the rape metaphor to express a violation by another nation, however, this does not mean that they necessarily respect women's human rights. Far from it, there is a tendency to criticize the assertion of women's rights as an act that serves the enemy by bringing out divisions. Seen from this perspective, the nationalist discourse can be considered a variant of the patriarchal paradigm. The patriarchal paradigm by objectifying women, understands rape as the infringement of male property rights, while the nationalist discourse, by turning

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<sup>8</sup> Yamashita, 1996.

<sup>9</sup> Chizuko Ueno, "The Japanese Responsibility for Military Rape During World War II." *Asian Studies Review* 17, no. 3 (1994): 105.



women into national subjects, understands rape as the violation of the nation. In both instances, the norm for the nation is based on the male subject and there is an identification of female interests with male interests. From this standpoint, there is little difference between them

### THE PARADIGM SHIFT FROM NATIONALISM TO FEMINISM

With this kind of historical amnesia and increased economic trade with Japan, it is no wonder that the issue of comfort women paled considerably in the nationalist discourse. However, feminist attention to the testimony of rape victims has also produced a new understanding of the physical and mental effects of rape – of why it must be seen as a weapon of destruction and suffering, both in wartime and in what we may choose to call peacetime. Moreover, feminist psychologies such as Laura S. Brown and Patricia A. Resick have been responsible for implementing new forms of therapy to treat the trauma of women recovering from war atrocities.<sup>10</sup> Through feminist efforts, the stories of women raped during war are being broadcast globally and are becoming the stuff of international legal action and of historical narratives, focusing the rewriting of war to highlight crimes based on gender. Susan Brownmiller warns of what happens when such feminist pressure is not exerted,

The plight of raped women as casualties of war is given credence only at the emotional moment when the side in danger of annihilation cries out for world attention. When the military histories are written... the stories are glossed over, discounted as exaggerations, deemed not serious enough for inclusion in scholarly works.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Margaret Stet and Bonnie Oh, eds., *Legacies of the Comfort Women of World War II*, (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2001), 95.

<sup>11</sup> Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*, (New York: Bantam Books, 1976), 95.

But new stories of military histories are appearing, and Japanese feminists, in particular, deserve credit for brining the gendered crimes of militarism, along with the plight of the Asian comfort women of World War II, into the official Japanese story. Japanese feminists' determined resistance to further efforts at un-silencing and remembering has been unceasing, as has been their readiness to work together with Asian and Western women alike in networks of support. Throughout Asia, academic and nonacademic feminists alike have united both within and across national boundaries to build coalitions around these issues. No clearer example of successful action and coalition formation exists than in the Philippines. The Task Force on Filipino Comfort Women began in 1992, largely thanks to the initiative of Filipina feminist leaders such as Nelia Sancho and Indai Sajor. Soliciting the stories and participation of victims of the comfort station system, Sancho and Sajor brought to the fore front comfort women such as Maria Rosa Henson, a remarkable woman who had survived not only sexual slavery under the Japanese Imperial Forces, but post-war Philippine revolutionary struggles and government crackdowns that had resulted in the deaths of her family members. Until Henson's death, Filipina feminists worked with her in a variety of capacities, including the filing of a lawsuit in a Tokyo district court for financial redress from the Japanese government. Along with other members of the task force, Sancho and Sajor helped to record, preserve and circulate Henson's important testimonial, which has recently been issued in English as *Comfort Woman: A Filipina's Story of Prostitution and Slavery* under the Japanese Military, and which has given to the history of this subject a personal voice and a new immediacy for readers everywhere.

### *The Gendered Nature of Filipino Politics*

In the last two decades, feminist research has sought alternative indicators to capture women's actual role in society. Nowhere is this effort more pronounced than in studies on their role in politics, where the search has focused on understanding the nuances of their participation and influence outside the overt "public" realm. Mina Roces has successfully uncovered other aspects of women's political influence in a country where women's power is more felt than defined the Philippines. Roces attempts to provide explanations for the phenomenon of Imelda Marcos' power while merely serving as first lady to dictator Ferdinand Marcos, and Corazon Aquino's perceived reluctance to use her power as President of the Philippines after the ouster of Marcos, as well as insight into Filipino women's influence in politics. Criticizing some theses and building upon others, Roces gives what may be considered a most plausible explanation for the seemingly ambiguous position of Filipino women in society.

In what she calls 'gendered politics,' men "generally exercise official power while women exercise unofficial power via their kinship and marriage ties to politicians"<sup>12</sup> Roces posits that in gendered politics, unofficial power in postwar Philippines is "definitely a female-dominated site, allowing women to exercise an enormous amount of power."<sup>13</sup> To unravel the scope of the Filipino women's political influence, Roces suggests looking at other social venues: "for instance, women's political participation in civic work, charitable organizations, community work, fundraising, or networking with

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<sup>12</sup> Mina Roces, *Women, Power and Kinship Politics: Female Power in Post-War Philippines*. Westpoint (CT): Praeger Publisher, 1998:7.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

other politicians' wives."<sup>14</sup> She does this, tying them together with what she describes as the dynamics of kinship politics that allow for advantaged position for the influential.

Beyond kinship sociopolitical activism, Roces adds that "images of female power also stress beauty and moral guardianship," that even though women claim the symbols of power themselves and no longer have to exercise power unofficially, "they are still expected to exude such images"<sup>15</sup> in Philippine society. Thus, politically influential Filipino women may or may not hold official power, but must know how to extract power while keeping a non-threatening profile, since they "still have to contend with a male-dominated environment and compete with male-centered established networks."<sup>16</sup> With the term 'kinship politics' she coined in an earlier work, Roces is able to describe actual power interrelationships in Philippine society. This time she applies the concept to women's political power and influence, enabling an understanding of the nature of the political process in developing countries and the women's role in it. For the moment, Roces provides us a very useful framework for understanding the influence and power, that women, in the Philippines at least, wield.

### **THE COMFORT WOMEN MOVEMENT IN THE PHILIPPINES**

Up until the last decade, comfort women across the Pacific were considered no more than a minor detail of World War II, if they were ever considered at all. In the late 1980s, several official war documents were unearthed by historians and researchers in South Korea and Japan which firmly established what until then was the unconfirmed existence of the comfort women and the war practice of the Japanese Imperial Army of systematic rape and sexual slavery of Asian women during the aggressive Asian Pacific

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 182.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 190.

War.<sup>17</sup> In light of this evidence, women's movements in Asia took up the cause of the comfort women, the survivors of Japan's military comfort system and began the process of bringing this tremendously neglected issue to the forefront of media attention.

Soon after Korean activists began to organize around their own comfort women, on March 10, 1992, a news article in a Philippine newspaper reported that among the thousands of comfort women during World War II were Filipino women, including a sketch of a the location of a comfort station in Iloilo. A document revealing 19 Filipino comfort women in Iloilo City during in the central island of South Philippines was unearthed by Rep. Hideo Itoh of Japan's Diet. The document is a medical report by a Japanese doctor who conducted an examination of 19 Filipino comfort women to prevent the spread of venereal diseases among Japanese soldiers. Partial names of the 17 of the 19 women were listed in the document.<sup>18</sup>

A press statement was immediate released by BAYAN (*Bagoong Alyansang Makabayan*) Women's Desk on March 13, 1992 condemning the sexual abuse of Filipinas and other Asian women and strongly calling on the Philippine government to immediately conduct investigations and seek justice for the women, also expecting the government to demand from Japan an apology and compensation for possible survivors.<sup>19</sup> This demand prompted a reaction from the Philippine government, who challenged BAYAN to provide proof and thus passed the burden of looking for the survivors and investigating the issue to the people's organizations.

On May 4, 1992 the Philippine government, announced its investigation of the Presidential Commission on Human Rights by asking the help of a notable faculty

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<sup>17</sup> Malou Sabado, "The Filipino Comfort Women Struggle" cited in Sancho, 310.

<sup>18</sup> Hicks, 23.

<sup>19</sup> Sancho, 8.

member in the University of the Philippines, Professor Ricardo Jose. Jose submitted an inquiry report using official documents of the Philippines and Japan on World War II. Unfortunately, he made the hasty conclusion that there was “no major forced prostitution in the Philippines”<sup>20</sup> alluding that there were no comfort women in the country. The Philippine government, referring to the report, then announced on June 26, 1992, that there were no sex slaves in the Philippines and that there was no need to seek an apology and compensation.<sup>21</sup>

Suspecting a whitewash, this then prompted the non-governmental organizations to organize a systematic research and investigation process. BAYAN Women’s Desk sought the help of BAYAN and GABRIELA chapter in Iloilo to conduct field investigations. GABRIELA National Women’s Coalition, a self-described militant women’s alliance, was also consulted as to how it could help to pursue the field investigation at the local level.<sup>22</sup> This effort resulted in the visit of several towns where local folks reported the existence of comfort women. A Filipino spy for the Japanese Army admitted that there were indeed army-built comfort houses and said that one comfort woman he knew died a few years back.<sup>23</sup>

On July 6, 1992, sharing the results of its own government inquiry, Japan admitted the direct involvement of the Japanese Imperial Army and identified the conscripted comfort women as coming from Korea, Philippines, Taiwan, Indonesia, China and Japan itself. Japan’s admission that Filipina women were among the World War II comfort women negated the Philippine government’s assertion and conclusion

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<sup>20</sup> Cited in Sancho, 10.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Katharina R. Mendoza, “Freeing the Slaves of Destiny: The *Lolas* of the Filipino Comfort Women Movement” *Cultural Dynamics* 15, No. 3 (2003): 256.

<sup>23</sup> Sancho, 11.

that there "are no sex slaves in the Philippines."<sup>24</sup> In addition to the army-build comfort station in Iloilo, new evidence arose detailing the presence of comfort women in Ormoc (Leyte province), Santa Cruz (Laguna), Masbate and Cagayan de Oro (Mindanao). A Japanese newspaper also pinpointed three places where comfort houses were established in the Philippines. These areas were Manila, Tacloban (Leyte) and Iloilo Province.<sup>25</sup> The newspaper report stated that in an August 1943 report from Tacloban, nine Filipino comfort women were recorded by the Japanese Imperial Army.<sup>26</sup> Other areas reported included Antique (Panay Island), Mindoro, Negros provinces and Cagayan Valley (Isabella).

In May 1994, the TFFCW disbanded to pave the way for the formation of LILA Pilipina, or *Liga ng mga Lolang Pilipina*,<sup>27</sup> where the Filipino comfort women themselves participated and were at the forefront of the activities and decision-making for the direction of the Filipino movement for redress, a truly remarkable and inspiring development for advocates and supporters in the Philippines, Japan and elsewhere to witness empowered women survivors taking their place at the forefront of the campaign. Part of their campaign included holding annual general assemblies of the *lolas* and board meetings to elect survivors, advocates and supporters in partnership to continue pursuing the campaign. In addition, regular rallies and demonstrations were held in front of the Japanese embassy as well.<sup>28</sup>

In May 1996, a resolution was filed in the Philippine Senate by Senator Francisco Tatad, as a result of intense lobbying, urging official support to the demands of the

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<sup>24</sup> Mendoza, 256.

<sup>25</sup> Sancho, 11.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Sabado, cited in Sancho, 314.

<sup>28</sup> Sabado, cited in Sancho, 315.

Filipino comfort women for legal reparations from the Japanese government and urging Japan to fulfill its legal responsibility to the comfort women. Shortly thereafter, a similar resolution was filed in the Philippine House of Representatives by Rep. Bonifacio Gillego, which, after a series of public hearings, was approved by the House Committee on Civil, Political and Human Rights.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, the Philippine government's position stands in sharp contrast to the Taiwanese and Korean governments; its initial whitewash of the comfort women issue is thought by Filipino activists to have come from state officials' fear of losing valuable Japanese investments and possibly having to renegotiate atonement money already given by the Japanese government for war crimes.<sup>30</sup>

## TESTIMONIES

John Beverley describes testimonial as a "literature of personal witness and involvement,"<sup>31</sup> and here, the testimonies of the former comfort women are moving, personal accounts of the horrific events they have suffered, and the courageous struggles of their lives. As testimonies that typically begin as first-person oral narratives that were then transcribed and translated, these testimonies become a useful genre of historical analysis primarily because they deconstruct the individual author by questioning the authority of written expression and reassert the role of the *lolas* and their stories.

The majority of comfort women in the Philippines were directly secured by military authorities or other agents, acting on their behalf, particularly the *Makapili*

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Mendoza, 262.

<sup>31</sup> John Beverley, "The Margin at the Center: On *Testimonio* (Testimonial Narrative)" in Smith and Watson, *De/Colonizing the Subject*, 94.



(*Malayang Katipunan ng mga Pilipino*).<sup>32</sup> Most of the testimonies collected from former comfort women detail how they were abducted by the Japanese from home, work or while walking in the street, and were taken directly to a Japanese garrison. The duration of captivity was usually between one and several months, and in some cases, even confined for up to two years, till the very end of the war.

In contrast to the military authorities' behind the scenes approach with abducting girls and young women in Korea, Taiwan and the Dutch East Indies, many testimonies indicate that in the Philippines, Japanese troops directly secured the comfort women. Their methods were incredibly wanton: abduction, rape, murder of relatives that tried to help and continuous confinement for the purposes of sexual exploitation. In fact, it seems that the Japanese did not even try to conceal what they were doing to the civilians. The main reason for such direct action by the Japanese troops in the Philippines may lie in the fact that the anti-Japanese guerilla movement, the *Hukbahalag*, was strong and widespread throughout the occupation period. It is strongly believed that in the Philippines, Japanese troops tended to regard civilians as possible guerillas, and as such, humiliation and rape of women amounted to subjugation of the natives as a whole.<sup>33</sup>

Additionally, a number of the comfort women directly witnessed the murder of their parents and siblings. For example, in 1942, thirteen-year old Tomasa Salinog was

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<sup>32</sup> Also translated as Patriotic League of Filipinos. The *Makapili* was a pro-Japanese security force, numbering some 5,000 and were trained by the Japanese to assist in anti-guerilla operations and to oppose any American landing during World War II. Organized by Benigno Ramos, they were born out of José P. Laurel's refusal to conscript Filipinos for Japan. See *The People of the Philippines v. Domingo Capacete*, G.R. No. L-943 (Supreme Court, November 22, 1947); Motoe Terami-Wada, "Lt. Shigenobu Mochizuki and the New Philippine Cultural Institute" in *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 27, 1996.

<sup>33</sup> See Dorothy D. Dowlen, *Enduring What Cannot Be Endured: Memoir of a Woman Medical Aide in the Philippines in World War II*, (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2001); Jose Ma. Bonifacia Escoda, *Warsaw of Asia: The Rape of Manila*. Manila, (New York: Giraffe Books, 2000) and Ma. Felisa A. Syjuco, *The Kempei Tai in the Philippines: 1941-1945*, (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1988).

abducted from her home in Antique, Panay, and when her father tried to resist the Japanese soldiers that intruded their home, “[he] was struck with a sword by Captain Hiruka... [running] to where he lay, [she] found that his head was already severed from his body and [she] cried hysterically.”<sup>34</sup> In another case, Rufina Fernandez, a seventeen-year old from Manila, witnessed the murder of her parents and siblings in 1944, when they tried to resist the Japanese soldiers that broke into their home. As Fernandez was being dragged out of her home, her two younger sisters were crying hysterically, and when their crying stopped immediately, she presumed that they too had been beheaded.<sup>35</sup>

In the Philippines, it seems that the usual practice was that about 10 young women or girls were held by each small, company-size army unit for the exclusive exploitation by the unit, raped by five to ten soldiers every day and some were even forced to cook and wash for Japanese soldiers during the day.<sup>36</sup> Another distinctive feature of comfort women in the Philippines is that they became victims of militarized sexual violence at very young ages, with the average age being 17.6 years, with many younger than 15 and one as young as 10!<sup>37</sup> Elizabeth Asistin testified that she was forcibly taken to a garrison when her village was raided, saying “I was 13 or 14 at the time. Imagine being raped at that age. I cried and cried when they held me down I could not stand up after they had finished with me, I ached all over and I was lying in my own blood.”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Tomasa Salinog, in Hicks, 86.

<sup>35</sup> *Philippine “Comfort Women” Compensation Suit: Excerpts of the Complaint*, (Manila, Philippines: Task Force on Filipino Comfort Women and Japanese Committee for the Filipino Comfort Women, 1995): 17.

<sup>36</sup> Yuki, 49.

<sup>37</sup> Elaine Lies, *Japan Court Rejects Philippine Slave Case*, 6 December 2000.

<sup>38</sup> Elizabeth M. Asistin, “Interview with Lola Elizabeth,” interview by Amnesty International, March 2005, in *Still Waiting after 60 Years: Justice for Survivors of Japan’s Military Sexual Slavery System*, (London: Amnesty International, 2005), 10.

Coerced sexual intercourse went without saying when these girls and young women were forcibly rounded up and taken directly to Japanese garrisons. The coercion explicit in these episodes was incredibly inhumane and most of these comfort women can attest that they did not have any say in the outcome of their situations. Cristeta Alcober remembers:

Those soldiers who used to come to our hut to pick us up would say, "OK *suksok? Pataṃ ka!* [Do you consent to insertion? Or do you wish to die?] In such a situation, I could not do anything but be taken out of the hut as the Japanese ordered and to sexually service them.<sup>39</sup>

Fedenica David also highlighted her own experience, stating:

When night came, I was forced to go into one room, there were five of us inside the room, which was dark. Soldiers entered the room. A soldier touched me and caressed me. I pushed him and he fell, he then pushed me against the wall. I tried to shout and struggle but he put a cloth over my mouth and raped me. After the first soldier, two more followed. I lost sense of what was happening. I was so weak. The other girls were also raped. I had not yet started menstruating at the time.<sup>40</sup>

These first impressions of rape and torture sadly became a daily routine for many suffering comfort women. With the global attention given to this issue of comfort women, the Japanese government in the 1990s repeatedly asserted that many of the 200,000 women were themselves prostituting their bodies to make ends meet during the war and that the Japanese government should not be penalized for their choices. The

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<sup>39</sup> Cristeta Alcober, "Testimonies" in Sancho, 46.

<sup>40</sup> Fedencia David, "Interview with Lola Piding," interview by Amnesty International, March 2005, in *Still Waiting after 60 Years: Justice for Survivors of Japan's Military Sexual Slavery System*, 11.

question of whether commercial transactions occurred however is repudiated by the fact that comfort women, and most of the Filipino ones, did not receive any money from their captors. Sabina Vallegas states that "[she] had never been given any money by the Japanese soldiers... regarding the meals, they just gave [them] what remained after they had finished eating, [which] were very little in quantity and there were occasions when [she was given] a spoonful of rice on [her] palm as a whole meal."<sup>41</sup> In addition, those who had been set aside as the 'property' of Japanese soldiers were expected to cook, clean and wash laundry for them as well as provide sexual services at night, just like a Japanese wife. Remedios Estorninos Felias describes her routine:

After a week, I started a routine that became my life for the year that I spent in the garrison. In the morning, I and the other women would wash clothes for the soldiers. In the afternoon, we cleaned the hospital, cleaning up after the doctors, throwing away bandages, etc. After the work is done, and sometimes even before the work is over, a Japanese soldier would come to me and grab me and take me to their tent. The soldiers in the tent, maybe 6 or 7 of them, would rape me one after the other.<sup>42</sup>

Ma Fe Yabut Santillan was eighteen years old and helping her mother to run a small *carinderia*<sup>43</sup> in Manila, next to where a Japanese garrison was stationed. With the Japanese occupation, Japanese soldiers came to their stall and demanded that they be allowed to eat without paying, a welcome agreement in order to avoid any trouble with them. Meeting Captain Sakuma, however, changed her fate. Forced to go to the local garrison under the pretense of being employed as a cook, Santillan was treated like a

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<sup>41</sup> Sabina Vallegas, "Testimonies" in Sancho, 117.

<sup>42</sup> Remedio Estorninos Felias, "Testimonies" in Sancho, 70.

<sup>43</sup> *Carinderia* is defined as a home-run, food stall in Tagalog.

maid in the morning, making meals and washing laundry, and at night, became a 'wife' to serve the sexual needs of Captain Sakuma for nearly two abuse-filled years. In addition, whenever Captain Sakuma had visitors, he would offer Santillan to them as part of the 'entertainment'.<sup>44</sup>

Despite regular examinations for sexually transmitted diseases, comfort women's risk of contracting a disease was undoubtedly high. Yet another important facet of these women's stays in the comfort stations was the high risk of becoming pregnant and of miscarriage. In 1943, Maria Rosa Henson suffered a miscarriage amidst bouts of malaria attacks during her nine months as a comfort woman in a Japanese garrison. Despite this apparent illness, Henson testified that soldiers continued to rape her as well as beat her if their expectations were not fulfilled:

Once when a soldier was raping me, I suddenly got a malaria attack. I started shaking, and the soldier kicked me... Maybe he thought I was pretending to be ill... I could feel that even my intestines were shaking... After a week of taking medicine, I began bleeding profusely.... And [I was told] that I had had a miscarriage... When I learnt that I had lost a child, I began wondering how that was possible, as I had not yet begun to menstruate. And who was the father?<sup>45</sup>

The women and girls experienced a great deal of physical and mental violence, often beaten, frequently suffering injuries such as broken bones. As the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women stated in her report:

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<sup>44</sup> Santillan's story is taken from George Hicks, *The Comfort Women* (St. Leonards, Australia: Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1995): 30; Originally cited in Calica, Dan P. and Nelia Sancho, eds., *War Crimes On Asian Women: Military Sexual Slavery by Japan During World War II – Volume I*, (Manila, Philippines: Asian Women Human Rights Council, 1993).

<sup>45</sup> Maria Henson, 45.

In addition to the deep-rooted and long-lasting trauma of their sexual abuse, the harshness and brutality of the conditions of their servitude are apparent. They had no personal freedom, were treated with violence and savagery by the soldiers and with indifference by the station operators and army doctors. Due to their frequent proximity to the front-line, they were exposed to attack, to bombings, to threat of death, conditions, which made the soldiers who frequented comfort stations even more demanding and aggressive.<sup>46</sup>

Many women were murdered or committed suicide during their enslavement. Some were released before the war ended, usually due to ill health. At the end of the war, some comfort women were summarily killed, or died in combat at the frontline. Others were simply left stranded. Survivors faced severe hardship while attempting to return to normal lives. On return, many of the surviving women kept silent about what happened to them as for many, "rape and brutalization were but a prelude to a life of suffering. The view that a raped woman is a defiled woman dies hard everywhere in Asia."<sup>47</sup> Belen Sagum, for example, did not leave a room in a relative's house for five years, saying, "All I did was cry... my cousins slowly helped me recover. I was ashamed of what happened. I was scared... if people were laughing, I thought they were laughing at me."<sup>48</sup> Fedencia David remembers:

My thoughts were very painful. I could not express what happened to me. I'd been a virgin... it took me three years to consent to sleep with my husband. I

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<sup>46</sup> Report of the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, its Causes and Consequences, Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, in Accordance with Commission on Human Rights Resolution 1994/45, *Report on the Mission to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Republic of Korea and Japan on the Issue of Military Sexual Slavery in Wartime*, E/CN.4/1996/53/Add.1, 4 January 1996, supra note 13, para. 37.

<sup>47</sup> Hicks, 125.

<sup>48</sup> Belen Sagum, "Interview with Lola Belen," interview by Amnesty International, March 2005, in *Still Waiting after 60 Years: Justice for Survivors of Japan's Military Sexual Slavery System*, 15.

buried everything and tried to forget. When I saw men in uniform, I'd panic and get scared. When I finally spoke out, my neighbors called me *japayuki*.<sup>49</sup> I explained that I am not a *japayuki* and that I want justice.<sup>50</sup>

Another distressing feature of the lives of the comfort women were the disturbing scars and diseases they have had to deal with since their ordeals. A number of women still have scars from being bayoneted by the soldiers. Sadly, there is still a high level of emotional scarring that these women still carry with them, as Sabina Vallegas asserts:

Whenever I am reminded of being confined and being repeatedly raped by Japanese soldiers, I would feel fear so much and filled with anger. I even feel that I'd like to kill those Japanese who raped me... my elder sister, [who had already partially lost her mind in the garrison] went completely insane because she lost her husband and son.<sup>51</sup>

### *The International Impact of Testimonies*

With the historical issue of the former comfort women becoming a source of contention between the Japanese government and Diet and the US House of Representatives, the issue has also gained increased attention since the early 1990s. The current issue of contention between the Japanese government and the House of Representatives stems from two resolutions introduced into the House of Representatives in 2006 and 2007 and Japanese reactions to them. The first resolution, House of Representatives (H.Res. from hereon) 759 was passed by the House International

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<sup>49</sup> A derogatory term used to refer to Filipino women who go to Japan to work as migrant entertainers, many of whom become prostitutes. See M. Yokoyama, "Analysis of Prostitution in Japan," *International Journal of Comparative and Applied Criminal Justice*, 19, no. 1 (1995): 47-60 and Nicholas Bornoff, *Pink Samurai: Love, Marriage and Sex in Contemporary Japan*, (New York: Pocket Books, 1991).

<sup>50</sup> Interview with Fedencia David.

<sup>51</sup> Sabina Vallegas, "Testimonies" in Sancho, 119.

Relations Committee on September 13, 2006, although the full House did not vote on it before the House adjourned in November 2006.<sup>52</sup> The main provisions of this resolution were an expression from the House that Japan should formally acknowledge and accept responsibility for its sexual enslavement of girls and women, and that this system was a serious crime against humanity.<sup>53</sup> In addition, the resolution called for further educational initiatives for current and future generations and highly suggested that Japan follow the recommendations of the United Nations and Amnesty International with respect to the former comfort women.<sup>54</sup>

During this period, just a few weeks after Shinzo Abe became the new Prime Minister of Japan, there was heightened concern in Japan as a result of this international pressure. Japan's Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary, Shimomura Hakuban called for a new study of the comfort women issue, while Japan's leading newspaper, *Yomiuri Shimbun*, editorialized that the 1993 statement by Chief Cabinet Secretary Kono Yohei had not been given with adequate evidence, that "[showed] transportation of women for forced labor as sex slaves."<sup>55</sup> Members of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party set up a Committee to Consider Japan's Future Historical Education, resulting in a March 2007 decision that the Kono Statement would be revised, instead highlighting:

There currently is no evidence that permits us to declare the military, the strongest expression of state authority, took women away and forced them to do things against their will.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Niksch, 2.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> "We wonder why those remarks are problematic?" *Yomiui Shimbun*, 31 October 2006, p. 3; cited in Niksch, 3.

<sup>56</sup> "Tokyo denied coercion in war brothels" *Korea Herald* (Online Version) 14 March 2007; cited in Niksch, 3.



The second resolution, H. Res. 121 was introduced in January 2007 by Congressman Mike Honda, a Japanese-American, who called for "historical reconciliation, [highlighting] that responsibility for the Comfort Women tragedy is worthy of a nation as great as Japan... I also feel strongly that reconciliation on this issue will have a positive effect upon relationships in the region as historical anxieties are put to rest."<sup>57</sup> The major provisions of this resolution include the formal acknowledgement, apology and acceptance of historical responsibility by Japan for the comfort women system, the 'unprecedented' cruelty of this system of forced military prostitution, the downplaying of this issue in Japanese school textbooks, and the rescission of the 1993 statement by Cabinet Secretary Kono Yohei on the deep remorse felt by the Japanese government.<sup>58</sup> The resolution also called for an official apology given as a public statement by the Prime Minister as well as more education initiatives based on the recommendations of the international community with respect to the comfort women.

In the midst of the House of Representatives' consideration of H. Res. 121, Prime Minister Abe Shinzo and his Cabinet issued a number of statements that drew both support and criticism from within Japan and from other countries, notably the United States, Australia, the Philippines and South Korea. For example, on the question of testimonies of former comfort women, Abe emphasized that "testimony to the effect that there had been a hunt for comfort women is a complete fabrication."<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, Abe reiterated that the Japanese government would not issue an apology to the comfort women in response to the passage of H. Res. 121 by the US House of Representatives. At

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<sup>57</sup> Statement of The Honorable Mike Honda, Member of Congress, *Hearing on Protecting the Human Rights of Comfort Women*, February 15, 2007.

<sup>58</sup> Niksch, 3.

<sup>59</sup> Martin Fackler, "No Apology for Sex Slavery: Japan's Prime Minister says" *New York Times*, 6 March 2007, p. A10.

the same time, Abe's remarks were quite contradictory. On the issue of coercion, Abe backtracked, stating instead, "there probably was not anyone [of the comfort women] who followed that path because they wanted to follow it. In the broad sense, there was coercion."<sup>60</sup> Incidentally, in a telephone conversation with US President George Bush in April 2007, Prime Minister affirmed that he stood by the consistent position of the Government of Japan, represented by the Kono Statement of 1993 and expressed his apologies to the comfort women.<sup>61</sup>

The conflicting nature of Prime Minister Abe and his Cabinet's position on both the comfort women issue and other international issues continued in a tone of forced acknowledgement and apology, despite the passage of H. Res. 121 in July 2007 and Abe's own resignation from his post in August 2007. With the passage of the US resolution, the Philippine Congress stepped up its own version of the resolution, Philippine Congress House Resolution 124. On August 13, 2007, six representatives from the Republic of the Philippines 14th Congress, including Gabriela party-list Congresswomen Liza Larzoga-Maza and Luzviminda Ilagan introduced House Res. 124 to the Philippines House of Representatives. By following the steps of the U.S. Congress in passing H.Res. 121, "the Philippine government is demonstrating its earnest interest to help Filipino comfort women achieve justice they deserve and reclaim their dignity and that of the Filipino people."<sup>62</sup> Accordingly, through the resolution, the Philippine Congress:

[Expresses] its sense that the Philippine government urges the government of Japan to formally acknowledge, apologize and accept its responsibility over the

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<sup>60</sup> Fackler.

<sup>61</sup> Press Guidance Statement of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, April 3, 2007; Cited in Niksch, 6.

<sup>62</sup> Philippine Congress Res. 124.

sexual slavery of young women commonly known as comfort women by the Japanese Imperial Army during World War II and provide compensation to the victims in the light of the adoption by the U.S. House of Representatives of House Resolution 121 which states that Japan should formally acknowledge, apologize and accept historical responsibility in clear and unequivocal manner over its armed force's coercion of young women into sexual slavery during its colonial and wartime occupation of Asia, and in the light of the legislative initiatives in the House of Councilors of Japan seeking apology, compensation and immediate resolution of the issues concerning comfort women.<sup>63</sup>

Yet another Congressional bill tabled by the 14<sup>th</sup> Philippine Congress was introduced by Representatives Liza Maza and Luzviminda Ilagan of Gabriela Women's Party in August 2007. House Bill 1136 "An Act Providing for the Inclusion in the History Books of Elementary, Secondary and Collegiate Curricula the Lives and Heroism of Filipino Comfort Women during the Japanese Occupation and Appropriating Funds Therefore," focuses on revising historical education in the Philippines.

### **CASE BRIEFS**

All legal cases tell stories, and indeed, the process of story-telling in a case is decidedly non-linear in its approach. From a dispute to initial fact-finding, to legal process to appellate analysis, the stories that emerge from a legal case is not only inter-related but multi-dimensional as well. It is because of this inherently multi-dimensional nature that case narratives, including the socio-political struggles that give rise to the dispute and the resulting litigation, are an important aspect of historical analysis. The law courts have proved to be an important site of memory for former comfort women. An examination of narratives in these cases can shed light on circumstances that have been overlooked in the official state history of the Philippines, providing a more nuanced

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

understanding of the conflict, and, indeed, an altered interpretation of the narrative of former comfort women.

A series of seven suits filed with Japanese courts by 65 former comfort women resulted from the efforts by war victims and NGOs to get both compensation and legal recognition by the Japanese state. On December 6, 1991, the Korean comfort women belonging to the Association of Pacific War Victims and Bereaved Families filed a lawsuit against the Japanese Government at the Tokyo District Court. They were joined on April 2, 1993 and September 21, 1993 by 46 Filipino comfort women of the Filipino Victims of Military Sexual Slavery by Japan (now known as *Lila Pilipina*). These litigants demanded post-war responsibility, compensation and reparations, for the crimes against humanity committed during World War II.<sup>64</sup> However, on October 9, 1998, after five years of court hearings, expert opinions and testimonies, the Tokyo District Court dismissed the claims filed against the Japanese government by the Filipino women, denying to recognize the suffering of the aged women. Stating that the Court could not legally recognize any case that the state (Japan) had already provided wartime compensation and reparations for under the 1956 Treaty, the Court stated that it would be in violation of the Laws of War of Article 3 of the Convention (IV) on Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land.<sup>65</sup> Presiding Judge Yoriaki Ichikawa refused to accept and examine the case, because he felt that there was no legal basis for the victims' claims even under international humanitarian law.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Asian Center for Women's Human Rights, *Position Paper on the Court Case of the Filipino Comfort Women*, (Manila, Philippines: Asian Center for Women's Human Rights, 1999).

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

The second of these suits was filed by 46 aging Filipino former comfort women and focused exclusively on the right of an individual to seek compensation under current international law and the Hague Convention. The case was initially filed in April 1993 by 18 women, among them Maria Rosa Henson, who died before the ruling, and 28 others joined it six months later, seeking a combined compensation of \$66.6 million.<sup>67</sup> In 1998, the Tokyo District Court dismissed the suit on the grounds that international law does not provide for individual claims for compensation against a former occupying country. However, the publicity garnered by this legal defeat was resounding: Indai Lourdes Sajor of the Asian Centre for Women's Rights stated,

Japan's decision on the comfort women is watched closely by the world because it is not only as a way of showing Japan's remorse for its war crimes but also because it affects abuse of women by the military during wars all over the world.

One of the most important alternative sites of memory involved in the movement for redress is the Women's International Tribunal on Japanese Military Sexual Slavery, held in December 2000 in Tokyo, Japan. Established to consider the criminal liability of leading, high-ranking Japanese military and political figures and Japan's own responsibility for rape and sexual slavery as crimes against humanity, the Tribunal examined documentary evidence, collected survivors' testimonies and provided legal analysis. Arising out of the work of various women's nongovernmental organizations (NGOS) across Asia, the Tribunal was motivated by the conviction that:

These failures [of past trials] must not be allowed to silence the voices of survivors, nor obscure accountability for such crimes against humanity. [The

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<sup>67</sup> Suvendrini Kakauchi, "Comfort Women Battle on Despite Legal Blow", *Interpress Service*, 12 October 1998.

tribunal] was established to reassess the historic tendency to trivialize, excuse, marginalize and obfuscate crimes against women, particularly sexual crimes, and even more so, when they are committed against non-white women.<sup>68</sup>

Prosecution teams from ten Asian countries, including the Philippines, presented testimonies from several women, building up a picture of forced recruitment and prostitution and the physical and mental anguish suffered by many of the women throughout the rest of their lives, directly attributed to their suffering under the Japanese. Interestingly enough, the Tribunal even drew from the 1998 ruling as evidence of Japan's unwillingness to redress the issue of comfort women. One of the Filipino former comfort women, Maxima Regala Dela Cruz, remembered how "[they] went back home and [they] were crying... couldn't tell anyone or [they] would be executed. It was so shameful so [they] dug a deep hole and covered it."<sup>69</sup> In addition, the prosecution teams added documentary and expert evidence that linked these atrocities directly to the Japanese state and Emperor Hirohito, including the testimony of two former soldiers on their involvement in and use of the comfort stations.

The preliminary judgment found Emperor Hirohito guilty on the basis of command responsibility, and indicated that the comfort stations had been systematically instituted and operated as military policy, fully constituting crimes against humanity under applicable international law. Furthermore, the judgment determined Japan to be responsible for violation of treaties and international laws, particularly relating to slavery,

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<sup>68</sup> *Prosecutors and Peoples of Asia Pacific Region v. Hirohito; Prosecutors and Peoples of Asian Pacific Region v. Japan, Summary of Findings and Preliminary Judgment*, para. 5 (Women's International War Crimes Tribunal, 2000, December 12, 2000)

<sup>69</sup> Christine M. Chinkin, "Women's International Tribunal on Japanese Military Sexual Slavery," *The American Journal of International Law*, Volume 95, No. 2 (April 2001), 336.

trafficking, forced labor and rape. Finally, the Tribunal provided a series of recommended reparations.

Interestingly enough, despite the widespread attendance and publicity garnered by this Tribunal, the Tribunal itself lacked legal authority and jurisdiction to fully reprimand Japan and enforce its reparations. Debate on its effectiveness has been widespread, particularly on the question of whether this was nothing more than a mock trial, of little concern to international law and treaties.<sup>70</sup> Chinkin, however, disagrees, stating that the tribunal is an example of a people's tribunal, providing an alternative source of evidence and jurisprudence, particularly pertaining to contested applications of international law. Premised on the understanding that "law is an instrument of civil society,"<sup>71</sup> that does not solely belong to governments; peoples' tribunals can exercise moral authority, and can thus be opened to non-state actors through the addition of amicus briefs. While a peoples' tribunal cannot provide the due process guarantees of a national or international court of law, it is important to highlight that such tribunals, by sheer publicity, represent how states cannot, through their political alliances, treaties and settlements and legal loopholes, ignore or forgive crimes against humanity committed against individuals.

The Women's Tribunal is also clearly indicative of the need to collect and accurately compile the historical record. As a tribunal focused on the rights of women and on crimes of sexual violence and slavery, which have historically been neglected in

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<sup>70</sup> See Ida Mae Fernandez, ed. *International Symposium on Filipino Comfort Women: Papers and Proceedings*, (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Law Center, 1994); Yvonne Park Hsu, Yvonne Park, "Comfort Women' from Korea: Japan's World War II Sex Slaves and the Legitimacy of their Claims to Reparations," *Pacific Rim Law and Policy Journal* 2, no. 1 (winter 1993): 97-129; Afreen Ahmed, "The Shame of *Hwang V. Japan*: How the International Community Has Failed Asia's 'Comfort Women'," *Texas Journal of Women & the Law* 14, no. 1 (Fall 2004): 121-149; and Yayori Matsui, "Women's International War Crimes Tribunal on Japan's Military Sexual Slavery: Memory, Identity, and Society," *East Asia: An International Quarterly* 19, no. 4 (Winter 2001): 119-142.

<sup>71</sup> Richard Falk, "The Rights of Peoples (In Particular Indigenous People)" in *The Rights of Peoples*, James Crawford, ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1988) p.29.

treaties and settlements, the Women's Tribunal represented a widespread effort by grassroots movements, NGOs and even by former comfort women themselves, to collect data on human rights abuses to repudiate history sanctioned by states. Furthermore, former comfort women's testimonies were used in conjunction with various official documents, such as ticketing systems, revenue receipts and schedules, that highlighted not only how systematically institutionalized the comfort station was, but also how integral it was to keeping up soldier morale. In the case of the Philippines, this exhaustive effort to use testimonies and official documents in unison provided an alternative source of memory to address the lack of attention academic scholarship gave to abuses of human rights and gendered violence.

Ever since the comfort women's suits in Japanese courts during the early 1990s, with the exception of one victory in a lower court in 1998, Japanese courts have rejected claims for Japanese government financial compensation, citing Japanese reparations agreements with several Asian governments, concluded in accordance with the Treaty of Peace with Japan in 1951. In September 2000, 15 comfort women from China, Taiwan, South Korea and the Philippines filed a lawsuit in the US District Court of Washington, seeking claims, including financial compensation, against the Japanese government, under the US Alien Tort Statute.<sup>72</sup> Titled *Joo vs. Japan*, the District Court and the US Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia ruled against the comfort women, accepting instead, the Executive Branch's *amicus curiae* brief that the Executive Branch, and not the US courts, had any jurisdiction over the political question of whether individual claims against Japan were valid under the provisions of the Japanese Peace

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<sup>72</sup> Niksch, 19.



Treaty of 1951.<sup>73</sup> In July 2004, the US Supreme Court ruled that the Court of Appeals must reconsider the case, resulting in a June 2005 decision that affirmed the original District Court judgment.<sup>74</sup> In February 2006, the US Supreme Court ruled that the claims of the women constituted non-judicial 'political questions' and then deferred to the judgment of the US Executive Branch that the acceptance of such claims by US Courts would impinge upon the President's ability to conduct foreign relations.<sup>75</sup>

## NEWS ARTICLES

Media texts, and more specifically news articles, present versions of the world through the 'packaging' of events and characters into stories. A basic conceptual distinction analyzes the story that is told, the order in which, and the point of view from which it is told. Narratives in news articles rely on the presentation of an initial state of order which is in some way disturbed, and disordered, in relation to a particular problem or set of problems, a distinction that justifies its use as a genre of historical analysis.

In this section, I examine Filipino press coverage of the emergence and the question of compensation for the Filipino comfort women during the 1990s. In analyzing Filipino newspaper representations of the comfort women case, I seek to uncover what such discursive production might reveal about Filipino identity itself. I consider that the newspaper, that cultural artifact which constitutes the basis of a kind of secular ritual performed by thousands of people daily, as an especially potent site of identity production. News texts drawn from several major Filipino metropolitan and regional daily newspapers published in Manila were analyzed. While the comfort women issue

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Summary of case from US Law Week, provided by the American Law Division Congressional Research Service, April 5, 2006.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

received considerably more attention in the metropolitan newspapers than it did in the other newspapers, there was little discernible difference in the overall perspective taken on the issue between the publications. Most of the texts built their narrative trajectories around the central theme of the failure of the Japanese to adequately acknowledge and atone for their role in World War II. In relation to this general theme, the Japanese typically emerged as deluded about their role in the war, kept in the dark by a self-serving and unjust government which has consistently refused to make proper amends for the unparalleled horrors perpetrated by Japan's wartime administration. Throughout these newspaper articles, the former comfort women appear as victims whose innocence and youth were stolen by the Japanese.

Various rhetorical devices were employed in the coverage to connote the Japanese government's categorical misconduct in responding to the comfort women issue. Lexical elements of apologies issued by Japanese officials are routinely dissected in the coverage in such a way as to imply their insincerity, and a recurring line of argument posits any moves towards compensating former comfort women as representing nothing more than calculated attempts to win global sympathy. For these journalists, Japan's alleged failure to atone for acts perpetrated by its military during the war is openly deplored and it is stated that:

The Japanese government must show the world that it holds its military accountable for the crimes committed against those women and must formally apologize to those victims in the name of the military.<sup>76</sup>

The Japanese are also chastised in the coverage for their stubborn refusal to acknowledge what is presupposed to be the "truth" of their war, and indeed, it was

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<sup>76</sup> *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, June 7, 1996, p.7.

become a "question of honor and justice, not money."<sup>77</sup> Furthermore, the newspapers also steadfastly highlight how they will "serve notice to the governments of Japan and the Philippines that [they] will continue the struggle to press for the recognition of Japan's war crimes against the women of Asia and its legal responsibility to the victims."<sup>78</sup> The tone of condescension discernible here is echoed in the many infantilizing constructions of being Japanese that appear in press coverage, particularly in the question of compensation.

The question of compensation is the most discussed in the various newspapers. The establishment of the Asian Women's Fund was seen as a cop-out, "that the fund is being used by the Japanese Government to avoid taking full responsibility for its military war crimes."<sup>79</sup> Accordingly, only 11 of the 169 documented former comfort women actually came forward to partake of the funds being distributed. The newspapers documented how the "*lolas* who initially thought of availing of the fund now opted to reject it or simply not to apply because of the fund managers' lack of caring, respect and consideration for the individual situations of the victims."<sup>80</sup> In addition, the newspapers also highlight how a letter of apology and part of the money given by the Asian Women's Fund was returned to Japanese officials, primarily because "the message was plain and simple: the letter must be accompanied by a state legal compensation."<sup>81</sup> Furthermore, it was widely believed that "the Japanese Government set up the Asian Women's Fund to

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> *Today*, 18 December 1996.

<sup>79</sup> *Today*, "Lolas Set For Verdict," 5 May 1996.

<sup>80</sup> *Today*, 18 December 1996.

<sup>81</sup> *Today*, 6 February 1998.

help [the former comfort women] but the women rejected the offer because its funds were raised from donations by private groups or individuals.”<sup>82</sup>

The former comfort women emerge in the coverage as incontrovertible victims, and their eminent rape is established in some texts by reference to the tender age, or to the fact that they were still virgins and had been in parental custody. The recruitment of the former comfort women is typically represented as a violation of the sanctuary of the family home. *The Harbinger*, for example, depicts the story of *Lola Lucia*:

In 1944, when *Lola Lucia* was 15, five Japanese soldiers came and dragged her, her parents and her sister out of their house. After bayoneting her parents to death and disemboweling and mutilating her sister – who had refused to go – the soldiers took her to a two-story garrison, where one by one, soldiers, from dusk to daybreak, came into room.<sup>83</sup>

The coverage generally attached considerable importance to the degree of force used against the women, and thus established beyond doubt the comfort women’s unequivocal status as rape victims. Furthermore, this troping of the former comfort women as victims is at times expedited by referring to the women’s long-held silence. “Who knows how many of them continue to suffer in silence? Or how many died before they could tell their story? Or how many were killed or died during their captivity?”<sup>84</sup> At the same time as this discursive strategy of delayed justice is employed, the newspapers also continue their tirade against the Japanese government by highlighting the women’s status as survivors, bent on taking on the Japanese government:

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> *The Harbinger*, 16 March 1999.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

They will not be denied! In faded dresses and worn-out shoes, [the former comfort women] march in front of the Japanese embassy ... their emaciated arms and hands – now arthritic from old age and decades of washing clothes and cleaning houses for a living – hold protest signs... [they] may not get justice before they die, but they will not be nameless.<sup>85</sup>

More recent news articles focus on the lack of accountability the Philippine government has accorded to the comfort women issue. Indeed, the *QC Independent* for example, highlighted how the comfort women condemn president Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo for abandoning their fight for justice. Tagging Arroyo as a modern-day *Makapili*, the newspaper goes on to lament that “this is the only country where the fight of the comfort women is not supported by its government.”<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, the newspaper also condemned President Arroyo for defending the position of the Japanese government that the 1956 Peace Treaty and the Reparations Agreement of the Philippines and Japan had already covered the demands of the comfort women and for supporting the erection of a *kamikaze* memorial in the Philippines. The newspaper states, “...with Mrs. Arroyo acting as a *Makapili*, she has been serving the comfort women’s enemy.”<sup>87</sup> In addition, the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* highlights how a 2007 resolution before Congress to demand that the Japanese government formally make amends for the comfort women issue was met with extreme hostility from Japan. The bill, seen as more likely to pass since the Democrats took control of Congress, calls on Japan to “formally and unambiguously apologize and acknowledge the tragedy.”<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> *QC Independent*, 10 August 2005.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 19 February 2007.

By representing the story of the comfort women in this way in the press, Filipino newspapers continue to vilify the Japanese as cruel and exploitative sexual predators, pitted against the rights of the former comfort women. However, by examining this issue in terms of Japan's failure to atone for its war crimes, it makes it easier to construct the stories of the comfort women as a kind of currency of international relations. In this sense, their representation in Filipino news texts, while highly important, can also be seen as symptomatic of the Japanese-Filipino relationship.

### ***LOLAS' POETRY***

The legacy of Filipino poetry is rich and complex, and the stories that it tells can be seen as national stories. Since the earliest days of Philippine history, the creative impulse has been at work, and the people who shaped the nation have always expressed themselves in lyrical form—in hymns, ballads, marches, limericks, love songs, and elegies. The poems they have left for posterity are unmatched in their vitality and variety, and the events and emotions that these works describe together make up a portrait of the Filipino experience.

While the resources that any group has available to it dictate the medium of expression used, it is here that literacy takes on a vital role in the historical record. The very lack of literacy among former comfort women, as a result of their largely lower class standing, has had important implications for how their testimonies have been preserved. Not only have their testimonies have had to be transcribed for them, but these former comfort women have had to learn how to read and write in their old age to be able to keep up with the issue of redress. Poetry as a site of memory has proven useful in documenting gaps in historical record, and in the case of the former comfort women,

have served as a means to highlight their testimonies and make it more available to the general public.

Ruth Elynia Mabanglo's *Balada ni Lola Amonita*, published by the Asian Women Human Rights Council, is just one example of how the act of remembering the past and of assigning levels of significance to it, is an act of interpretation. This poem serves as a collective framework for these women's testimonies, drawing its inspiration from a former comfort women's testimony at a Hawaiian conference in September 1992. Mabanglo relives the story of how a former comfort woman was accosted and raped:

"A fresh maiden is sweet!"  
 Rough and callused palms gag my lips  
 Frantically, I tried to move  
 He forces me to lie down  
 His thighs pinned down my thighs  
 His violent hands  
 Seeking  
 His penis breaks me open  
 Like a razor  
 Spreads me  
 Diffusing me  
 Like blazing light  
 Damning darkness  
 Warm tears flow from the wound  
 Blood of crushed flower.<sup>89</sup>

While Mabanglo's poem follows the general rule of forced recruitment and then rape, Joi Barrios' poem, *Inasawa ng Hapon*, highlights the sense of taboo that the former comfort women had had to deal with in the aftermath of the war. Describing both the lingering sense of loss and overwhelming shame, Barrios highlights how, through no

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<sup>89</sup> This text is translated by the author from: "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 nya/ Marahas na pagaapuhap/ Ang mga kamay / Bumiyak sa akin ang ari nya,/ Parang labaha,/ Ibinuka ako,/ Ibinuhaghag / Parang nagliliyab na liwanag/ Humihiwa ng dilim/ May mainit na agas sa nabiyak na sugat/ Dugo ng ligis ng bulaklak.

fault of their own, former comfort women were made to feel responsible for the sexual violence and human rights abuses they had suffered.

Oh, Saint Regina, be with me to freedom  
 How do I face my countrymen who run after me?  
 Oh, Saint Clara, they catch up to me  
 Grab my hair  
 Pull it  
 Hit me  
 Even the earth silences each slap  
 Oh, Saint Rita, how sharp do they point!  
 How slanted are their eyes<sup>90</sup>

Interestingly enough, Barrios describes how the comfort woman's enemy is not just the Japanese soldier, who she has to cook and clean for, and then be sexually intimate with at night, as the soldier's *asawa* (wife) but also the general society around her. Her fellow countrymen become, in her eyes, just as bad as the Japanese enemy, noting how their eyes grow slanted and sharp in anger and criticism, directly paralleled with the slanted Japanese eyes. Furthermore, in this poem, as in Mabanglo's poem, the former comfort women detail their disillusionment with religions, both native and Christian, because of their inability to come to terms with their suffering. Mabanglo, for example, asks further along in her poem whether she had done anything to invoke the anger of the native spirits: "I don't remember how I provoked their ire / Did I sweep the floor at night? / Did I plant pepper without asking permission? / Did I go near a banyan tree?"<sup>91</sup> Calling to mind that the majority of the Filipino former comfort women were provincial, largely illiterate and deeply superstitious, Mabanglo depicts, with Barrios, how their

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<sup>90</sup> This text is translated by the author from: *Ay, Santa Regina, samahan ako sa paglikas, paaanong haharap kapag naabutan / Ng humahabol na kababayan? / Ay, Santa Clara, sila'y pumaligid, buhok ko'y hinablot, hinila, tinapyas, / At sinalo ng lupa ang bawat hibla / Ay, Santa Rita, kay talas ng patalim, Kaylupit ng kanilang mga mata.*

<sup>91</sup> This text is translated by the author from: *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?*



stories of suffering become so entrenched in them and their personalities that they begin to take blame for their rapes and imprisonment. For Barrios, the apparent silence of the saints was apparently justified because they could not deal with the shame that the comfort women had.

On the other hand, Pilar Frias' *Mga Lola*, is a stunning and uplifting poem, not only because Pilar Frias was a former comfort woman herself, but because, in a way, it encapsulates justifiable anger and resentment into an anthem of redress:

Let us fight the Japanese government  
If they do not want to pay  
Our compensation  
They are the one's who destroyed our lives back then  
They are the ones who destroyed our education.<sup>92</sup>

Perhaps the most interesting element in this poem is the fact that the former comfort women are rallying to make compensation their issue, and in addition, that they are no longer blaming themselves for their suffering. Instead, there is a marked difference in assigning blame specifically to the Japanese government for its interference in and its destruction of these women's lives and their future prospects. At the same time, there is a marked sense of solidarity among these women, particularly in their adoption of the term, *lola*. *Lola* is the Filipino term for grandmother, traditionally a sign of respect in a conservative and family-oriented society. The adoption and widespread acceptance of this term, instead of *biktima* (victim) is significant because it highlights the comfort women's view that they are not responsible for the atrocities that they suffered, and that they are laying blame solely on the Japanese government.

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<sup>92</sup> This text is translated by the author from: *Labanan na natin ang gobyernong Hapo/ Sapagkat sila ayaw magbayad/ Ng ating compensation/ Sila ang nagwasak ng buhay natin noo/ Sila ang nagwasak ng ating edukasyon*

## PERFORMANCE

Another site of memory seldom used in compiling official historical records is that of performance. Among the genres presented here, dance and performance may have the most to gain from a historical reading and feminist analysis. In this section, I rely on how representation, inherent in the story-telling of performance, leads to new insights into the ways dance and performance produces meaning. In addition, I view performance as a cultural form, informed by socio-political events, rather than as a purely aesthetic practice.<sup>93</sup> Here, I draw on Gayatri Spivak's reading on the *l'écriture féminine* (the writing of the feminine body), where she argues that the only way to move women from a position of objectified servitude to a position of full subjectivity is for women to write the truth of their bodies, as a call to arms.<sup>94</sup>

The Filipino former comfort women have, on a number of occasions, performed traditional Filipino dance and music during rallies and organizational gatherings. While the significance of performance as a medium of expression in historical record has been relegated to an outlaw genre, I find that not only do the specific dances these *lolas* perform have symbolic meaning but also becomes a mode of outreach to a society with folkloric beginnings.

Traditional folk dance and music are commonly derived from ritual practices and is often thought of as being a separate and distinct component of rituals. In practice, however, this distinction is not as clear-cut. Oftentimes, the dance itself constitutes the

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<sup>93</sup> See Ann Daly, "Unlimited Partnership: Dance and Feminist Analysis," in *Dance Research Journal*, 23 no. 1 (Spring 1991): 2-5; Marianna Goldberg, ed. "The Body as Discourse," in *Women & Performance*, 3, no.2 (1987/1988): 78-89 and Johanna Boyce, Ann Daly, Bill T. Jones and Carol Martin, "Movement & Gender: A Roundtable Discussion," in *TDR: A Journal of Performance Studies*, 32, no. 4, T120 (Winter 1988): 82-101.

<sup>94</sup> See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Woman in Difference: Mahasweta Devi's 'Douloti the Bountiful,'" in *Cultural Critique, The Construction of Gender and Modes of Social Division II*, no. 14 (Winter, 1989-1990): 105-128.

ritual, and the movement and symbolic gestures are interpersonal and blended into the entire ritual performance.<sup>95</sup> In Filipino ethnography, at the very core of any ritual is the fundamental belief that there exists a delicate balance between man and nature, and the spirit world, as evidenced by both Mabanglo and Barrios' poems.<sup>96</sup> Traditional Filipino folk culture believes that it is man's action that shifts this balance and thus, rituals can be interpreted as an attempt to enhance and maintain this balance. When the balance is lost, misfortune in various forms is visited upon the village and rituals must be performed to restore the state of affairs.<sup>97</sup> This helps explain the broad range of ritual practices in the Philippines, including prophesizing the future, appeasing spirits, ensuring good harvests, invoking protection, guiding, counseling and healing.

As a general rule, where there are rituals, there are dances as there is no higher symbolic form than a dance in Filipino folk culture. Transcendent of the spoken language and laden with the most profound emotional content, dance represents an intersection of collective memory, religious piety and humility.<sup>98</sup> When the message is so complex, it is at times articulated in a dance. In addition, the performance of a ritual provides an important occasion to reaffirm social roles and expectations and to validate village hierarchies. The persons who initiate and lead ritual dances are those who hold the

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<sup>95</sup> Ann Dils and Ann Cooper Albright, eds., *Moving History/ Dancing Cultures: A Dance History Reader* (Durham, NC: Wesleyan University Press, 2001), 415.

<sup>96</sup> See Paul A. Rodell, *Culture and Customs of the Philippines*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001); Francis Reyes Aquino, *Philippine Folk Dances Volume I - VI*, (Manila, Philippines: n.p, 1983); Leonor Orosa Goquinco, *The Dances of the Emerald Isles* (Quezon City, Ben-Lor Publishers, 1980); Libertad V. Fajardo and Mary Joan V. Fajardo, *Visayan Folk Dances* (Manila, n.p, 1979); Reynaldo Alejandro, *Sayaw Silingan: The Dance in the Philippines* (New York: Dance Perspectives Foundation, 1972); Thelma B. Kintanar, *University of the Philippines Cultural Dictionary for Filipinos* (Quezon City, Philippines: University of Philippines Press and Anvil Publishing, 1996); Ligaya Fernando Amilbangsa, *Pangalay: Traditional dances and Related Folk Artistic Expressions* (Manila, Philippines: Ethnographic Arts Publications, 1983)

<sup>97</sup> Goquinco, 117.

<sup>98</sup> Alejandro, 96.

collective knowledge of the village, a role that commands the highest respect and is accorded the highest status.<sup>99</sup>

Despite the differential regional histories and the diversity of folk dances throughout the Philippines, most of these dances symbolize a need to clarify and to define a sense of place in the universe.<sup>100</sup> The dances typically amplify well-known narratives drawn from a shared collective history that illustrate the interplay between man, nature and the spirits. In this cultural context, the dances cater to both the spiritual world, which govern man's affairs, as well as the dancers themselves. From a social context, the dramatization and the use of symbolic narratives in these dances, both intensify and reinforce values and beliefs, and provide a sense of generational continuity.<sup>101</sup>

The performances of the *lolas* during their protest rallies are also a distinct nod to an era in Philippine history where music and dance was energized by domestic political events, serving as vehicle for political protest and social commentary.<sup>102</sup> Just as turn of the century Filipino revolutionaries used music in their struggles against Spain and the United States, so too was the medium used to organize radical agrarian labor movements in the 1930s.<sup>103</sup> The anti-Marcos protests of the 1960s and 1970s also continued this radical tradition, rewriting and reusing some of the same lyrics from the 1900s and 1930s. Some of the music and dance of depression-era Philippines were directed straight at youth and women, such as *Gumising Ka Kabataan!* (Wake Up Children!) and *Babaeng Walang Kibo* (Passive Woman).<sup>104</sup> However, once adopted by professional musicians,

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<sup>99</sup> Kintanar, 75.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Rodell, 184.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 185.

protest music and dance had a significant impact on mainstream Filipino music, by making feeling love for one's country not only acceptable but popular and even necessary for one's self-respect and dignity. For example, Florate de Leon's *Ako'y Pinoy* (I am a Filipino) and *Handog* (Offering) captured the mood of the People's Power Revolution of 1986 that ousted dictator Ferdinand Marcos. Philippine dance has also retained its relevance for contemporary society by making social commentary, such as Basilio's 1984 *Misa Filipina*, a stylized representation of the assassination of Benigno Aquino, Marcos' longtime political opponent and husband of future president, Corazon Aquino.<sup>105</sup>

As such, the performance of Filipino folk dance and music is an act of recollection. Here, folk dance highlights the understanding that in recollecting the significance of the past, dancers are better prepared for the present's difficulties. The concept of recollection is illustrated well in the *lolas'* performance of folk dance, bringing to mind the *lolas'* reconstruction of their violated bodies through these performances. Indeed, the *lolas'* call for Japan to provide compensation for their past suffering is a call to arms, to independence, and is symbolized through these performances. Most of their performances constitute dances from the *barrio* or rural suite of dances, a distinct category of Filipino dance that reflects the rural areas of the Philippines, where dances commemorate harvests, farming and innocent love. Most rural dances demonstrate a love of life, expressing a joy in work, a love for music, and pleasure in the simplicities of life.

The *Kalapati* dance, for example, is from Cabugao, Ilocos Sur province, and symbolizes a call to peace. By imitating the movements of a graceful dove, the dance symbolically portrays simplicity, naturalness, and shyness. Another popularly performed

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 191.

dance is the *Maglangka*, from the Southern Islands suite of dances. Literally meaning "to dance," the *maglangka* is used to mold the adolescent girls into ladies of good breeding and accomplished dancing skills.<sup>106</sup> In this dance, the girls are strictly taught to gracefully execute movements imitating birds in flight, fish swimming in the sea, or branches swaying in the air while remaining in the confines of a square cloth. Interestingly enough, the dances that the *lolas* perform are usually confined to female dancers only, and with the extensive repertoire of Philippine dances that deal with courtship, their choices remarkably dwell on the topics of innocence and coming of age.

The *Malangka* dance, for example, is usually performed by young, unmarried women.<sup>107</sup> In a sense, it almost seems that the *lolas* are in a sort of limbo, not quite fully grown-up women, with marriages and children, and see themselves as having been robbed of a childish innocence. Indeed, many of these women were pre-teens and had not even had their menstrual periods at the time of their forced recruitment as comfort women. The performance of the *Kalapati* is an interesting development, particularly since its origins stem from matriarchs calling for peace among their warring villages, a symbolic gesture for the movement of redress.

The history of military sexual slavery during the Japanese occupation of the Philippines in World War II shows that colonized women were explicitly made a part of Japanese imperialism. Even today, the stories of former comfort women continue to mediate the politics and practices within the Japanese-Filipino relationship. At the same time, however, women in wartime military sexual slavery have not been included in traditional modes of history writing. Former comfort women have been largely omitted or

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<sup>106</sup> Rodell, 217.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

otherwise marginalized in history textbooks and official public histories and commemorations of World War II.

As counter-memories, the *lolas*' narratives offer an alternative reconstruction of collective memory in contrast to the official history written and glorified in textbooks. At the same time, the *lolas* complicate both the official and unofficial historical records by adding alternative sites of memory to collect their experiences. In retrospect, the masculine nature of statist narratives of World War II history in the Philippines delegates these alternative sites as feminine, providing a supporting role instead to testimonies, legal briefs, news articles, poetry and performance. Here, too, we see the intertwining of class with gender in this specific historical context, for not only is World War II history in the Philippines focused on the structure and process of male-dominated politics, but also specifically on men of power, such as General MacArthur and President Laurel. Interestingly enough, the body of Philippine historical writing on tribal politics, women, matriarchs and local politics is often seen as complementary to the "official" account of World War II history. At the same time, these statist accounts are also racialized, primarily in their pro-American narratives of Filipino history during World War II. In the same way, alternative sites of memory highlight all Japanese as enemies of the Philippine state, bringing to mind the dichotomy between the rural, young and innocent Filipina and the urban, sex-crazed and rapist Japanese soldier. Interestingly enough, the *lolas*' call for redress does not specifically dwell on the soldiers' intentions themselves, but rather on the responsibility of the Japanese government instead, highlighting again a class-based struggle against men and governments of power.

Owing to their advanced age and the activist nature of the Filipino movement for redress, their experiences have been immortalized in legal court proceedings, in press statements, in poems, artwork and even dance. As alternative sites of memory, these avenues of expressions offer a different way of remembering the wartime past. In this way, the *lolas* challenge the way in which the Filipino national memory, including the textbooks themselves, are controlled, regulated and mediated. One can even use these avenues of expressions to rethink the way in which national history is written, conceptualized and taught in schools.



## CONCLUSION:

### A TIME FOR *LOLA*: PRODUCING HER HISTORY

*The life of a comfort woman is hard  
Enduring all hardships  
How hard is the road we've traveled  
Sleeping on cement, no mat to sleep on  
The life we've endured  
At the hands of the Japanese  
The life of a comfort woman is hard  
No dignity, No honor.<sup>1</sup>*

The story of the Filipino *lolas* in the comfort women movement is an interesting and deep chapter in the overarching history of the Filipino people. The main question in the following analysis, I look at the broader implications of the impact of the former comfort women issue in Filipino history and society. In this chapter, I look at how the comfort women issue in the Philippines has been written and how it has changed paradigms, touching on questions of nationalism and discourse in Filipino history and its connection to feminism. Another important question here that I grapple with is how the issue of the comfort women plays on the question of the historical representation of women and power in the Philippines, and the Philippines' relationship with Japan in light of this issue.

### FILIPINO COMFORT WOMEN IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS

It is this very same framework that guides this discussion of the former comfort women. The Japanese Imperial Army's comfort system differs from other forms of

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<sup>1</sup> Lola Pilar Frias, "Buhay ng Comfort Woman" cited in Sancho, 294, translated from: *Kay hirap ng buhay ng comfort woman / Tinitii ang lahat ng kahirapan / Kay hirap ang aking pinagdaanan / Natutulog sa semento, walang banig na higaan / Ang buhay na aking tinitii / Sa kamay ng mga Hapones / Kay hirap ng/ buhay ng comfort woman/ Nawawalan ng dignidad at karangalan*

wartime sexual violence in that it was a disciplinary institution that used sex not as a weapon of aggression but as a means to discipline soldiers into being more efficient tools for Japan's imperial project. The Philippine comfort women movement employs discursive strategies that respond directly to the gender and race ideologies underlying imperial Japan's practice of military sexual slavery during the Pacific War. Other comfort stations survivors, including *Lola Rosa*, came forward and employed these same discursive strategies. Indeed, it is not uncommon for the word "*lola*" to figure so prominently in the names of comfort women organizations in the Philippines. Examples of which include LILA-Pilipina, founded in 1994, which stands for *Liga ng Lolang Pilipina*, or the League of Filipino Grandmothers. Similarly there is *Malayas Lolas* (Malaya being free) and *Lolas Kampanyera*, which stands for Grandmothers for Peace and Compensation. The public insistence of the survivors' status as grandmothers is both social convention and tradition as well as a strategy to overcome the stigma of rape and prostitution.

A protest statement issued by the Philippine branch of International Women in Black movement relies heavily on this construction of family, in which family and children need to be protected from evil at all costs:

We stand in silence and remember that this is our way to keep peace... because it is the women and children most affected by the armed conflicts, by the brutality of wars. It is the women who are raped and made to serve as sex slaves to the dominant wartime forces. It is the women and children who are most traumatized and bear the burdens of the atrocities throughout their lives, as in the case of the former Japanese (military) sex slaves, the comfort women.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Katharina R. Mendoza, "Freeing the 'Slaves of Destiny': The *Lolas* of the Filipino Comfort Women Movement," *Cultural Dynamics* 15, no. 3 (November 2003): 258.

It is this particular strategy, of focusing on women, family and children, that actually replaces one type of value with another, reinscribing the distinction between worthy and unworthy women, of willing prostitutes versus coerced girls and young women. Indeed, this implies that the victims, the women, could really have been both mothers and grandmothers, and thus, the criminal nature of the comfort station system is even more criminalized because it poses a threat against the traditional and valuable family unit. Henson's autobiography and detailed testimonial of her life as a comfort woman uses this discursive strategy to demonstrate how chastity determined the worth and marriageable material of a woman. In her discussion of Henson's life, Mendoza illustrates the powerful chasm that existed between the privileged and the powerless in Philippine society. Mendoza highlights the fact that the only other person who knew Henson's predicament was her own mother, who was a sympathetic listener primarily because she herself has been a comfort woman of sorts to Don Pepe, Henson's father. Besides perpetuating troubling notions of gender and class, Mendoza asserts that movement rhetoric also placed great emphasis on the courage survivors have displayed in daring to break the historical silence.

As it seeks reparations for those wartime atrocities, the movement makes appeals to traditional notions of family and Filipino womanhood, a strategy that has done much to create awareness of and public support for comfort station survivors. However, these discourses carry within them the potential to reinscribe those very same patriarchal ideologies that made institutionalized rape possible. Mendoza goes on to highlight that we should not fault the women for taking full advantage of the few strategies that are available to them. Rather, such strategies must be used with care.

The testimonies of the Filipino comfort women can be seen as a form of performing oral history—a spectacle of protest. Many of the Filipino comfort women come from the urban poor. Their victimization has resulted in a life of poverty; as social victims, they were forced to leave their villages and move to the city, where, deprived of an education, they were compelled to remain in low-paying jobs such as laundry women and salesgirls. However, these stories are not merely memories of the war or stories of rape and victimization. They are a form of protest politics in which women demand compensation from the Japanese government as well as an apology and the rewriting of official national histories in textbooks. They are also feminist protests. The women become feminist advocates—they are linked to feminist transnational organizations with other comfort women in Asia, as well as feminist groups in Japan, and they ally with other feminist organizations campaigning for ‘a world without war.’ In telling their stories, I’d argue, these women become transformed from victims into feminist advocates.

With both these groups, the *lolas* present themselves as both victims and feminist advocates. Demanding an official apology and compensation from the Japanese government, the strategies the *lolas* employ also serve as a reminder that their struggle is not just against the Japanese government but also against the Filipino government, which has also ignored them and has resisted including their stories in the country’s national histories.

### COMPLEMENTARY NARRATIVES

Over the past few decades, archaeological and material sources have emerged as a powerful means of writing alternative histories. They have become essential means for

recording and preserving memories and the life experiences of people whose histories have often been marginalized in external literary sources. It enables historians to eavesdrop on events, feelings, attitudes and ways of life which have been hidden from history, and thus to write a more inclusive and a more localized history of our past. Alternative history has developed out of historiography to identify historical points of view that have been ignored, overlooked, or un-seeable. It usually denotes a history told from an alternative viewpoint, rather than from the view (actual or ascribed, obvious or inferred) of imperialists, conquerors or explorers.

Like the oral histories of all peoples, the testimonies of the Filipino comfort women express values, attitudes, and thoughts which are the products of their past and traumatic experiences. For that reason, the study of their testimonies and the various mediums of expression which they employ provide a way of learning about their history. Through the study of these mediums, we can study the questions which have long preoccupied Filipino historians. As students of Filipino history begin to consider World War II and its relation to post-war Filipino society, we must also take into consideration the Philippine's current foreign policy, particularly in dealing with Japan and the United States. As a historian has noted, "beggars cannot be choosers,"<sup>3</sup> can Filipino politics really come to terms with the war crimes perpetuated by Japanese troops in the Philippines during World War II, especially considering the amount of foreign aid it has received from Japan? Will the Filipino government really endorse the sanctioning of ties with Japan, as voiced by many former comfort women and their supporters? At this point in time, it is difficult not to be sceptical.

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<sup>3</sup> Conde.

As reflected in the Filipino textbooks, in the testimonies of the comfort women as well as the symbolic success of the Tribunal, the place of comfort women in the construction of public memories has been fraught with debate. Yet, despite their centrality within the debate of constructing official, national memories, comfort women, or even just the broader spectrum of women in wartime military sexual slavery, have not been treated as subjects truly worthy of inclusion in "professional", "traditional" historical writing. There has been such an unwillingness to discuss such sexual matters within the public realm, and at the same time, there has been an unwillingness to atone for the sufferings these women, now septuagenarians, have endured. It is only by telling their stories of forced recruitment, hunger, confinement, torture, beatings, rape, death and humiliation that these women are able to reconstitute both private and public memories of the past.

On another level, however, the use of the comfort women's testimonies as a form of alternate history has proven to be the trend in Filipino historiography. From collections of folk art, to music, to oral histories of fast-disappearing ethnic tribes, more and more sources are becoming more available to counteract an official version of history, a narrative that focuses on top-down, political history rather than of the general population. If anything, my research during this thesis has shown that a historical interpretation of the Filipino comfort woman movement is lacking, and that historical research needs to incorporate a gendered perspective in understanding why the comfort woman issue was silenced for so many years in the Philippines, and what informal power these former comfort women employ in getting their stories heard.

Perhaps an even more challenging perspective to incorporate within this struggle is the need to both understand and balance the official discourse and the counter-memories of the comfort women. At the beginning of this research, I asserted that any understanding of the nature of the debates between official public memory and alternate histories is integral to understanding the prevalent view in academic scholarship that Japan has not been held accountable to any of its past aggressiveness. For some, the testimonies of the former comfort women have been feared as a source of emasculation for Japan, and perhaps justifiably so.

Alternative narratives are not necessarily independent of the statist narrative. In the case of the former comfort women, their alternative narrative cannot be seen as separate from that of the state's. Instead, it is shaped and molded accordingly. Thus, we need to be mindful of the dangers in celebrating their alternative memories as oppositional, as they are produced within the same cognitive structure and design as the statist narrative. As in the words of Richard Roberts, "the most important task in examining the production of history is to pay careful attention to the extraordinary range of contexts in which men and women produce history and memories and the uses to which they put them."<sup>4</sup> In this specific context, where assuredly, there is no utopia for historians, it is imperative to recognize these women as not just victims that demand justice, but also as active shapers of history, by challenging us to question "truths" about imperialism, colonialism, gender relations and ultimately, nationalism.

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<sup>4</sup> Roberts, 522.

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