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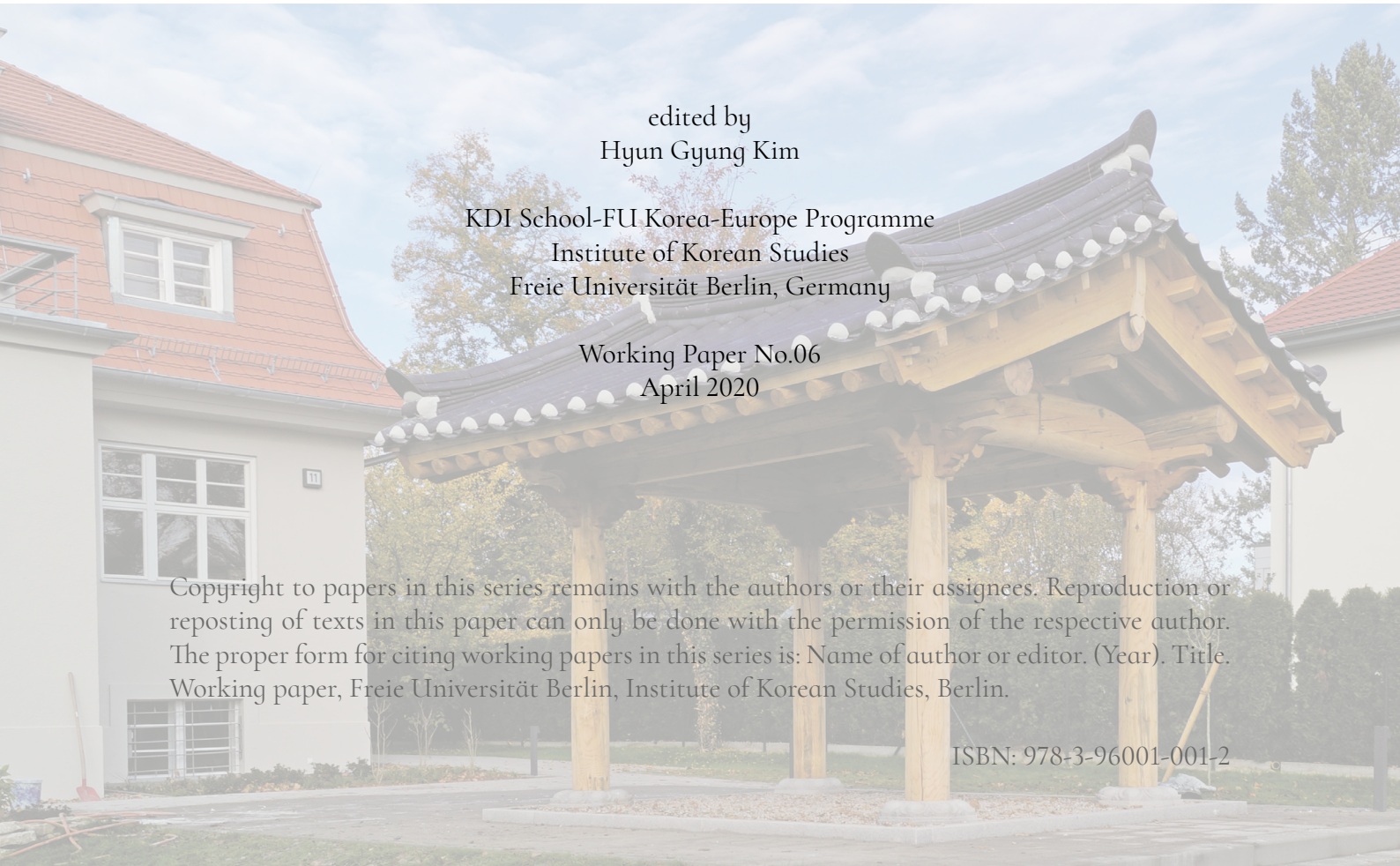
Korea Focus

Educating and Teaching Students in Europe about the issue of "Comfort Women"



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Introduction: Toward a Critical Transnational Production of Knowledge on War, Violence, and Gender

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Forced Sex Work in Europe and "Comfort Women" in Asia during World War II

"Comfort women" is the euphemistic term used to refer to victims from all over Asia and from the Netherlands who were forced to provide sexual services to soldiers and civilians affiliated with the Japanese military in the battlefield, Japanese-occupied territories, and Japanese army posts in the period of time from the first Shanghai Incident of 1932 to Japanese defeat in 1945. In a process that started with the public testimony of former "comfort woman" Kim Hak Soon in 1991, Japanese military "comfort women" have by now become part of a "transnational memory" similar to that relating to the Holocaust and the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings (Gluck, 2007, p. 49). What this means is that the memory of these crimes and tragedies is no longer limited to those who perpetrated or endured them directly, but belongs to all who have lived or live in this world in the period of time from the end of the war to the present day.

The USA is probably the place where we can most clearly observe the movement regarding – and the artistic representation of – "comfort women" as part of a transnational memory. Since 2010, numerous memorials to the comfort women have been erected in New York, New Jersey, Texas, Michigan, California, and Virginia, in each case with the support of the respective local governments. Statues of young girls representing the victims were also erected in several cities including Glendale, Southfield, Brookhaven, and San Francisco. This was possible mainly due to the solidarity of Asian diasporic communities. The process of erecting these public memorials calls attention to communities' engagement with the history of World War II and allows them to weave their own stories from their very own perspectives.

Compared to the situation in the USA, interest in the issue of "comfort women" does not seem as widespread and intense in Europe. The fact that East Asian diasporic communities do not have much influence in European society is probably one reason for this. However, Europe cannot be considered the exceptional case when it comes to sexual exploitation in times of war.

The manner in which Germany has dealt with forced sex work under National Socialist rule in particular shows us the difficulties inherent in investigating and attributing responsibility for gendered violence.

It was only in the middle of the 2000s, more specifically in the year 2005, that women who had been mobilised as forced sex workers during World War II started to become visible when a special exhibition titled *Camp Brothels - Forced Sex Work in Nazi Concentration Camps* revealed victims' names and detailed their experiences (for the details, refer to https://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/concentration-camp-bordellos-the-main-thing-was-to-survive-at-all-a-632558.html). As had been the case with the "comfort women" of Asia, these women's experiences had previously been an open secret: Even though it was not difficult to find descriptions of camp brothels in well-known survivors' autobiographies, nobody paid attention to the related crimes, with research on the victims of National socialist violence focusing on Jewish victims.

In her book of 2010, translated into Japanese in the year 2015, Regina Mühlhäuser, who is the author of a monograph and several research articles on sexual violence against women in wartime Europe, recounts how it was her involvement with the Women's International War Crimes Tribunal on Japan's Military Sexual Slavery of 2000 (Mühlhäuser, 2015) that reignited her interest in sexual violence in wartime Europe. That tribunal, of course, was the fruit of the efforts, and mutual solidarity, of feminist movements, particularly, but not exclusively, in Asia. Mühlhäuser having been motivated to start her research into sexual violence in Nazi concentration camps by her participation in the Women's International War Crimes Tribunal on Japan's Military Sexual Slavery thereby goes to show how Asian feminists' activism and production of knowledge contributed to the production of knowledge on forced sex work in Nazi concentration camps in Europe.

It was against this background that the Institute of Korean Studies at Freie Universität Berlin devised a programme in 2018 that would educate and teach students in Europe about "comfort women". The programme, described in more detail below, was designed to facilitate an understanding of the genealogy of critical knowledge and feminist activism surrounding the issue, and to do so particularly, but not exclusively, with regard to the Korean case. It was also intended to give students the opportunity to articulate their very own positionalities regarding the issue of "comfort women" – as students in Europe engaging with Korea and East Asia. We hoped that through their experience with the programme, participants would gain the ability to get involved in the critical and transnational production of knowledge in their role as members of the next generation of Korean and East Asian Studies scholars in Europe.

With hindsight, the year 2018 seems to have been the perfect time for examining the complicated situation surrounding the issue of "comfort women": Japanese literature scholar Park Yoo Ha's book of 2013 titled *Comfort Women of the Empire* had been translated into Japanese in 2017, sparking outrage and uproar. The publication of Park's book called attention to the Korean version of historical revisionism. Also, in 2018, the Korean government elected into office in 2017 following the impeachment of the previous president, who had been involved in a corruption scandal, declared the invalidity of the supposedly "final and irreversible solution" contained in the 2015 agreement between that previous Korean government and the Japanese government. That decision was based on a recognition of the principle of individual victims' rights to bring direct legal action against state entities.

Of course, our primary motivation in planning and running an educational programme on the "comfort women" was quite independent of any consideration of current affairs. It was rooted in the fact that the issue of "comfort women" is so deeply intertwined with questions of colonialism, nationalism, gender, and state violence, and that all of these are of such central importance when it comes to trying to understand modern Korean history.

The Modular Course of 2018:
Multiple Approaches to the Issue of "Comfort Women" in Korea

The modular course comprised a total number of four modules: two sets of two intensive seminars each, a summer school in Korea, and a special lecture series. The summer school in Korea consisted of lectures, the screening of a documentary film followed by a post-screening conversation with the film-maker, a number of field trips, and participants' presentations.

The topic of the first set of intensive seminars held in December 2017 and January 2018 was *The Korean War, Cold-War Culture and Gendered Violence*. Professor of history at Seoul National University Chung Yong Wook provided a fresh perspective on the Korean War in the context of Cold War culture. In the second seminar, professor Chung Young-Hwan of Meiji Gakuin University focused on the post-war treatment of the Japanese Empire's war crimes.

The theme of the intensive seminar in July 2018 was *Human Rights, Civil Society, and "Comfort Women" in Korea*. Its purpose was to offer an overview of the issue to provide orientation for the summer school. In teaching the seminar, professor Cho Hyo-Je of SungKongHoe University, who is an expert in Human Rights Studies, elucidated the development and the features of Korean civil society and issues related to human rights in Korea. I myself, specialising in Gender/Sexuality Studies, gave a class on the historical background to, and current issues surrounding, the issue of "comfort women". An average number of eleven senior-level undergraduate and graduate students participated in these seminars.

The summer school was held from 15 to 22 August 2018 in cooperation with the Department of Sociology of Yonsei University, Seoul, and was attended by nine students from Freie Universität Berlin, one student from Ruhr-Universität Bochum, one from Charles University in Prague, and two students from the Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales in Paris. These students were joined by several students from Yonsei University. Participants started the summer school programme by visiting the Wednesday Rally for "Comfort Women" (*Suyojip'oe*) held in front of the Japanese embassy in Seoul. They did so on the 15th day of August, referred to as "the Day of the Anniversary of the Ending of the War" in Japan and as "National Liberation Day" in Korea. (The allies of World War II referred to this day as "Victory over Japan Day" or "Victory in the Pacific Day".) Students vividly debated the details of how the rally had been organised and how it compared to the European style of organizing and holding demonstrations. You can feel that the rally – incidentally held on an unbelievably hot day – left a strong impression on the participants when reading their essays. We also visited the Seodaemun Prison History Hall (*Sŏdaemunhyŏngmuso*) and the War and Women's Human Rights Museum (*Chŏnjaenggwa yŏsŏng in'gwŏn pangmulgwan*). Most participants chose to compare the two memorials in their essays with a view to how they represent victims of Japanese colonial rule.

The lectures of the summer school dealt with the following themes:
Gender in Korea, Gendering Korea (Professor Kim Hyun Mee, Yonsei University), *"Comfort Women" and the Global World* (Dr Sakamoto Chizuko, Yonsei University), *The "Comfort Station" System of the Japanese Imperial Army* (Dr Yoon Myong-Sook), *The Public Prostitution System under Japanese Colonial Rule* (Dr Park Jung Ae, Northeast Asian History Foundation), *Hot War, Cold War, and Patriotic Prostitutes: the Military Prostitution System in Postcolonial Korea* (Professor Park Jeong-Mi, Chungbuk University), *The Representation of "Comfort Women"* (Professor Kwon Eun-Sun, Choongbu University), *The Girl Statues: Politics and Ethics of Representation* (Jung Eun-Young, Artist).

We also watched a documentary titled The Big Picture (*Kŭrigo ship'ŭn kŏt*, 2012, Director Kwon Hyo) and invited its main protagonist and author of picture books, Kwon Yoon Duk, for a post-screening talk. The documentary was about a cooperative project to publish a history picture book for children in Japan, China, and Korea. It showed the process of the author encountering opposition from both the Japanese and Korean side and having to not only manage the intense outward pressure, but also deal with the numerous questions she began to ask herself. In my position as coordinator, I had chosen this documentary for an audience of next generation Korean and East Asian Studies scholars because it shows us that the issue of "comfort women" is approaching the post-victim era and raises the question of how to represent or memorise the "comfort women" in the future. The participants' response to the documentary was, again, quite lively.

While the summer school was designed to offer opportunities to understand the genealogy of academic and activist problematization of the issue of "comfort women" in Korea itself, the special lecture series in Berlin was planned to provide a more comparative perspective. It was organised in the form of public lectures held in October and November 2018. Professor Lisa Yoneyama of Toronto University gave the first lecture titled *Remnants of American Justice: Race and Sexuality of Japan's Revisionism*. Using psychoanalytic critique, she detailed the male-centrism of historical revisionism in Japan in the context of the entanglement between imperialism and the post-Cold War system. The second lecturer was Dr Regina Mülhäuser of the Hamburg Foundation for the Advancement of Science and Culture. The starting point of her inquiry was the question of why sexual violence and sexual enslavement during the National Socialist period had so long been as invisible in Germany as the issue of the "comfort women" had been in Japan.

As I mentioned in the beginning, Germany is often considered a role model that has shown itself truly responsive to its wrongdoings of the past. The fact that sexual exploitation in the concentration camps became visible as late as in the mid-2000s, after reparations for forced labour had already been completed, demonstrates not only the impossibility of a "final and irreversible solution" for *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, but also the possibility of a critical comparative viewpoint on gendered violence carried out by the modern nation-state.

Participants' Essays:
How Can We Produce Critical Knowledge about Wartime Forced Sex Work?

Seven participants have completed essays related to their experience of the summer school. They wrote on topics of their choice, guided by their different positions, perceptions, and emotional reactions.

In the section titled *The Representation of "Comfort Women" in Korea: How can We Overcome "Victimhood Nationalism"?*, four essays deal with various sites crucial to the representation of "comfort women", such as the "girl statues", children's picture books and animated films, memorials, and the Wednesday rally for "comfort women". Korean historian Lim Jie-Hyun has coined the term "victimhood nationalism" to delineate and criticise Korean nationalism (Lim, 2010). The main questions dealt with in these four essays can be linked to the core of this concept.

First, Gwendolyn Domning's essay focuses on *History and Emotions* in discussing Kwon Yoon Duk's picture book *Grandma Flora* and Kim Jun Ki's animated film *Herstory*. While she thinks these stories have played a significant role in encouraging young generation Koreans to develop an interest in the issue of "comfort women", she expresses doubt over whether students should be mobilised for activities such as a political rally on a day as hot as 15 August 2018. This last aspect, of course, can take us to the wider question of how special activities regarding historical issues of the colonial and wartime period are being organised and executed as part of Korea's elementary, junior, and high school curricula.

In the second contribution, Katja Ziegler examines the connections between the construction of Korea's national identity and the "comfort women". The fact that Korean brokers, community leaders, and fathers were involved in trafficking women in the colonial period and during the war – a point Ziegler touches upon in her essay – makes us think deeply about how to analyse and represent the entanglements between the Japanese Empire's power, class and patriarchy in colonial Korea, and the nationalistic sentiments and Cold War politics that forced the victims into silence even after the end of Japanese imperial rule. Kristina Kaltenbach and Sabrina Stemmeler, in the third and fourth essay respectively, address the issue of "national victimhood" in relation to their experience of our visit to Seodaemun Prison Hall. They compare that site with the War and Women's Human Rights Museum and conclude that the representation achieved in the latter is more inclusive and global. This line of inquiry has the potential of leading up to further comparative research on issues of representation in the "comfort women" memorials that have recently been built in Korea, the US, Taiwan, and China.

Three further essays are grouped under the theme of *An Intersectional Understanding of the Issue of "Comfort Women": The (Im)possibility of Resolution*. Tatjana Lim's piece could be read as providing a connection between the two sections. She begins by relating her impression that the Wednesday rally unfolded on the basis of a stark division between "we" the Koreans and "you" Japan. Then, she moves on to elaborate on the gap between the nationalistic mood on "Victory in the Pacific Day" and the war veterans' reality in Russia, where she spent her childhood days. This reminds us of Nobel laureate Svetlana Alexievich's book *The Unwomanly Face of War: An Oral History of Women in World War II*, which deals with the reality faced by Russian female soldiers who served in World War II. Nationalism as such has the effect of hindering a historiography of people's actual experiences, especially when it comes to women's sexuality.

Introducing a new line of thought, Kim Misun argues that, given that the Japanese system of licensed prostitution was an essentially modern invention, Korean researchers examining both the unique features of that system of prostitution and its commonalities with the system of "comfort stations" should do so in the wider context of Japanese (and Korean) modernisation and with specific and repeated reference to the process of modernisation in Western countries. We can refer to Fujime (2004) and Onozawa (2018)'s works in relation to this point. The former focuses on the universal character of prostitution in modern Japan, while the latter explains the specific characteristics of Japan's system of licensed prostitution. We can safely conclude that there is indeed considerable room for further investigation into the connections between modernity and the issue of female sexuality in East Asia.

Lastly, Hendrik Johannemann's contribution opens with a description of the deep and lasting impression left on him by his experience of listening to the story of one former "comfort station" survivor's life after the war, then continues with an analysis of "comfort station" survivors' lives with recourse to the concept of "intersectionality". The latter seems appropriate for inquiries into the survivors' experiences in that they were not shaped by only one, one-dimensional force or power. There was, in fact, a previous attempt to analyse victims' lives during the war with the help of the concept of "intersectionality" (Min, 2003). The combined effect of reading Johannemann's essay and Min's article leads us to the question of whether the notion of "class" has so far been sufficiently taken into account in examining the issue of "comfort women". As I see it, the issue of "comfort women" is deeply tied to the creation of "class" in Japanese-occupied, colonial Korea, and there is both considerable room and need for further research into the relation between class and the "comfort women".

Toward a Critical Transnational Production of Knowledge on Gendered Violence from the Part of the State and the Army

As I mentioned before, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* with regard to forced sex work in Nazi concentration camps has only very recently been elevated to the status of an essential issue in Germany. The public memory of Holocaust victims had not, previously, allowed for any room to reveal the diverse experiences of victimhood. The existence of a sort of hierarchy within the notion of victimhood meant that such diversity and complexity could only come to the surface once the task of resolving questions surrounding the "more important victimhood" had been "resolved". In the case of East Germany, the victimhood of women who had been forced to provide sexual services to, among others, male political prisoners in Nazi concentration camps had to be "invisibilised" for fear of "tainting" the glory of men who were considered the "heroes" that had built the country after the war (Sommer, 2009; quoted from Jung, 2018). We can assume that the situation of victims of gendered state violence was no different in other socialist countries in that they, too, would have been forced into silence for the sake of nationalistic sentiments and Cold War politics. To borrow from the essay of one of our participants, Hendrik Johannemann, issues surrounding "comfort women" and sexual enslavement in Asia, Europe, and beyond cannot, and should not be attempted to, "be resolved". This does not mean that the perpetrator countries' official apologies do not matter. What it does mean is that official apologies cannot "put an end" to the issues at stake.

In my understanding, the task of Korean Studies as a university subject is not only to provide access to knowledge about Korea, but also to make its students ask questions of a more contextual and general nature through their engagement with Korea. The modular course of 2018 that this working paper is based on was designed to achieve that aim by focusing on the issue of "comfort women". It would seem that future research that wants to arrive at a more profound understanding of war and gender/sexuality would have to take a more comparative and transnational approach to the questions involved.

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Section 1.

The Representation of "Comfort Women" in Korea:

How Can We Overcome "Victimhood Nationalism"?

History and Emotions

Gwendolyn Domning

Gwendolyn Domning is a doctoral candidate at the Graduate School of East Asian Studies, Freie University Berlin, Germany. She has worked on topics such as anti-corruption institutions and transparency policies in South Korea and is currently writing her PhD thesis on political corruption in South Korea.

On the 15 August 2018, I had the opportunity to attend the weekly Wednesday Demonstration for comfort women in front of the Japanese embassy in Seoul, Korea. The 15 August marks the day of the National Liberation of Korea in 1945. On this occasion, middle, high school and university students participated in the rally to show their compassion and support for the survivors of the Japanese Military's sexual slavery system during World War II. For 27 years already the *Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan* demands that the Japanese government provides a formal apology and acknowledges the wartime military's sexual slavery system and their victims (Chŏngŭigiŏgyŏndae, 2018). The efforts made by the Japanese and Korean governments to resolve this issue failed to reflect the Council's position. The Council announced that they would continue organizing the weekly Wednesday Demonstrations until their demands are met.

I watched young participants dance cheerfully for the victims and chant "Grandmother, I love you" in support. It was terribly hot that day and I was worried for the students that sat in neatly organized rows on the street under the burning sun. Some looked as if they could pass out at any moment. At one point, one of the ex-comfort women stood on stage to hold a short speech. Behind her a banner read "Peace Together", the slogan for not only the rally, but also an international conference on the comfort women issue that was held the day before. The frail looking "Grandmother" was sweating profusely, and the organizers had to hurry and bring her an umbrella to shield her from the sun. She seemed tired but thanked the participants for their support and for being acknowledged as a victim of the Japanese war time crimes by them.

To be acknowledged as victims is something all ex-comfort women struggled with through most of their life. Even in Korea, comfort women did not speak out publicly until the 1990s: Kim Hak-sun (1924-1997) was the first of many to testify in 1991[1] (Han'gyŏre, 2018). The lack of recognition is one of the defining problems of the comfort women issue. The participants of the rally fight for a history that acknowledges the pain and sufferings of the comfort women. This "real" history is at odds with how Japanese view it[2] . Even though proof for the existence of comfort women stations during wartime, testimonies of victims, and even testimonies of Japanese soldiers exist, the Japanese government has been slow in taking full responsibility, at times even going as far as to omit the existence of comfort women in textbooks (Selden et al., 2009).

1 Pae Bong-gi (1914-1991), a Korean victim of the comfort women station system in Okinawa, was actually the first to publicly speak about her experience. In order to stay in Okinawa, she had to explain to the Japanese authorities how she came to reside on the island. A book recording her testimony was published in 1987 (Hŏ, 2014). It is likely that her testimony was largely overlooked in Korea because she chose to stay in Japan, instead of returning to her country of origin.

2 It is important to note that Japanese civil society organizations fighting for official recognition of the comfort women history exist. However, their opinion is not reflected in the Japanese government's official stance. Thus, the term "Japanese" here reflects the Japanese government's position.

Some Japanese scholars also published counter-narratives that denied the existence of the comfort women stations (Blakemore, 2018). The history of comfort women is one of many topics causing political tensions in Korean-Japanese relations.

One of the core questions concerning this matter seems to be how these different understanding of history came about. Why is it that the cries for recognition are met with silence? In this essay, I first look at the role of historians in general and how the use of fiction can help improve understanding of History. I then look at different examples of how fiction is used to communicate the history of comfort women and reflect on how this may have led to different degrees of emotional understandings of history.

History and Historians

The past is true, but history is not. The past can only be documented but never accessed directly. The study of the past - in other words History - has an innate data-problem. It is impossible for a historian to conduct experiments on the past (*until someone finally manages to build a time-machine of course*). A historian simply produces knowledge about the past by collecting, ordering and narrating data - and that is where the headache starts.

From a European point of view, History has been established as a 'scientific' discipline around the Age of Enlightenment (18th C). Historians refer to that period as "the disciplinization of history" (Daddow, 2008, pp. 44-48). During the 19th century, the first chairs of history were founded at universities and a process of decoupling philosophy and literature from the scientific study of History began (Daddow, 2008, p. 45 and p. 47). Before the disciplinization, History was not only concerned with the past but also the future: its study was commonly of philosophical and rhetorical nature (White, 2005, pp. 149-150). This even led some scholars to classify it as art form. In the context of the disciplinization, efforts to purge this artistic label from the newly established discipline were made. To professionalize the field, historians were trained in what is now known as a "positivist" approach (Novick, 1988; Daddow, 2008, p. 47). The new goal of historians was to write a 'professional' history, based purely on evidence. As time flew by, the positivist approach has in turn been criticized for being too narrow-minded and drawing false conclusion about the past based on "hard" evidence (Daddow, 2008, p. 51). The positivist claims to explanatory supremacy based on a scientific approach has been met with skepticism.

Nowadays, historians highlight "narration" as one of the essential tools of History. They explain that History cannot and does not need to escape the fictional dimension completely (White, 2005; Demos, 2005). The use of fiction helps to improve the reader's understanding of history. To further understand how fiction can turn into an asset to the study of History, the distinction between "true" and "real" by Michel de Certeau is helpful. According to de Certeau historical discourse is concerned with the "true" and fictional discourse with the "real" (Michel de Certeau, cited in White, 2005, pp. 147-148). The "real" here can be understood as "everything that can be truthfully said about its actuality plus everything that can be truthfully said about what it could possibly be". The use of the "real" by historians thus leads History as a field to readapt the forward-looking tradition of historical studies (White, 2005, p. 147). Narration, which will always retain fragments of fiction, thus may be essential to understand the "real" dimension of history. Fiction helps to transform the factual knowledge (the historical facts) into a wholesome understanding of the matters of the past.

Communicating the History of Comfort Women

Fiction thus bridges "true" and "real" and is a powerful tool for improving not only factual but potentially also emotional understanding of the past. It is a powerful tool to communicate the past and make it more accessible to those that have no point of contact with events that happened 20, 30 or, in the case of the history of comfort women, around 80 years ago.

During the program I encountered different works that used fiction to communicate the history of comfort women. Kwon Yoon-duk's picture book for children *Grandma Flora* was one of the works that left a lasting impression on me (Kwon, 2010). The work successfully transcends the "true" and dives into the "real" of the comfort women history. Based on the testimony of Sim Dal-yŏn, the book stays faithful to the historical facts but uses art and story-telling to achieve a real experience of history. The reader achieves a deeper understanding of how the comfort women may have felt. He or she feels powerless as he follows the story and not only watches but empathizes when the character suffers. The reading can be emotionally painful at times. The impact of the story is even stronger due to the personal connection the reader feels towards the character called "Grandma".

Another example that comes to my mind is the animated film *Sonyŏiyagi* [Herstory] by Kim Jun-ki. The ten minutes long short-film is screened at the War and Women's Human Rights Museum in Seoul and also accessible through online streaming services. The film features original recordings of Chung Seo-Woon's (1924-2004) testimony, which is illustrated by dynamic animation. The movie goes back in time and shows how "Grandmother" survived the comfort women system as a young girl. Through the animation many details about the environment and time in which the events took place are reconstructed, which helps the viewer imagine the past and understand the victim's testimony.

Both animated film and children's book are artistic tools that made use of fiction to add a "real" dimension to the "true". They both invoke emotional reactions inside the viewer/reader that deepen the "wholesome" understanding of the history of comfort women.

Different Understandings

Both the short-movie and the children's book strengthen the emotional connection of those that study the history of comfort women through fiction and contribute to a "wholesome" understanding of the "true" and "real" dimensions of the past. Those works are readily available in Korea, but hardly accessible in Japan. For example, the release of *Grandma Flora* in Japan was put on hold until 2017. The book was created in the context of a project called *Korea-China-Japan Peace Picture Book* that started in 2008. The goal of the project was to bring picture book artists from the three countries together and simultaneously publish meaningful works under one common theme "Peace". The Japanese publishing company however was worried about releasing *Grandma Flora*. Only after finding a new publishing company and 9 years of waiting could the picture book be released in Japan. This case shows how difficult it is in Japan to communicate the history of comfort women. Ordinary Japanese citizens cannot readily access works that aim at enhancing a 'wholesome' and therefore also more personal understanding of this history.

Koreans on the other hand are introduced to this topic from a very early age on. From elementary school on, they learn about the "Grandmothers" and study works like the picture book or the short-movie together with their schoolmates. They participate in Wednesday rallies and shout their love for the "Grandmothers".

If we now go back to the Wednesday demonstration on the 15 August 2018, we have the participants of the rally, who showed compassion and seem to have a strong emotional connection to the victims. They build a space in the present to remember the past. The history of the "comfort women" is something they want to see reflected in their understanding of the present, something they have a personal connection with and constitutes a part of their world. On the other side, we the closed doors of the Japanese embassy and actors that maybe do not want to engage with the past. Their connection to the history of comfort women may not be "real", not personal. The Japanese government made multiple requests to take down the different statues remembering the victims of the comfort women system all over the world. They seem unwilling to create a space to remember and want to cut out those elements that force a connection to their own understanding of history. Maybe the history of the comfort women is something these actors want to be disassociated from, something that is not a part of their world because they could not make a connection to the "real" dimension of this aspect of the past.

Concluding Thoughts: Providing Shades

This essay was based on my experience of the weekly Wednesday Demonstration for comfort women on 15 August 2018. I tried to explain the contrast between the Korean and Japanese connection to and understanding of the comfort women history by using the distinction between "true" and "real" suggested by Michel de Certeau. After presenting two works that successfully transitioned into the "real" dimension of history by using fiction, I explained how their availability and consumption may have been one of the multiple factors contributing to the contrasting understandings of the comfort women history in Korea and Japan. Seeing as this is only an essay, I hope this short thought-experiment can inspire more rigorous analysis of how exactly fiction impacts the historical understanding and what role emotions play in this process. Before ending this essay, let us go back to the participants that sat under the scorching sun. Most of them were middle school or high school students. Sweat ran down their faces and they were obviously suffering from the heat. It seemed as if they wanted to persevere in order to show their burning support for the "Grandmothers". But was there really any need for them to "suffer" to show compassion? Could they not simply stand in the shades and continue demonstrating safely?

Their efforts were admirable but seemed extreme to me. I felt the same way about teaching grade-school-students about the history of comfort women. Is the 8-year-old really able to relate to the comfort women history without receiving any sexual education first? Is it really necessary to make young people emphasize and connect so deeply to the Grandmothers? How deeply should an individual connect to history and when is it "too much"? This essay does not offer answers to these questions, but just like moving towards the shades would have made the demonstration safer for the participants, thinking about ways to improve how one should communicate the past, who should learn about it and how they should connect to it can surely keep us from getting painful sunburns.

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The Yellow Butterfly: The Remembrance of Korea's "Comfort Women"[3]

Katja Ziegler

Katja Ziegler is a student of Korean Studies at Freie Universität Berlin since 2012 and is currently preparing for her doctoral dissertation. Her main research interest is Korea's modern history, particularly the process of nation-building and democratisation of Korea. Furthermore, she is interested in Korea's colonial period and therefore participated in the workshop about the issue of "comfort women" in Korea.

How are the so-called "comfort women" (kor. *Wianbu*) remembered in South Korea (hereafter Korea)? The public commemoration of the "comfort women" is strongly connected to the construction of a collective national identity. The leading question of the following essay will thus be, how Korea's "comfort women" are remembered and contribute to build a national identity.

The starting point of this essay will be the contextualisation of public representation and remembrance of the "comfort women" in Korea. The issue became a public discourse after Professor Yun Chung-Ok of Ewha Woman's University presented her research at an International Conference on Women and Tourism in 1988. In the following years many women came forward and gave official testimonies about what had happened to them. Since January 8, 1992, a demonstration of the Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan (kor. *Han'guk chŏngsin taemunje deach'eak hyŏpŭihoe*) is held in front of the Japanese embassy in Seoul every Wednesday. Their officially stated objectives are the acknowledgement of the war crimes by the Japanese State, a whole revelation of the crimes of military sexual slavery and its accurately depiction in history textbooks, an official apology and legal reparations, as well as legal punishment of the war criminals.[4]

The "comfort women" are often put in the context of war. This contributes to a transnational narrative since the issue gets connected with peace and human rights in general. This connection to human rights and peace is more than understandable. In general peace is the opposite of war and the absence of violence, which was precisely the context in which the women were sexually abused then. The underlying principle of human rights is the subjectivity of the human being, which was violated in the case of the "comfort women". The Japanese authorities made them into mere objects by nearly trading them as military goods, when they took them from their families and hometowns to please soldiers at the front. This perspective contributes to the victimisation of women, because they were bereaved of their personal rights and (sexually) suppressed by Japanese men.

3 Reference: Chŏngdaehyŏp. (2018). Ilbon'gun sŏngnoye jemunje haegyŏl-ŭl wihan chŏngŭi kiŏk yŏndae, Retrieved September 23, 2018, from http://womenandwar.net/kr/수요시위/의미와-연혁.
4 Reference: Chŏngdaehyŏp. (2018). Ilbon'gun sŏngnoye jemunje haegyŏl-ŭl wihan chŏngŭi kiŏk yŏndae, Retrieved September 23, 2018, from http://womenandwar.net/kr/수요시위/의미와-연혁.

Of course, it is true that they were enslaved by the Japanese military forces during the war and that their fundamental rights as human beings were violated. This is also true for many other women during history, who became the property of men in patriarchal systems. It was even proved by the Korean Council itself. A young woman from the middle East gave a speech about her experiences in the so- called Islamic State at the Wednesday Demonstration on August 15, 2018, the Independence Day of Korea. She was abducted from her hometown and made a sexual slave for the fighters of the IS. It shows the far-reaching extent of the degrading and wrongful treating of women throughout the globe even nowadays.

The "comfort women" issue has undoubtedly a transnational character, since it involves the Japanese military and women from many Asian countries.[5] There were even international court trial in which survival of various countries gave their testimonies. Nevertheless, women from other countries often seem to be excluded in the public commemoration in Korea. Although some groups, especially in the US, claim to fight for all women's rights, symbols like the peace statue represents a Korean girl and therefore draws the attention only to this group of victims. Of course, Korean "comfort women" should be remembered, but instead of a transnational narrative with the focus on women, whose rights were violated, some nationalist groups seem to use this discourse for the construction of a collective national identity by using the commemoration of the Korean "comfort women".

Generally, the victimisation of the women builds upon the narration of young innocent girls who were violently taken from their homes and suffered cruel sexual enslavement by Japanese soldiers. The image of these young innocent girls is particularly expressed through the statues of young girls, representing the victims (kor. *Pyŏnghwabi*). The image is also captured in the Korean movie Spirits' Homecoming (kor. *Kwihyang*). In the movie the protagonist is a young girl from the countryside who is taken forcefully by Japanese soldiers from her family to a military brothel where she serves as a sexual slave. The poor, innocent girl seems to represent Korea. This nationalistic view is emphasised by the song Arirang, which is used a few times during the movie. All of Korea's past suffering is concentrated within the picture of this young girl and serves therefore as a symbol for Korea's colonial experience.

It is this very narrative that narrows the issue of the "comfort women" to the period of Japanese colonial rule, although the term was associated with prostitutes of the US-American soldiers before the 1980s. Surprisingly they were even seen as Korean patriots serving their country by satisfying the allied army of the United Stated. In contrast, the "comfort women" of the Japanese military were the surviving evidence of Korea's national disgrace and the shame of colonisation. The women were euphemistically referred to as "*chonggun wianbu*" (engl. "comfort women" following the army) or "*chŏngsindae*" (engl. volunteer corps) or even more often their stories were concealed and banned from public discourse. The authoritarian rule of the military dictatorships played a huge part in suppressing the discourse in public, as they also did in regard to the dealing of collaboration during the colonial period. Additionally, the dependency on US-American and Japanese economic aids especially during the Korean War might have limited the will to deal with the issue, which would have led to a discussion about the prostitution after World War II as well. An even more shocking fact was the story of a sociology professor who talked about pornographic depictions of the "comfort women" in the 1960s in South Korea.

5 Scholarly research estimates that there were about 200,000 women form Asian countries forced into prostitution between 1930 and 1945. Most of them were Korean, but there were also women from Taiwan, Mainland China, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Indochina, Burma and even Japan (see http://www.awf.or.jp/e1/facts-07.html; http:// www.jpri.org/publications/workingpapers/wp77.html).

As a primary-school pupil he visited a local secondhand bookstore, where he was browsing for some interesting books, when he found a small illustrated magazine. It was a pornographic work based on the stories of Korean "comfort women" serving Japanese soldiers. The professor stated, that this was his first time he got to know about this topic, since it was a part of Korea's history that was kept a secret from the public. It is against that background of national concealment, that rise the question, why "comfort women" were insufficient remembered and even dealt with in a pervert way rather than reappraise history correctly and honestly.

The fact that the "comfort women" issue is merely associated with the sexual slavery by the Japanese military during World War II supports the construction of a collective national identity. With the focus on the responsibility of the Japanese government or military it excludes the role played by Koreans. Apart from concealment and the use of these women for their own sexual stimulation and satisfaction, there were Korean brokers, community leaders and even fathers who sold their daughters to the Japanese, not to speak of Korean soldiers in the Japanese army who might have raped "their own women". Also, the broader context of the "comfort women" during other times plays almost no role anymore. There were "comfort women" during the Korean War, "serving" Korean and other soldiers, or the "comfort stations" which were established by Korean soldiers during the Vietnam War. At least this part of history is for example exhibited in the Museum for War and Women.

As can be seen, the issue can be connected to women's rights and their social status in general. Not only in the context of war and colonisation, women are forced into prostitution and sexually abused even today. It is the patriarchal system which played a crucial role and is still the reason for suppressing and objectifying women. In order to honestly deal with the "comfort women" it would be necessary to not only investigate Japan's responsibility for the systemised prostitution, but also the underlying elements of the general attitude of men towards women. At least that could explain why surviving "comfort women" of the Japanese could not speak freely after World War II, why their stories were concealed and why they were a "national shame". They did not fit the official national narrative of history and even today they are just instrumentalised for the construction of the collective identity of Korea being an innocent victim of Japan.

Although that might not be the intention of the survivals and all of their supporters or the scholars researching on this topic, but the official discourse at least tends in this direction. General feelings of Koreans towards the Japanese prove this attitude. In personal conversations many Koreans express unfriendly feelings for the Japanese, seeing themselves as pure victims, which shows that the construction of the collective identity worked in some way. One crucial aspect of this discussion should be the identity of the "comfort women" themselves. The narrative of the young innocent girl was challenged by some other testimonies of survivors, who were in their twenties. Also, there were women, who were brought to the front under false pretences, but they were not kidnapped from their homes. Maybe the "comfort women" are not one homogenous group. Maybe, although they suffered similar experiences, constitute not one only type who represents all of them. Maybe they have different identities. The girls or young women differed in where they came from (country or hometown), their social status and economic situation. It would be a starting point to clarify the "comfort women" identities in order to reappraise the issue appropriately.

However, they represent the painful past of Korea and used to constitute a collective identity: Now, they are the *halmŏni* (engl. grandmother). A term which on the one hand demonstrates the long time it took since the issue was dealt with in public. On the other hand, the term is very much associated with family and contributes to the perception that everything that happened to the women happened to one's own family, which strengthen the narrative of the national identity.

The question of how to deal with the past is definitely no easy one. But another aspect, which seemed quite odd to a German perspective, was the combined Wednesday demonstration with the ceremony on occasion of the 73rd Independence Day of Korea. Women, who were sexually abused during the Japanese colonial rule were remembered with young girls dancing in mini skirts to some pop music and screaming "*Halmŏni Saranghae*" (eng. Love you grandmother). How would a similar event take place in Germany? War crimes, crimes against humanity and such atrocities would be commemorated in Germany mainly with speeches by contemporary witnesses, politicians and representatives of civil society, wreath-laying ceremonies, perhaps classical music and minutes of silence. Although the nearly cheerful atmosphere in front of the Japanese embassy might be an instrument to teach history to children and youngsters, it does not seem appropriate to the issue, since it takes part of the gravity away. All the survived "comfort women" said, they never want this to happen again. But how could children, could people understand their situation without grasping the graveness of it?

In summary, this essay does not aim to take sides or judge how the "comfort women" of the Japanese colonial period should be remembered. Dealing with the issue from a German perspective, there might be many aspects which are appraised differently. This essay is merely an attempt to show the difficulty to use the "comfort women" as an instrument for the construction of a collective national identity while searching for historical justice at the same time. The lack of historical dealing in Korea itself as well as the tendency to portray the issue at sometimes one-sided are alongside the unwillingness of Japanese authorities to confront their own history and wrongdoings reasons why the issue is still unsolved.

Impartiality and the Depiction of History: Representation of the "Comfort Women" Issue

Kristina Kaltenbach

Kristina Kaltenbach is majoring in Korean Studies at Freie Universität Berlin. She is in the process of writing my Bachelor thesis on Kwanghaegun's dethronement (Injo Restoration) and its depiction in the *Chosŏn Wangjo Sillok*. She is particularly interested in history and historiography which is why she greatly enjoyed the different angles of the comfort women issue she was shown during the Europe and Korea Young Leaders' Forum.

In this essay I will recount my impressions participating in the Europe & Korea Young Leaders' Forum 2018 in Seoul. I decided to participate in this program because I was very intrigued by the topic of "comfort women". Of course, I came across the discourse before, during my studies, in classes or even in the media but I was curious about different aspects of the topic and was looking to engage deeper with it.

Our program consisted of a mix between lectures held in collaboration with Yonsei University and several visits to memorials, museums or other places connected to the issue. I enjoyed the lectures very much especially because we got to see and experience many different points of the topic through professors and researchers from both Korea and Japan along with artists representing comfort women through their work. Along with my impressions and experiences during the program, I want to focus on what I noticed about representation of history in Korea and how it compares to what I am used to from Germany which I felt was quite different at times.

Right at the beginning of the program we got the chance to attend one of the Wednesday Demonstrations in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul. First of all, I thought it was impressive how consistently and diligently those demonstrations were held since they had been started in 1992. At the same time though, I felt a little bit out of place as a foreigner. The comfort women issue is seen as such a collective injustice with which one is linked to by simply being Korean and everyone there seemed to connect with the former comfort women as well.

There is also a big difference in the way demonstrations are held in Korea compared to the ones I witnessed in Germany which I had already noticed last year during the candlelight demonstrations for former President Park Geun-hye's impeachment. Then they had built a huge stage in front of *Gwanghwamun* where speeches but also performances were held and the atmosphere, despite the serious occasion, was very joyful. I was again reminded of that fact during the Wednesday Demonstrations. There were several performances that day including school children singing and a group of girls performing a dance in front of the crowd of demonstrators. To me this seemed a bit foreign since I was more used to a more serious and straightforward style of demonstrations where people would simply yell out their demands or explain their cause during demonstrations.

Further did the children turn to the former comfort woman, that was present that day, after the performance and told her they loved her which almost gave the impression that they knew her. It was so personal. Even the word *halmŏni*, which means grandmother in Korean, that is being used to refer to the former comfort women shows this collective feeling. The issue is made too personal and too subjective by calling them that and throughout the week I felt more and more that it makes the problem too small. I agree that compensating the victims and acknowledgment by Japan is very important. But I also think sexual violence, especially during wartimes, is a too common phenomena even today which makes the comfort women issue and activism relevant also in a global context to raise awareness for these injustices.

That this is in the survivor's interest as well could be felt even more in the stories about meetings between the former Korean comfort women and survivors of other sexual crimes that we were told about later that week during our visit to the *War & Women's Human Rights Museum*. Stories about how they consoled other, younger victims in a way only someone who went through a similar fate could. We were told that only they can tell them things such as "it happened to me too and I lived, and you can live too". The support they give and the activism that some of the survivors partake in internationally shows that they want their voices to be heard not just for themselves but for other victims as well.

A few days later we visited the *War & Women's Human Rights Museum* which is a privately-owned museum dedicated to the stories of both the former "comfort women" and the activism movement surrounding them. I was pleasantly surprised by the way the exhibition was organized and how it portrayed the history of the movement. Surprised, because I was expecting the way of presentation to be similar to that of *Seodaemun Prison History Hall* which we visited the day before. I will talk about *Seodaemun Prison* a bit below but in short, I found the representation to be slightly one sided and at times unfitting the seriousness the history of the place deserved.

This museum, however, was a little more impartial and included international aspects of sexual violence against women in war zones. Of course, the focus was still on comfort women, but I felt more informative than indoctrinating. I also appreciated the combination of written information and symbolical artworks such as several quotes by the survivors that were incorporated into the walls by the staircase that led from the basement to the upper floors.

I would have wished that they included the life of the survivors prior to their testimony which we only heard about from one of the project leaders afterwards. Many of them had to live in poverty and without any support. They did however have a small room dedicated to Vietnamese women raped by Korean soldiers during the Vietnam War which I thought was very important. In my opinion, history, even though it can never completely be, should be portrayed as neutrally as possible. That includes getting justice for crimes committed against one's country but also admitting the wrongs that were done to others as well.

In comparison to the *War & Women's Human Rights Museum* which is located in a more residential area in a house that has no direct connection to the survivors, *Seodaemun Prison History Hall* itself is a historical site. There is a big difference between the two in terms of how one should look at them. A site such as *Seodaemun Prison Hall* deserves respect in memory of those who suffered and died during their imprisonment there.

Comparable museums and memorials in places connected to the holocaust in Germany are again very different from what I've seen in *Seodaemun Prison History Hall* and maybe even different from most such sites around the world. More often than not there is no exhibition or only small explanations here and there in the historical site itself. The idea behind it is to let the place itself make an impact on the observer and for them to see and feel it as it was then. I would have wished for a few rooms in the prison hall that were empty to just stop for a moment and think about all the suffering that had happened there and all the lives that had been lost to pay respect to their memory.

With those sentiments in mind I was looking forward to, in a sense, feel or experience the history of the prison hall more than going through an ordinary exhibition. The first part of the exhibition in the hall might as well have been situated in a completely different building for the first rooms were completely void of any traces of what they might have looked like during the colonial period. Still, this first part of the exhibition was interesting and informative and for the most part well-presented and gave a basic overview over the Korean independence movement during the time. One thing about it is still in my mind though. In one room there was a screen showing a video or a documentary. I can't quite recall the contents, but it had a background music that sounded familiar to me. I paused for a moment and listened, which also distracted me from the actual content of the video, only to realize, quite shocked, that it was the main title music of Pirates of the Caribbean. To have the theme music of a Hollywood blockbuster as background music for a video in such an exhibition is, in my opinion, misplaced and more distracting rather than eye-catching.

There were a few other things like this example in the exhibition that I felt didn't belong in a place such as the *Seodaemun Prison Hall*. Another one of them were two photo zones in the basement of the building where one could still look at the prisoner's cells. I appreciated that those cells were made available to look at for the public. Along with the exhibition this made it easier to imagine what kind of place the prison hall might have been in the past. With this though, as I mentioned already, should come respect towards its history and posing in front of the cells with cutouts or dolls of guards felt very out of place. Maybe these things could at least be more strategically placed for example outside the actual building and not in the same hallways where prisoners had been held in and suffered. There were also people with little kids picnicking outside of the main building in the courtyard as one would do in a normal park. This as well is something that, coming from my experience with such historical sites in Germany, seemed a bit off.

The second part of the exhibition talked more in detail about the independence movement, the personal stories of some of the prisoners of *Seodaemun Prison* and about the guards. This part was very detailed and emotional in its explanations and I felt that it was a bit too one-sided. The use of the prison hall after colonization was also barely mentioned. To be honest, the thing that had the biggest impact on me was the little house on the prison grounds which used to be the execution chamber. There was barely any explanation but just seeing the hangman's noose and knowing what had happened there made everything I had read in the exhibition even more real.

A lot of things can represent history. Be it museums, memorials or simply historical sites. Coming back to the comfort women movement, one thing that represents them and their history, as I shortly mentioned above, is the Peace Statues (*P'yŏnghwaŭi sonyŏsang*).

During one of our lectures we learned that the original statue was criticized as looking too innocent and of having no impact at all and be therefore unfit as a memorial. But we also learned that it was made with the purpose to stand across the Japanese Embassy looking at it as a reminder as well as a memorial. I personally think that the way it is it has great impact. There is something about that little girl just waiting with that stern glare set straight ahead that is very strong and that reminds one of the fact that, even though the former comfort women got older and that one day there won't be any living survivors left, the issue won't go away with them. That it isn't only an issue of compensating the survivors, which is without a doubt important and necessary, but also part of a bigger movement against sexual violence. If one thinks about the statues like this then they send an even bigger message and are, in my opinion, a great representation.

In the same lecture it was mentioned that the artist who created the statue made sure that it was never touched by a man's hands and her husband was not even allowed to watch her work on it. This treatment really touched me because it showed what a close connection the artist felt between the memorial and the former comfort women and made an effort to show that memorial so much respect even while creating it.

Throughout all these excursions and lectures I learned that Korean representation of history is in general very different from the German understanding of history and historical representation.

Especially concerning the "comfort women" issue and the period colonization it is very emotional and is often portrayed in a way that seeks to create a collective feeling among Koreans. In the comfort women issue especially this might make it difficult to take a step back and look at the issue more impartially and see the potential their movement has for fighting against sexual violence in general and in helping other survivors.

History and especially its representation will always be somewhat personal. In displaying a certain event one has to choose a form of portrayal and ultimately also a perspective and a focus. However, I think it is necessary to show as wide a picture as possible and try to distance oneself from that event to make it less personal and to be able to look at it from various perspectives.

The Comfort Women Issue under the Aspect Commercializing the Survivors

Sabrina Stemmeler

Sabrina Stemmeler is a student at the Freie Universität in Berlin. She is writing her bachelor thesis about *kinyŏ* (or *kisaeng*) in the Chosŏn Dynasty and one of her main research interests is women's history, that is one of the reasons she attended the Europe & Korea Young Leaders' Forum 2018.

In this essay I will present my impressions of the Europe & Korea Young Leaders' Forum 2018, as a German studying Korean Studies at the Freie Universität Berlin in Germany. The Forum was a collaboration of the Yonsei University in Seoul and the Freie Universität in Berlin and focused on the "comfort women" issue. Because of the settled focus we had been able to get an overview of the problem and very detailed information. The lectures we were able to listen to were very varied and showed different sides of the problem and made clear that the comfort women issue is much more complex than someone may have thought. The trips we went on each day made it possible to experience what we have learned and to deepen the understanding of this complex issue.

Of course, I knew about the "comfort women" issue before and read some articles on that topic or listened to lectures that among others discussed the problem, but it was much more intense to have such detailed lectures in Korea and to go to places connected with the issue. We also had the opportunity to not only listen to lectures held by Korean professors, but also by a Japanese professor. For me the most interesting point was how the "comfort women" are being commercialized for the cause of creating a collective feeling amongst South Koreans. That is why I will try to focus on the commercializing of the former "comfort women".

I think right from the first day at the Wednesday demonstration in front of the Japanese embassy all of us got the feeling that in Korea the issue of the comfort women is made into a national problem. The Wednesday demonstration we visited was like a festival and very different from demonstrations in Germany. There had been performances from middle school students dancing in short skirts, which was very controversial in my opinion, because it was a demonstration against sexual violence. But at the same time the performance of these girls could be seen, as sexualizing them especially wearing short skirts. Demonstrations in Germany are not that entertaining and they only focus on fighting for one's own rights. For me it was kind of hard to watch the former comfort woman standing on the stage on such a hot day. It was even exhausting for us, so I do not want to imagine how hard it was for the old lady. But I can also imagine that it probably is consoling for the survivors to directly feel the acceptance and the support they get from those people chanting for their rights.

Of course, it was the country, which was colonized or occupied in war, but we should not forget that the people suffered the most in such times. The government was not able to help those women and even if they are trying to do their best today, the support comes kind of late. The state should become aware of its own responsibility and should do everything to make the life of the victims as comfortable as possible after such experiences. It is not primarily a national problem, but a global problem of sexual violence under which individual humans still have to suffer even until today. None of us can understand their pain and we should not display it or present it as a shared pain, because it was not and is not a collective pain. The women were left alone and some of them were even turned over to the Japanese by their fellow countryman. The women have been all alone with their pain their whole life and in my opinion the best way to help the few survivors now is to rectify history, which is what South Korea is trying to do these days.

We especially came to know how hard the life of the survivors is or was even after being a comfort woman, when we listened to one activist's experiences at the War and Women's Human Rights Museum. It was very heartbreaking to learn how poorly almost all the former "comfort women" lived their whole life. Some of them all alone without family. She told us the story of one old lady who lived in a house made of plastic in the hills. This story can be seen, as representation for how the life of the women was completely ruined, both by being a "comfort woman" and by the society back in those times giving them the feeling they had to be ashamed about what they had experienced. Even though it was done to them against their free will and they were forced to endure something that cruel. Only now when there are only a few survivors left and their life is almost over, the state recognizes their stories, but uses their memories for its own purpose by commercializing their stories against the Japanese government and in a nationalistic way. Meanwhile the Japanese government still has not even acknowledged their pain at all. Both should focus on relieving the women from their pain and to prevent such crimes to happen again in the future.

Even calling them girls (*sonyŏ*) or grandmothers (*halmŏni*) presents the Nation as one big family. But only referring to them as girls (*sonyŏ*) and grandmothers (*halmŏni*) does ignore the hard times of silence they suffered after being a comfort woman, between being a girl and grandmother, when no one wanted to listen to their story and they protected themselves and their family by not talking about it. They ignore the longtime of poverty when no one acknowledged their hard times of suffering.

I thought it was very shocking, how the survivors were used for unifying the masses. The documentaries we saw briefly in some museums were designed like blockbuster movies and I am not sure if everything is presented the way the survivors would want it to be presented or rather how the government would like it to be seen. We also saw parts of the movie *Spirits' Homecoming* (*Kwihyang*), which was a very cruel display of what the comfort women had to experience at the comfort stations. The movie again, used the stories of the comfort women to rage hate against the Japanese and portrayed them like monsters, but at the same time made the women into sex objects without any free will. The audience witnesses the cruel scene of the rape from the perspective of the Japanese soldier, which made it very hard to watch. From the scenes we watched, the movie seemed to set the focus on the sexual aspect and the cruelty of the Japanese soldiers and not on the traumatic experiences of the comfort women and their mental damage. There had been no room for the victims' perspective, they rather had been forced into silence.

In the lecture held by Professor Jung Eun-Young we learned that there are more than 109 Statues for the remembrance of the comfort women and some of them are exact copies of the original girl statue in front of the Japanese embassy. But why do they need so many statues? Is it not much more meaningful to have only one statue or a few different ones and not to copy this one a dozen times? Even in the independent War and Women's Human Rights Museum they were selling little figurines of the former comfort women and had statues of them with which one could take a photo with. Those figurines and statues directly objectify and commercialize the survivors. Of course, it is important to remember their past, but why does it have to be figurines of their body? Would it not be better to do something symbolic to remember and not use their identity for it, by selling their figurines?

In the War and Women's Human Rights Museum, I felt the former "comfort women" are also used to commercialize "World Peace". But what is Peace in this context? I do not think that the solution of the "comfort women" problem will bring peace for the world. The world peace is just too universal and again seems to forget the real problem of sexual violence and the individual pain of the women. They should aim for more direct and realistic goals, like the prevention of sexual violence or a hotline for victims of sexual violence.

But still compared with the Seodaemun Prison History Hall the War and Women's Human Rights Museum was much better and more impartial. The Seodaemun Prison History Hall deals with a different problem from the Japanese colonialization, but one can compare the presentation of history of both museums. The Seodaemun Prison History Hall was kind of set up like an attraction more to entertain the people than to educate them. The given information had been very basic, and everything was very partial only presenting the Japanese as the evil. It is true that the Japanese were the metaphorical bad guys, but of course a lot of Koreans worked for the Japanese in times of the colonialization. Which is nothing to criticize, because they had no other choice. Their situation is comparable to those of the Germans during the Third Reich. Probably the War and Women's Human Rights Museum is more impartial, because it is a privately-owned museum led by activists and not a museum financed by the state. What I really liked at the War and Women's Human Rights Museum was that they also showed the stories of Vietnamese rape victims of the Korean military, which they would not have been able to do if they were financed by the government.

But are foreign women from other countries, who experienced something similar generally included or excluded in the dealing with this problem in Korea? I would say in the way the Korean government is doing it right now they are still excluded, even though at the demonstration and the War and Women's Human Rights Museum we saw them trying to include them. It is a global problem and something that keeps happening, it is not only a Korean problem or a problem of the past. If we generalize it to be a problem of sexual violence it is happening everywhere at any time. Not only in Korea and not only in wartimes. Of course, it most fiercely happens in times of war and colonialization, but it sadly still happens in everyday life more or less pronounced. In my opinion it would be better to use the issue of the comfort women to go against sexual violence on a global basis and not to unify the masses or to rage hate against the Japanese. That is also one reason why I really liked Sakamoto Chizuko's lecture. She presented the "comfort women" issue as a global problem and focused on the Filipino victims of the Japanese comfort women system. But the way the government deals with the issue is also understandable if one looks at the history of Korea and what it had to experience. Korea lost a lot of its independence in the past to its surrounding countries and from which the urge to make itself stronger and independent from other countries arose.

With this background the development of the movement can be understood, but I think the painful memories and experiences of the "comfort women" victims should not be used for that cause.

I can imagine that some of the "comfort women" do support those goals, but I also think there are some of them who do not want their story to be repeatedly used and presented for commercial purposes. If I were one of them, I think it would be too painful for me to continuously be reminded of such a horrible past and I would not want everyone to know in such detail about my awful experiences, which are even hard to talk about with only one person. But I do understand how probably some of them feel some kind of relief, because they are finally able to talk about those life-breaking memories, which they were forced to keep to themselves for almost their whole life. Their courage can be a huge encouragement for other women around the globe and they attribute greatly to rectify the Korean and Japanese History.

All in all, in this Forum we got the impression, that the "comfort women" issue is being handled as a national problem and that the victims are mobilized to move the masses. But the issue should be handled as a global problem of sexual violence and to fight sexual violence in general. Even though the nationalistic agenda seemed to be much more present, we also saw the acknowledgment of the issue being a global problem at the Wednesday demonstration, because there had been also a woman from another country who has been a forced sex slave holding a speech. Also, among the many statues which were built for the "comfort women" had been statues of foreign women, to show that the Korean women are not alone. I hope this kind of trend will keep on developing in the future. It is very good that the women are finally able to talk freely about what they have experienced without feeling ashamed or even guilty. But on the other hand, their personal experiences are used too much for a national cause and even the continued search for a solution does not seem to be primarily for the benefit of the few survivors, but to find an agreement between South Korea and Japan. The long silence and the guilt of the Korean state seems to be forgotten. So, it is good that activists like the ones who built the War and Women's Human Rights Museum work on truly helping the women financially and emotionally and are fighting against sexual violence in general, even though the aim of world peace is a bit far-fetched.

Section 2.

An Intersectional Understanding of the Issue of "Comfort Women":

The (Im)possibility of Resolution

Representation of Nationalism and Culture of Remembrance in the Comfort Women Issue

Tatjana Lim

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Almost 30 years passed since the issue of the comfort women of the Imperial Japanese Army during the occupation and the World War II began to rich wider audience in Korea and abroad. In fact, the survivors had already begun to speak out earlier but until the 1990's their voices continued to be largely ignored within the Korean society. Now, in the year 2018, we find ourselves at the point where the support for the movement seems to be in the full swing and the media pays close attention to the issue of comfort women.

Added to this is there a group of European university students with diverse life experience and academic background dealing with this highly complex issue as the main topic of this year's summer school in Korea. I was one of these students who got the opportunity to have this exciting experience on the ground. As a student of Korean studies at the Freie Universität Berlin, I've witnessed the growing awareness of the "comfort women" issue and it's developing. As well as growing up in Russia with its painful experience of the World War II and moving to Germany as a former ethnic German immigrant makes the "comfort women" issue and the Japanese-Korean relations in this context even more interesting for me to examine. However, my experience in Korea doesn't turn out the way I'd anticipated, and the issue provided more complexity than clarity to me. This paper attempts to clarify my experience from the perspective of a foreign student observing the "comfort women" issue in the Korean social environment over a short but very intensive period of time. Since the issue touches on the wide range of topics in Korea such as colonialism, prostitution system, sexuality, victimhood, etc. I decided to focus on the different aspects of the representation of nationalism I was able to reveal during the summer school.

First, I will address some of the field trips that were specifically related to the nationalistic discourse in the "comfort women" issue. Furthermore, I will discuss the aspects of remembrance culture in comparison to other countries interacting with their history. I'm not an expert on this topic but I would like to share my impression on the issue from the outsider-perspective on how nationalistic interests have generated tension around the "comfort women" issue.

But let's start from the beginning. The morning on August 15 started with a brief introduction round among the students. Immediately afterward we set off to our first field trip to make our first observation. We went to the place in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul, which is also known for the Wednesday demonstrations hold weekly since the first demonstration in 1992. Such long years of weekly demonstrations aim at obtaining an official apology of the Japanese government to the victims of sexual slavery. But especially on that Wednesday, hundreds of people attend the protest because it was on the same day when the whole country was celebrating the 73rd anniversary of the National Liberation Day.

Most of these people were school students. These students were the ones who were singing, dancing and exclaiming the demonstration slogans like: "Official apology! Legal reparation!" Looking at this way of participating in a demonstration of young people was not a common sight for me. And I was astonished to see this large number of students interested in this complex and very emotionally charged problem.

The most important participants, of course, were the Korean *halmŏni's* (grandmothers) themselves. In Korea, it is common to call an elderly women grandmother. Otherwise, the demonstrators also called them "our grandmothers" several times during the protest. This collective construction of "Us vs them" simply describes the process of "Othering" coined by Spivak. Quite obviously the Japanese government represents the Others. The usage of the expression "our grandmothers" may also have the power to create the impression of the family atmosphere, but on the national level. This term with a normally positive connotation in connection with negative terms like the sexual slavery could intensify the conflict as well. These grandmothers who were victims of Japan's military sexual slavery system represent to an extent the entire nation that feels victimized by the Others.

The other important national symbol in front of the Japanese embassy is a bronze statue of a young Korean girl looking impassively forward to the embassy. Despite the statue of a young girl being a constant reminder of the past, its shadow is that of an old woman representing the present situation and a long period these women had have to suffer. There were a lot of discussions about this statue representing only Korean victims while there were victims from all over Asia being forced into sexual slavery. But as we learned in our lectures there are now hundreds of the statues in Korea and other countries which looks different and shows diverse nationalities of the former comfort women. So, it's gradually shifting away from the nationalistic discourse.

At the same time, however, the other thing that came to my attention was the organization of the demonstration. The school students were, in my view, not just individual participants, who came because they made a conscious decision to participate in this protest. Rather, there were whole classes accompanied by their teachers and equipped with demonstration placards and fans showing an illustration of a comfort woman. One could assume that behind the actual protest there should be an organized structure keeping direct contact with the schools and mobilizing students for the demonstrations.

The demonstration left me plenty of impressions that I analysed during and after the summer school. I often asked myself how the comfort women issue can be moved beyond the nationalistic view. At the demonstration, there was one important point. There was the Yazidi girl who escaped from ISIS about 4 years ago standing on the stage and telling the audience about her story and the sexual violence against women. At this moment it was clearly not about nations. Something like violence against women that still happening to this day across the globe and in Korean society as well. Some recent examples include the #MeToo movement or the spy camera issues. In my opinion, the "comfort women" issue should move away from nationalistic discourse and focus more on the social treatment of women and the gender equality in Korean society.

On another day we visited the War and Women's Human Rights Museum. Taking nine years to develop and build demonstrate that even the Korean society was and still be unwilling to accept the former "comfort women" to raise up the topic of sexual slavery and to give the testimonies to the public.

The day before we also visited the Seodaemun Independence Park where the museum originally planned to build the site about comfort women's history with the permission of the Seoul city government. However, the Korea Liberation Association and Association for Surviving Family Members of Martyrs of the Country protested against it. They argued that it would be "undignified" to build a section about comfort women in the place created to honor martyrs of the country during the colonial period. I would like to deliberately mention at this point only briefly that, after visiting the Seodaemun Independence Park we discussed in our groups about the exhibition there to be relatively one-sided and therefore anti- Japanese directed. The German case is, therefore, a counterexample of historical remembrance culture after the fall of Nazi Germany. Germany tries to keep the remains of consecration camps in their original construction and as neutral as possible. This is to prevent any manipulations of the representation of history.

Coming back to the visit of the War and Women's Human Rights Museum, it was relocated to the west from the center of the city to a normal housing area. The museum is divided into several sections, each one displaying a different aspect of the histories of comfort women. In contrast to the Seodaemun prison, the focus here was on the individual stories of the survivors. Photographs, audio and video testimonies, documents such as a diary of one of the Japanese soldiers writing about comfort stations. I must say, I was overwhelmed as I've heard that this diary was donated to the museum from the son of this soldier.

But one of the most surprising sections was that for the Vietnamese women who were raped by South Korean troops during the Vietnam War. I suspect that to show war crimes of Korean military wouldn't be possible in other museums supported by the state until there is no official recognition of this crimes. This was one of the reasons why we argued in our groups that the nationalistic view over the "comfort women" issue has to be overcome. There are many aspects still be hidden in the comfort women issue due to the representation of Japan as the only aggressor and Korea as the constant victim of the past. Though there were many cases of Koreans working for Japan's military in recruiting women for the comfort stations. Their perspective and that of the Japanese soldiers would be very useful to reform the discourse in the new direction.

My discussion about this topic automatically reminds me of my own school time, back in Russia. On May 9 each year, a day after the rest of Europe, Russia celebrates Victory Day which marks the capitulation of Nazi Germany. On this day commemorative events with military parades are held across the whole country. The biggest military parade takes place in Red Square in Moscow, showcasing Russia's military forces and power. Many western countries criticize therefore Russian government for the nationalistic favor surrounding the parade.

Besides the military parade, millions of people join the Immortal Regiment marches all across the country each year to honour the victims of the war: veterans, partisans, resistance fighters, front workers, prisoners of concentration camps, children. In this case, the focus here is on individual stories of the victims similar to the War and Women's Human Rights Museum in Korea. However, together with the military parades, it has a strong relation to the nationalistic view. The former Soviet countries and Russia as a nation are considered as victims but mostly as victors of the Second World War.

However, in addition to this massive public celebration, many schoolchildren like me visited and are perhaps still visiting the veterans of the Second World War at their homes to thank them for saving our country, to talk to them and to hear about their histories. During the war time, most of them were also young people who experienced the cruelty and agonies of the war. Now as aging veterans many of them are living in poverty and require medical care. Every year there are fewer and fewer survivors left to speak about the war experience. At that very moment, I can consider the discourse transferring from the national to the individual and emotional level.

As the case of comfort women my own experience of celebrating Victory Day, ever since I can remember, is complex and in some instances very difficult to differentiate between my own perspective and the one which was constructed due to my social environment. Though the Russian case may demonstrate clearly what role the remembrance of the history can have in the development of a country in present days.

Under these circumstances, the issue of the comfort women has to be understood as a gender issue rather than a national one. The discourse surrounding comfort women issue indicates substantial aspects of sexual violence and discrimination of women in Korean society and demonstrates the relevance even today. Since I became aware of the "comfort women" issue I can see the support movement continuing to develop in diverse directions. For this purpose, it shouldn't be directed only to the Japanese government and remain trapped in the nationalistic discourse. It should rather strengthen the awareness of all sorts of discrimination based on gender in Korean society. But, of course, every little change needs its time.

"Comfort Woman" and the Construction of Experience: A Short Reflection on the Logics, Limitations, and Prospects of "Comfort Women" Discourses

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When I was a little kid in the mid-1990s, there lived an old lady whose back was bent like a bow living in my neighborhood. Kids in the neighborhood often called her '*Ssŭregi halmang*[6] ', which means in English the 'scavenging old hag,' for, they gossiped, she lived on garbage people dumped on the rubbish dump. One evening, I went out with my mom to take out the food waste to the rubbish tip. And the old lady was there searching through the hip of garbage bags. On our way back home, I asked my mom who she was and why she was searching through waste bags. My mom said, she was the "*Jŏngsindae*." As a little girl with limited knowledge, I understood that "*Jŏngsindae*" was the name of university[7] . It was after a few years that I realized that "*Jŏngsindae*" refers to the "Comfort Women."

"Comfort Women" is often described as "young girls" and "Grandmother" in the public discourse. Somewhere between those images lies the old lady from my childhood memory in a chronological order. The misery of the former two is the well-known story by the public. The story of the latter, however, had been hardly discussed since Liberation. Seen from the piece of the memory from my childhood, survivors of the notorious "comfort women" system had suffered from chronic poverty, ridicule, and apathy that resulted from social stigma and discrimination rooted deeply in gendered institutions after their coming back home. Many studies view this silence before the 1990s as "forced" silence and attribute its cause to military dictatorship.

6 "Halmang" is the Jeju dialect referring to an 'elderly lady' in English. In standard Korean, it is called "halmŏni."
7 In Korean, "Dae" is an abbreviation for "Daehak," namely, "university" in English.

Granted, the silence was forced by authoritarian politics, and the improvement in the public perception of "comfort women" was the fruit of the advancement of women's movement stimulated by democratization in the 1980s—*Why is the story between 1945 and the 1990s still missing in public discourse? Why is historicizing of "comfort women" disturbed?* The participation in the summer school was the practice of finding answers to these questions.

In my view, the process of making "Comfort Women" the *history*—say, history is the process of "making experience visible" (Scott, 1991, p. 778)—cannot be solely explicated by authoritarian rule or democratization. Although it may sound structuralist and draw criticism, an enduring force of Korean nationalism, developed after the 1990s, needs as well to be taken into account to understand the logic of the *history* of "comfort women." Needless to say, "comfort women" is one of the most powerful and well-known symbols of South Korean nationalism today. Since its first appearance in public discourse as a "forgotten" national memory, "comfort women" has been in the vanguard of the dispute over Japan's legal liability for its colonization of Korea in the past. In the public discourse, "comfort women" has been discussed mainly as a "national" cause aiming at Japan's indemnification for its wartime operation of "comfort women" stations as well as its illegal mobilization of young girls as military sex slaves. Three major points can be touched on with regards to the logic of the public discourse on "comfort women." To make Japan a war criminal, (1) securing the evidence confirming "forcibility" and "direct" involvement of Japan in operating and maintaining the "comfort women" system during the war has been the focal point in the debate. To highlight the brutality of the Japanese Empire, (2) studies have conceptualized a category of "abducted teenage girls," which the *Sonyŏ-sang*, the statue that was made to commemorate the sufferings of the victims, most vividly epitomizes. (3) "comfort women" has now become the symbol of national suffering and thus provides a great impetus for the national agenda, namely, "the liquidation of accumulated evil (*Chŏkp'ye ch'ŏngsan*)" under the current administration. To sum, the issue of "comfort women" in Korea has developed in line with the "anti-Japanese" nationalist movement in Korea since the 1990s.

Interaction with nationalism seems to have generated double-edged effects on the problem of "comfort women." Whilst nationalism provided favorable conditions for "comfort women" to become constructed as a "national" memory, it seems to be ironic that "comfort women" as victims of Japanese nationalism/militarism constructs its identity within the frame of the very ideologies that were used against them. For instance, the famous narrative of "pure" "young girls" who were "abducted forcefully" by the Japanese military from their "home" is the rhetoric that has been used by Japanese right-wing activists in their attempts at disproving arguments from the Korean side. Kwon (2017b) argues in her criticism on the movie, *Kwihyang* (Spirits' Homecoming, 2016), the ideology of "pure young body"—chastity and virginity—is the recurring theme found in patriarchal narratives on women's body. By the same token, survivors of "comfort women" was persecuted after returning home. Considering such experience, romanticism of "hometown" that is often found in the public representation of "comfort women" is debatable. As Kwon (2017a) points out in her critical review article, the thematic message of the most commercially successful movie about "comfort women" is disturbing. "The significance of hometown," Kwon writes, "is absolute in the movie. Interestingly, in *Kwihyang*, hometown is represented as father while, in the general sense, its image is symbolically incorporated into mother in the stories of diaspora whose protagonists are female characters. [...] Despite the importance of the home-house in the movie, the visualization of it is unrealistic. [...]

No one can find a hint of modernity in the movie's realization of them. Rather, home-house is completely bleached, against the fact that colonial *Josŏn* was placed in the modern period. [...] Such denial of modernity seems to reflect an 'obsession with purity.' [...] (As such) the movie fixates the symbolic image of 'Comfort Women' onto the idyllic and premodern image of the women in *Josŏn* Dynasty, as if the premodern representation of *Josŏn* women is the verification of young girls' innocence" (Kwon, 2017b, pp. 21-22)"[8] .

According to J. A. Park, such sanctification, or "purification," of "comfort women" was conducted by creating the subaltern "other" against "comfort women"-"prostitutes." It has, she argues, not only belied the historical continuity of sexual exploitation but also compromised the prospect of "comfort women" activism by fomenting schisms among the former "comfort women." Thus, Park suggests an alternative approach to the study and discussion of "comfort women." In her lecture that she delivered in the summer school, she addressed that the "comfort women" system should be viewed as wartime operation of *Kōshōsei*. According to Park, *Kōshōsei*, which is often translated as "regulationism" by feminist scholars, was the system of sexual mobilization for the military. It had two specific goals: (1) To protect soldiers and officers from venereal disease, (2) To protect potential wives and mothers from sexual violence by soldiers. According to her studies, it was the unique system in that it only existed within the territorial and occupational boundary of the Japanese Empire and its army. In this respect, Park conceives *Kōshōsei* as different from other prostitution systems elsewhere, with particular cultural and historical background.

In my view, granted the originality and validity of Park's argument, it seems necessary to elaborate her argument by linking her concepts to a broader theoretical framework as the theories of modern nation-state to make her argument more convincing. To do that, careful examination of Japan's modernization process in the global historical perspective is required. As Tilly (1992) and many other historical sociologists have observed, modernization in Europe was a long and gradual process that took almost thousand years until the end of WWII. Nation-state, as the ultimate form of state, was the product of Europe's unique state system. For almost thousand years, states of various forms in Europe had continuously conducted wars against one another and thus suffered from incessant fiscal crises. This process of waging wars through the management of fiscal crisis in turn reorganized domestic as well as international systems and orders—States had converged onto "National States" whose subsequent nature became parliamentary democracy and capitalist economy as Tilly concludes. Thus, as Giddens puts it, "The European state system was not simply the ‚political environment' in which the absolutist state and the nation-state developed. It was the condition and in substantial degree the very source of that development" (Giddens, 1985, p. 112). Unlike European pioneers, Japan entered into the nation-state system when the system itself had already been firmly established and consolidated. Put it another way, Japan's modern development lacks dynamic historical processes in which the balance of competing powers, whether political, economic, or military, took place and ultimately converged onto the system of parliamentary and capitalist democracy. Japan's modernization, as Barrington Moore Jr. aptly described and Theda Skocpol sharply pointed to, took place through the replacement of one sector of ruling class by the other without any social revolutions[9] .

8 However, I want to mention here that what the author means by "modernity" is unclear in the text as she does not elaborate on the concept.

9 Skocpol defines "social revolution" as follows (Skocpol, 1979, pp. 4-5):

"Social revolutions are rapid, basic transformations of a society's state and class structures; and they are accompanied and in part carried through by class-based revolts from below. Social revolutions are set apart from other sorts of conflicts and transformative processes above all by the combination of two coincidences: the coincidence of societal structural change with class upheaval; and the coincidence of political with social transformation. [...] What is unique to social revolution is that basic changes in social structure and in political structure occur together in a mutually reinforcing fashion."

While western modernization was circumscribed by both the domestic, mass revolts and revolutions, and foreign, military aggressions, challenges, Japanese modernization was the reactionary response from the part of the old order to the foreign intrusion, mainly and only. The Meiji Reformation, therefore, was one of the most conservative sorts of modern reformation and it was achieved through a coalition between sections of old order—the nobility at the Imperial court, a few disaffected leaders of fiefs where feudal institutions appear to have been particularly strong, Samurai, and the conservative old-line merchants—directed against the ruled (Moore, 1966, p. 245 and p. 305). Therefore, in short, when examining the development of the "comfort women" system in relation to *Kōshōsei*, investigating (1) Japan's modernization in the context of time (late-comer) and space (non-Europe), (2) Korea's modernization in the context of time (late-late comer) and space (former colony) is proposed. And based on the argument I have established above; I find it questionable to consume "comfort women" by the nationalist frame which is intrinsically "sexist" in nature. I have suggested a few "whys" for this problematization: Historically examined, nation-state and nationalism are the product of war, which is presumably at odds with the issue of "comfort women."

Before closing this essay, I would like to introduce a paper by an American historian, Joan W. Scott, entitled "The Evidence of Experience." In this critical review of the contemporary studies of history, Scott challenges to the tendency of "essentialism" found in the works of historians. According to Scott, essentialism is an idea believing that "there are *fixed* identities, visible to us as social or natural facts" (Scott, 1991, p. 791; emphasis added). Essentialism prevails, she continues, regardless of *male*-stream or subaltern historians who tend to historicize experience by imposing a "categorical (and universal) subject-status" on experience assuming a sort of "cumulative and homogenizing" identity of this categorical group (Scott, 1991, p. 785 and p. 792). Thus, once categories of one experience or another are established, they become taken for granted, Scott holds. I see such a tendency of essentialism treating experience as a self-evident foundation of knowledge in the history of "comfort women" as well. I believe, therefore, the significant task for the better historicizing of the "comfort women" is left to overcome such essentialism in the public discourses as well as the history of "comfort women." Scott is apt in her manifestation that experience in history is "neither self-evident nor straightforward" (Scott, 1991, p. 797). For, experience is constructed by the work of historians as well as through the memory-collecting activities of individuals—discursively. So how about letting "comfort women" and its experience contested and speak for "herself"?

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Integrating Complexity: Intersectional Perspectives on the "Comfort Women" Issue

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"I conducted an interview with one of the comfort women. Back in the 1990s. Kang Duck-Kyung *halmŏni* was one of the first women who decided to break the silence about her horrible experience. After the interview, I proposed I could accompany her home. She gladly accepted my offer. First, we took the subway and then a local bus till the final stop. Then we walked quite a bit through the streets. Then through a forest. It was getting dark and I was getting increasingly concerned. Kang Duck-Kyung *halmŏni* was already quite old back then. Might she be confused or disoriented? Is this really her way home? Where is she leading me? After a while, we reached the end of the forest and there I saw it. Countless shacks were amassed in a rather dirty environment. They were built of plastic boards, sometimes just cardboard. Kang Duck-Kyung *halmŏni* entered one of the ramshackle barracks. There was no electricity, no water supply, no canalization system. This is where she had been living alone for the past 40 or so years."

By the time the representative of the War and Women's Human Rights Museum in Mapo-gu, Seoul, Lee Jiyoung, had finished her story about how she met Kang Duck-Kyung *halmŏni* for the first time, we were all crying. Our interpreter, Irene, who was herself part of our group, had a hard time translating. Words failed her in face of such a sad and terrible life account.

Already before our summer school started, I had expected it to be quite tough, given its topic. The lectures we had at Yonsei University were more or less all right, though. Academic parlance takes away some of the severity of historical truths, I guess, no matter how dreadful these reports may be. But being confronted with first-hand experiences is another story. Interestingly, though, the tears were streaming down our faces in a moment in which the central aspect of our summer school program was not being told to us, that is, the forced sexual exploitation of women from Korea and from many other countries, organized by the Japanese military during World War II and before.

Sure, we had watched documentaries revolving around the issue, and scenes from movies that tried to depict the experiences of Korean "comfort women" (often in a rather vulgar and inappropriate way, I felt). Such accounts and portrayals were hard to bear, no question. But what seemed to be even more shocking than sexual violence and rape was, that, "after" these atrocious happenings, most "comfort women" had to live in extreme poverty, without support from their families or from the state. Rather to the contrary, they were regarded as impure, as outcasts, perhaps even as collaborators of the Japanese. Those women who, as a result, kept their terrible experiences as a secret may have felt such a shame that they deliberately led a life at the margins of Korean society.

Besides sadness, I felt anger surging up inside me. How can Korean society be so hypocritical? For decades, the sufferings of the so-called "comfort women" were blatantly ignored by the Korean government – and worse, also by their families, friends, and neighbours. The women had to deal with it on their own. And without the support of others, which is so important in Korean society, they were relegated to an existence in poverty, in agony and silence. Given this bleak prospect for agency, I feel great respect for the women who decided to raise their voices. How courageous they must have been! But fear had also played its part back then, I assume. Fear of the reaction of the Korean public, fear of how the Japanese were going to deal with their testimonies, as well as fear of the struggles that would lie ahead of them.

It turned out that, fortunately, there were many people showing solidarity with the "comfort women's" struggle for justice as soon as they spoke out about it. One of them was the chief of education of the War and Women's Human Rights Museum, Lee Jiyoung, who gave us an insight into her motives to become an activist in this matter. I wonder, however, if all people who spoke out on the "comfort women" issue – activists and politicians alike – have the same praiseworthy intentions in mind. I am afraid this is not the case.

Through the lectures and excursions during the summer school, I got the impression that the struggles of the former "comfort women" are being instrumentalized politically. This is not to say that the entirety of activism revolving around the "comfort women" issue is without value or problematic. Far from that. Rather, I would like to call attention to the fact that, even without wanting to, one can be drawn into geopolitical struggles that are not directly related to the core goals of a movement. Merely blaming the Japanese and demanding an honest apology will not be the solution to the problem. Also, what kind of "solution" is this so supposed to be? At the Wednesday rallies in front of the Japanese embassy in central Seoul, I heard such demands for a "solution", and also some lecturers mentioned the need to find a "solution" for the *halmŏni* – grannies as they are referred to in Korean. To be frank, I do not believe the "comfort woman" issue can be resolved. Or to be more precise, it "should not" be resolved. Finding a solution implies a kind of endpoint. However, it is illusionary to assume that any act by whoever could resolve the "comfort women" issue at one blow. I think that we should rather aim for dealing with the past in a constant and active manner. We have to question the way we commemorate and be critical of forces that want to strategically exploit the issue at hand.

The "we" I am thinking of is a very broad one. Of course, it includes the Japanese who finally need to come to terms with their not so glorious past. This consciousness-raising should concern, moreover, people from all different nations. We need to show solidarity with the women who suffered and are still suffering from sexual violence, we need to learn about it at school and elsewhere, and get active in order to avoid it from happening again. Sexual violence did not only concern women from Korea and other Asian countries, though.

History scholar Regina Mühlhäuser found out that German soldiers, for instance, committed grave acts of sexual violence during World War II, too – without any legal consequences in most cases. It is alarming that the German public, for the most part, is unaware of this historical fact. During our summer school, we had the opportunity to listen to many victims' accounts, among them women from D.R. Kongo, Kosovo, and from the Middle East. One young Yazidi woman, for example, gave a speech about the horrible experiences she had to undergo when the "Islamic State" kidnapped her only a few years ago. Fortunately, she was able to escape from the violence and captivity and became a courageous activist for women suffering from sexual violence during armed conflicts. Eventually, and importantly, the "we" also have to include Koreans themselves. I would like to emphasize that merely commemorating and filing demands towards the Japanese is not enough. No, Koreans have to accept their special responsibility for the women who suffered from sexual violence under the Japanese. And this is not only about caring for these women and caring about this issue today, but also about acknowledging that it was unacceptable to ignore these women and their sufferings, needs, and demands for more than 40 years after the end of World War II.

If we take the historical implications and responsibility seriously – and I am referring to responsibility in its broadest sense, see above – we also need to accept the complexity of the "comfort women" issue. It is clear that the core revolves around the forced sexual labor and the sexual violence that women had to suffer in the "comfort stations" organized by the Japanese military. However, focusing only on this aspect fails to embrace other factors that concern the "comfort women" issue, the commemorative and sociopolitical practices around it, and the people involved in all this. Important categories to think about in this context include, of course, gender, but also age, ethnicity, and class. The latter category – class – for example, did play a crucial role in the lives of the women who were forced to serve as sex slaves. As the museum representative, Lee Jiyoung, told us, most of the Korean "comfort women" found themselves in more or less impoverished and underprivileged situations after they came back to their home country. Although a comprehensive analysis of all these elements is difficult in the limited space available here, I will pick out some of them and try to show their interconnectedness – or to put in more academic terms: I want to draw attention to the *intersectional* aspects of the "comfort women" issue.

Intersectional Perspectives on the "Comfort Women" Issue

Intersectionality is an analytical framework that aims at identifying oppressive structures which are regarded as interwoven and should thus not be analyzed separately from each other. Coined by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw at the end of the 1980s, the term stems from black feminist theorizing, asserting that the identity categories of gender and race need to be analyzed in conjunction in order to achieve more valuable and accurate results. In most contexts, discrimination is at work in multidimensional ways. Analyzing the situation of marginalized women only through a gendered lens would most probably miss aspects that affect their experiences to a similar extent, as for example their class position, their age, their disability or their ethnic background.

In the following, I will briefly outline how I think we could widen our horizon by looking at the "comfort women" issue from different angles. To this end, I will concentrate on three vectors that have and had an impact on what kind of lives the victims had to live, on how we commemorate and on the way activists frame their activities: Gender, age, and class.

The "comfort women" issue and gender

When the victims of the organized sexual exploitation system returned home sometime after the end of World War II, women in general found themselves in rather subordinate positions in South Korea. Women were very much relegated to the private sphere and were thus not expected to speak out on public issues, not to mention fighting for their rights and for justice. Female voices were silenced by society, and the victims of the "comfort stations" were no exception to the rule. Korean society was (and, alas! still is) organized in patriarchal ways. Men were the heads of the families, men were the main breadwinners, and men were those able to participate in sociopolitical debates and activism. This is not to say that there were no women getting active, too. However, it was much more difficult for them to be heard.

Just imagine the outcry if something horrible like the sexual exploitation in "comfort stations" had happened to Korean men instead. I am sure it would not have taken 40 years to acknowledge the atrocities committed against our male brethren. I am not suggesting that sexual violence against men is a joking matter. UInfortunately, it is quite possible that rival soldiers have raped other men during wartime, too. Interestingly, for those men, it is presumably even more difficult to make their experience public – however, not because of their subordinate position in the gender system! Rather, being raped implies being feminized, which in turn is regarded as a great shame.

Rape is a common means of warfare. Yet, mostly women fall victim to such forms of sexual violence in wartime. There is a gendered logic lying behind this revolting practice, too. Masculinist military thinking goes like this: What greater defeat could you suffer than your mothers, wives, sisters or daughters being raped by the enemy? This is yet another form of shame, the shame of not being able to protect women from the adversary troops. Women are regarded as objects without proper agency from both sides (!), while the consequences of sexual violence committed against women could be regarded as even more severe in their home countries.

Considering the Korean case, there is the discourse on the purity of the female body. The "comfort women" who returned home after the war were regarded as stained by the Japanese. Their purity had been taken away from them. Perhaps the women themselves had internalized this discourse to an extent that they felt ashamed and dishonorable. Most victims did not get married. Society, and especially men regarded them as "non-marriageable material". Therefore, they remained single. In family-centered Korean society, however, this poses huge problems. You derive a good deal of your social standing from your family status. Your family network helps you in most circumstances and provides social security. These structures were not available for women with a "comfort station background". In most cases, they remained outcasts within Korean society, for 40 or more years.

Another issue related to gender, but not necessarily to the victims themselves is the fact that the vast majority of activists fighting for justice for the "comfort women" are female. At least, this was my impression. This may seem as a commonplace observation, just like feminists are mostly female, and gay activists mostly gay. However, I think that this is not the ideal we should strive for. Especially in issues related to sexual violence, men should show more solidarity (with the victims and not with the male perpetrators!). It seems that the core of the "comfort women" issue, i.e., the situation of the victims, is still regarded in highly gendered ways. Caring for the victims that are still alive, doing research about what happened to them, and actively commemorating their sufferings – it is almost always women who carry out these activities. Sure, there are also men attending the Wednesday rallies.

However, as far as I can tell, the larger part consisted of schoolboys who presumably were more or less forced to go there by their (female?) teachers. Korean society, including families and the education system, should endeavour to have boys and men participate in such events voluntarily and out of an understanding of the importance of commemoration. In a similar vein, general education about gender equality and mutual respect would be a good idea, considering how women are still treated in Korean society today. But to be fair, this is, regrettably, a worldwide problem.

The "comfort women" issue and class

Gender and class are highly interconnected factors when looking at the situation the victims found themselves in during the decades before they decided to speak out. The above analysis showed how the "comfort women" were silenced and relegated to subordinate positions within Korean society owing to their being female. This also entailed a precarious position in the economic sense in most cases. The life stories of the "comfort women" are of course different from each other. But Kang Duck-Kyung *halmŏni's* account seems to be representative for the experience of many victims. As the activist at the museum told us, no matter where they lived, no matter if they got married, all former "comfort women" had been leading unsteady lives at the margins of Korean society, certainly in the lower if not lowest income brackets. Only when they had their coming out, the Korean government reluctantly started to provide them with some benefits. However, without the help of many volunteers and activists, and without global attention and solidarity, their situation might not have improved even then.

The class background did certainly also play a role for the "recruitment" of the comfort women. The young women were often tricked into becoming "comfort women" by the Japanese. If they were not abducted forcefully in the first place, the Japanese recruiters told them that they could offer them well-paid jobs – an opportunity that they could not reject, especially in unstable wartime. Too soon, however, they would find themselves waking up to a nightmare rather than earning their livelihood. Thus, although they were confronted with audacious lies, it was out of economic need that they accepted the recruiters' offer. If they had stemmed from more prosperous families it would have been less likely for them to end up in a Japanese "comfort station".

Finally, looking at the people surrounding the "comfort women" issue again, we can also observe class concerns. I feel that it is mostly academic people doing research on the topic. The same is true for organizers and participants of solidarity events. All of us, the participants of the summer school, have a university background ourselves. While I am grateful for the opportunity to learn more about the "comfort women" issue, I wish the knowledge could spread even more broadly. Scholars need to leave the ivory tower more often and try to share their insights with people from all backgrounds. I would even claim that historians and social scientists dealing with this subject have a responsibility to go public and to present their work in a way that not only the academic community is targeted. I am not saying that this is not already happening. The War and Women's Human Rights Museum is a great example of how a broader public can be reached. But since the "comfort women" issue concerns all of us, it would be great to even see more of this. Consciousness-raising is the keyword here.

What I additionally expect from scholars is that they voice their concerns openly when commemoration goes into the wrong direction or when sociopolitical forces instrumentalize it out of self-interest. The way we commemorate, and also for what purpose we commemorate is not sacrosanct, but should be part of our critical engagement with the "comfort women" issue.

The "comfort women" issue and age

I have put the term *halmŏni* in italics in this text, firstly, because it is a Korean word that non-Korean speakers might be unfamiliar with, and secondly because I do not really like it. I will explain why. *Halmŏni* means "grandmother" or "granny" in Korean, but evolved into a honorific form of addressing and talking about the women who had to go through sexual exploitation by the Japanese. Kim Hak-sun, the woman who is said to have been the first one to share her story, would thus be commonly referred to as Kim Hak-sun *halmŏni* in Korea. Everyone in Korea would immediately know that I am talking about a "comfort woman".

I am not happy with this practice. The term *halmŏni* implies that all former "comfort women" are aged, elderly women. On first sight, this is of course true. Even when the first women came out of the closet in the early 1990s, they were way over 60, most of them over 70 years old. However, at the time they were forced to serve as "comfort women", they were young girls or adolescents. I can imagine that the victims may even like to be called *halmŏni*. It sounds caring and affectionate and the women certainly deserve a lot of affection after a life full of hardship. It is also possible that by calling the victims "grandmother" people want to create a feeling of closeness for themselves so that they can better understand the victims' life stories. However, in my opinion the term also turns the victims into something somewhat detached from the horrible past they had to suffer. It sounds a bit too smooth. Moreover, focusing on old age takes away some of the severity of the explicitly sexual components of the "comfort women" issue. Elderly people are not normally associated with sex in the first place, while the rape of young women is very much sexualized – and consequently problematized in this sense. Just a reminder: We are talking about sexual violence in its most perfidious and brutal form and I would prefer not to euphemize or gloss over anything. Therefore, I see the need to handle with caution the terminology we use when talking about the "comfort women" issue, or for that matter, when addressing the victims themselves.

What is more, I am not sure if the so-called girl statues are beneficial in this respect. At least, they represent young girls. They come closer to the historical truth than the term *halmŏni*, I feel. At the same time, the statues do not achieve to depict the sufferings the victims had to go through either. The girl statue in Seoul, for instance, features a lot of tiny symbols such as butterflies and a bird. For me, it is a bit too touchy-feely, the more so as one of the goals the statue stands for is peace. Of course, I am not against peace. And of course (and unfortunately) there is a relation between sexual violence and armed conflicts. But I think it is quite far-fetched to link the highly intricate issue of peace with the one concerning the victims of forced sex labour by the Japanese military. I am afraid that the focus on peace as a central demand, which we can also observe in the Wednesday rallies, might even result in diverting the "comfort women" issues from its initial goals. "Peace" is such a broad and diffuse demand that, again, it cannot meet the complexity of the issues at hand. If we really care about the victims' rights and justice, why not refocus and place their stories, their claims, and their agency into the centre of our activism and commemoration?

Final Remarks

I hope that I was able to give some fresh perspectives on the "comfort women" issue. By looking at it from several angles, I feel that we can obtain insights that are more valuable and that sharpen our critical thinking. The "comfort women" issue is never only a historical one, neither a feminist one, neither a question of class, ethnicity, sexuality or age *only*. We need to take into consideration all of these interlocking factors if we want to reach a deeper understanding of what is going on in Korea and elsewhere in terms of struggles for justice surrounding the victims of sexual violence.

Lastly, I would like to point out that my observations are not sacrosanct. They are the very personal opinions of a young German male PhD candidate. I am well aware of the fact that one single phenomenon can be perceived and interpreted in many different ways depending on your cultural background, your age or gender. Our respective positionalities include many different interconnected elements that have an impact on our worldviews. But what is important is that we do not lose our ability to question things, and dare to delve into the intricate complexities of social phenomena.

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