Akshara: An International Refereed Research Journal of English Literature and Language
ISSN: 0975-5373; E-ISSN: 2583-4738
Vol. 15, May 2023, pp. 46-63
Edited by Vijay Kumar Roy
https://www.waoar.org/akshara/

Unveiling the Cultural Dynamics of Sexual Slavery: A Foucauldian Analysis of Comfort Women and the Interplay between Agency and Power

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Abstract

Aligning towards the conception of agency as a cultural phenomenon, the process of enslavement of "the weaker sex" is often conveniently manoeuvred through sexual violation. A nation's history being tainted by crude episodes of tyranny unleashed upon vulnerable victims, those who later came to be infamously known as 'comfort women', denotes the epitome of deprived agency, on a cultural footing. This paper aims to juxtapose the undertones of sexual slavery imposed upon comfort women with the concept of power as discussed by Foucault, in an attempt to establish the inversely intrinsic relationship between agency and power. The utilization of sovereign and bio-power in legalising wartime sexual violence explicitly depicts how the social structure of the period played a significant role in denying agency. Thus, culture can be construed as being an active participant in the inhuman treatment of comfort women and their ensuing trauma. A broader evaluation might reveal gender hierarchy as an inherent trait of said culture which justified the degradation of these women as sexual toys. The biased and impenetrable sexual power dynamics is to date upheld by the nation as a mere 'wartime lapse' while it remains an unhealed scar upon the conscience of the affected community of women and their families. Select films of fiction pertaining to the aforementioned

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topic have been utilized as references in exposing their traumatic history and evincing the obverse facets of agency and power in line with cultural accounts.

Keywords: Agency, structure, culture, biopower, comfort women, apparatus

Introduction

The attempt to pinpoint a definitive explanation of agency is a tedious task. It is an abstract concept wherein the subjects or agents are under the notion that their actions are autonomous and independent, thereby emphasizing on the existence of a subjective free will. The dialectic of dichotomy between agency and structure has been an enquiry prevalent in several domains including sociology, philosophy and psychology. Structure here, refers to the constraints imposed upon its subjects by social systems through domains such as ideology, gender, norms and tradition. Sociologists have been divided in their arguments pertaining to the primacy of structure over agency and vice versa, yet Emile Durkheim's standpoint projects itself as assertive over the others. His famous aphorism remains proof to the same, which goes thus: 'Social phenomena are things and ought to be treated as things' (Durkheim 5).

According to Durkheim and Marx, 'social facts' override agency in a significant manner. The concept of the development of individual consciousness in agents, prompting them to take informed decisions independent of social facts, is nothing short of an implausible ideal reality. Social structure infact poses as an external constraint which denies some agency to an individual member thereby forcing the subject to exercise his will within the sphere of constraint. Often such social norms are subconsciously internalized by the agent and it results in the 'autopoiesis' or self-reproduction of these structures ensuring an eclipse of individual agency. Durkheim points out the influence of patterned social arrangements, in his book *The Rules of Sociological Method*: "These types of conduct or thought are not only external to the individual but are, moreover, endowed with coercive power, by virtue of which they impose themselves upon him, independent of his individual will" (Durkheim 21).

The supposedly unique behavioural patterns of individuals developed due to close association with other agents in the society is infact "selective assimilations of prevalent social practices and values", according to the American cultural psychologist Carl Ratner. Social integration and the subsequent development of individual identity and agency is subsumed under unconscious enculturation. The exposure to social structure and cultural identities thus creates a copy of the framework within ourselves leading to an agency deprived of self-determination. The fundamental essence of an individual

is a mere reproduction of a dominant cultural discourse. The misinterpretation of agency is rectified by Anthony King when he says,

> ... human agency is a collective product, germinated with others and dependent upon the social networks in which we all exist. Human agency is better understood as the collective product of social relations ... than as an autonomous individual power. (King 2006: 475)

Thus, agency as a social phenomenon, subsequent to the assimilation of available discourses by an individual to survive within the structure, can be argued as a pragmatic reality.

The question of the female is a prominent one, since the hierarchies of almost all social structures confine them to the position of 'the other'. In an arrangement where agency is exercised within the constraints, women are considered to be 'non-agents' (Davies 4). The irony of this construct is exposed through a metaphor by Dorothy Smith when she draws up the example of a ballgame which has more 'presences than players' whose activity is limited to outside of the play. In simpler terms, women often become mute spectators in a male-centric social environment. Instances of the illusionary nature of agency of women, the fallacy of the projection that women have choices and the irony of a structure depriving agency to its 'non-agents' are visible across all cultures, often in ways unimaginable. The most evident and traumatic manner of suppressing this agency is through violation of the female body irrespective of the morality embedded within the social structure. One among the most gruesome accounts of enslavement of women through sexual violation must be the comfort women system which existed in Japan during the Second World War.

The most vulnerable among the victims of war are often women, festered by the subsequent sexual violence and suffocated by patriarchy fortified through socio-cultural norms, a ghastly example of which was the existence of military brothels and the Japanese comfort women or *jûgun ianfu* during the Second World War. A great majority of them from Korea, then a Japanese Protectorate, women at these comfort stations or legalized brothels were stripped off their dignity, toyed around as sexual tools in the hands of many officers thereby losing their identity. They become the ill-fated witnesses of the precariousness of the heightened militarization and fanaticism plaguing their society, families, and their own bodies. In perilous times, especially those involving military mobilisation, the victimisation of women, and the reduction of womanhood to a mere conduit to carry out the constructed expectations of providing sexual service to men which were presupposed on her are high. The fact that mass

rape is accepted to be common during the times of war makes it all-the-more primitive and savage. A rather extremist form of such violence is manifested through the system of comfort women.

Though sexual violence against women, especially at the hands of soldiers, is common during the times of any armed conflict and is customarily attributed as an act of unleashing their sexual frustration, it is propelled by a sense of entitlement and superiority, which is demonstrated through the state-backed dictated patriarchy, acting as a fundamental cause for the establishment and normalization of this system. The root cause of the sexual savagery perpetrated against comfort women was instigated by the complex gender and sexual power dynamics rather than as a product of mere animalistic and carnal appetite of the 'superior sex'.

Michel Foucault, a social theorist and French philosopher, was a prominent figure in the structuralist and post-structuralist wave of French thought during the 1960s. He showed particular interest in analysing power and social change and also established power and knowledge as de-centralised, dynamic, and inseparable from one another. 'Power is everywhere' and 'comes from everywhere' so in this sense is 'neither an agency nor a structure' (Foucault 1998: 63). A major portion of his oeuvre is based on his concept of power, subdivided as disciplinary, sovereign, and biopower. Foucault's conceptualization of power and apparatus is utilized in drawing a relationship between the deprived agency of the comfort women and the biopower exerted by the officers through approved brothels.

The History of Comfort Women: Fons Et Origo Mali

A euphemism for women forced into sexual slavery, the term '*comfort women*', a direct translation of the Japanese term "Jugun ianfu" and Korean term "Ilbongun wianbu", is attributed to the victims of the Japanese militia violence, mainly from Korea, who were either abducted or lured with promises of work and later incarcerated in military brothels, known as 'comfort stations' during the 1930s, till the end of the Second World War. Approximately 200,000 women from all parts of the occupied nations like Thailand, Burma, Taiwan, Vietnam, China, and the Philippines, ranging from 11 to 27 years of age, were drafted against their will into the comfort stations, run either by the military or through private agents and thus brandished as prostitutes.

The Korean Empire was annexed by Japan in 1910 through the Japan-Korea Treaty of 1910, establishing it as a colony and retaining a large number of troops

on the Korean peninsula, thus paving the way for ultimate sovereignty and unassailable jurisdiction. The key event which instigated the establishment of the comfort women system was the episode of mass murder and mass rape executed by the Imperial Japanese Army during the second Sino-Japanese war, infamously known as the Rape of Nanking (1937-1938), which was condemned by the international community. The victims, estimated to be 20,000 in number, were often immediately killed through maiming. The resultant widespread hostility against the Japanese militia among the people and transmission of venereal diseases among the soldiers, which hindered their progress in the war, proved to be a Gordian knot in the Japanese colonial ambitions. Determined to reduce hostilities and minimize medical expenditure on treating the acquired venereal diseases of the soldiers, the Japanese government embarked upon a program legalizing the establishment of military brothels for the Japanese Armed Forces. According to Japanese historian Yoshiaki Yoshimi, "The Japanese Imperial Army feared most that the simmering discontentment of the soldiers could explode into a riot and revolt. That is why it provided women" (Yonhap). Moreover, the militia believed that sex before combat served as a 'charm against injury', simultaneously relieving them from the strict confines of military service (Yonhap).

The first comfort station was established in 1932 in Shanghai. The initial faction of comfort women comprised prostitutes who willingly surrendered their bodies to the militia. Existent licensed prostitution within Korea prompted increased recruitment of women into comfort stations. But as Japanese colonial expansion gained momentum, the shortage of volunteers forced the army to turn to the local population, coercing women into sexual slavery.

Though each comfort station differed in its establishment and management, complete supervision and security were kindred. According to a recent report published by Japan's Kyodo news agency, the Imperial Army demanded the government to provide "one comfort woman" for every 70 soldiers (qtd. *Aljazeera*). Brutal rape continued even during menstruation, sickness, and pregnancy, denying them basic human rights. The ensuing defeat of Japan in 1945 in no way provided the slightest alleviation to their crisis, with existing survivors either reeling under the psychological trauma and discrimination of the public or succumbing to the wrath of the ongoing war. Professor Youn Chung-ok proffered the issue of Japanese military sexual slavery during the Women and Sex Tourism Seminar in 1988, later initiating the establishment of the Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan through which the government denied any form

of involvement. Kim Hak-soon's public testimony in Korea on August 14, 1991, that she was a survivor, came as a blow to the government, the consequences of which resulted in the partial resolution of the issue of comfort women.

Examination of Comfort Stations as Apparatus

Foucauldian apparatus, alternatively referred to as dispositif which first appeared in his *History of Sexuality, Volume 1* (1976), denotes the institutional, organizational, and physical mechanisms which sustain the exercise of power and existence of power structures within a social body. In the interview "*The Confession of the Flesh*" from 1977, Foucault expounds on the methodological function of the term apparatus:

> ...I understand by the term 'apparatus' a sort of – shall we say – formation which has as its major function at a given historical moment that of responding to an urgent need. The apparatus thus has a dominant strategic function. (Foucault 1977: 194-228)

Apparatus can be thus interpreted as a reflexive technique of the control of norms or rather a multilinear ensemble which uses power in the reconstruction of living beings into subjects. According to Foucault, the notion of repressive institution allows the fabrication of the disciplined individual, their bodies being subjugated under many forms of dispositives of incarceration. Consequently in "*The Confession of the Flesh*", he cites, "…Couldn't it be that sex… be something which to the contrary is produced by the apparatus of sexuality?" (Foucault 1977: 210)

The concept of apparatus when applied to the comfort women system delineates the power relation between the women abused and the Imperial militia. Comfort stations established by the army and sanctioned by the Japanese government function as the apparatus or dispositif through which the sovereign authority establishes its supremacy as the 'subject' over the trafficked women who are transformed into 'objects'. The despotic institution of legalized military brothels emerges as an administrative measure of appeasing militia through the forcible extraction of sex from the victimized women. Consequently, it can be interpreted that the strategic function of the apparatus used by the government was to respond to the urgent need of enhancing the performance of the Imperial army during the Second World War. The ensuing result being the initiation of comfort stations, it culminated in the objectification of comfort women as sexual tools through which

the government asserted itself as the ultimate 'subject'. The cornerstone of the power dynamics emerging through this institution surprisingly is sexuality, which is utilized as a medium to avow the sexual superiority of the militia.

Validating this analysis is a scene from *Spirits Homecoming*, where a soldier forces his will upon the protagonist Jung-min, in a manner resembling that of prey being hunted down when she attempts to escape his clutches.

> SOLDIER: Good! That's it. This is how a real girl should react. She certainly has the spirit worthy of being offered to the Imperial Army (00 : 37 : 57 - 00 : 39 : 46).

Jake Adelstein's account in the *Los Angeles Times* goes,

> Historical documents unearthed in the 1990s, along with accounts from soldiers and victims, suggested that military authorities had a direct role in working with contractors to forcibly procure women to work in brothels. Nobutaka Shikanai, the former president of Japan's most conservative paper, the Sankei Shimbun, and an officer in the Imperial Japanese Army's accounting department during the war, has acknowledged the government's role in building wartime sex-trafficking networks (28 Dec. 2015).

It can be surmised that the incarceration of comfort women and raison d'être of comfort stations was due to the presence of complicated sexual power dynamics whose roots were entrenched deep within the patriarchal society, backed by the government.

Biopolitical Governance of Comfort Stations

The most elusive concepts in Foucault's oeuvre, they appear in the last section of *The History of Sexuality, Volume I* (1978). Biopolitics is a political ratiocination that brought within its purview, the administration of life and the population. Quoting Foucault, it is "to ensure, sustain, and multiply life, to put this life in order" (Foucault 1978: 169). In part V of the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, "Right of Death and Power over Life", he explains that certain political technologies that were based on considering the body as a machine and the population as a species body. Through this emerged the proposition that the body is meant to be disciplined by limiting its potential by rendering it docile and that biological processes like birth rate, mortality, and life expectancy are supposed to be regulated thus keeping the population in check.

> We are, then, in a power that has taken control of both the body and life or that has, if you like, taken control of life in general – with the body as one pole and the population as the other. (Foucault 1978: 252-253)

It explores how authority administers human processes through subjectivation, the medium used being biopower which instead operates through dispositif. Foucault elaborates on biopower in *The Will to Knowledge*: "…power that exerts a positive influence on life, that endeavours to administer, optimize, and multiply it, subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive regulations" (Foucault 1998: 137). In his *Society Must Be Defended*, Foucault elaborates on the emergence of biopolitical technologies paving way for extended political control over life and death: "This is the right, or rather precisely the opposite right. It is the power to 'make' live and 'let' die" (Foucault 1997: 241).

It is thus considered to be the other side of an "anatomico-politics of the human body" (Foucault 1998: 139). Foucault's conceptualization of biopower is such that instead of repressing the true sexuality within a society, its garish sexual verve is directed towards the interests of a particular category, primarily the custodians of power within the hierarchy.

Employing the concepts of biopower and biopolitics in the comfort women system, it can be interpreted that the Japanese government exerted political control over the life of those women, whose bodies being objects under the state governance were utilized to increase the productivity of the militia in the war front. According to Foucault, the dispositif of biopower, comfort stations in this context, operate from the 'level of life', thus accounting for the absolute suppression of comfort women by the state through the soldiers. Squashing the resistance of the victims to gain control over their bodies, the soldiers succeeded in subjugating them both physically and mentally, paving the way for the imposition of biopower. While the anteceding sovereignty possessed the right to impose death upon people, the congruent biopower infiltrated the society wielding the right to impose life upon people who craved death.

A testament to this plight can be witnessed in the film *Snowy Road*, originally aired on South Korea's public television network KBS1. Evaluating sexual enslavement from the perspective of the victims, it focuses on the interdependence of two victims Jong-boon and Young-Ae, their changing equations of hostility and friendship and the ghosts of the past impacting upon the future of the surviving victims. The protagonists Young Ae and Jong-boon confront a situation where

Young Ae is forced to abort her pregnancy, her resistance infuriating the mistress of the comfort station who warns Jong-boon of death if Young Ae hangs herself.

MISTRESS. You can't die here even if you want to. (00 : 52 : 28)

Their plight is depicted vividly though this statement where the mistress, a representative voice of the social structure asserts the helplessness of the victims in seeking out death to escape the torture.

YOUNG AE. It's better to die than to live like this. (00 : 53 : 32)

The social structure, through the comfort stations, exercised such power over these women that they were rendered insignificant, their bodies claimed to be state properties leased to the militia such that they were deprived of the right to death. Unable to take their own lives, comfort women were doubly victimized through the sexual assaults ceaselessly exerted upon them by the militia as well as through the biopolitical governance imposed, due to which the state could 'make live or let die' these women. This aspect of the comfort women system which employs biopower to cripple their resistance and agency is ample evidence to the inverse relationship between agency and power.

Assertion of Sovereign Power

Foucault evaluates state "as timeless abstraction, as a pole of transcendence, an instrument of class domination, or cold monster [were] overvaluation of the problem of the state" (Foucault 1978: 381). His conceptualization of state is phrased thus:

> The state is nothing else but the effect, the profile, the mobile shape of a perpetual stratification (étatisation) or stratifications, in the sense of incessant transactions […] relationships between local powers, the central authority, and so on. (Foucault 1978: 77)

According to him, the state has no heart, not with respect to the feelings, but with respect to the interior. It is the motile result of a regime of multiple governmentalities. In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault explains the transition of power possessed by the sovereign during the ancient and classical era. While a sovereign in the ancient era could use hard power over his subjects, during the classical era he "wielded an indirect power over them of life and death" (Foucault 1978: 135). According to him, sovereign power is legislative, prohibitive, and censoring, repressive in its use of the law. The recurrent characteristic of a sovereign irrespective of the era is the irrefutable power wielded, attempting to thwart mutiny. Claiming monopoly being the prime agenda, sovereign power seeks to imprison its

subjects, leaving them with bare life. It is that kind of power that suppresses public dissent, demanding subservience by perpetuating fear, creating subordinate subjects. The state, being the prime mover in the establishment of comfort stations, sovereign power was used as a medium in empowering the militia, coercing the women to pledge their bodies.

The establishment of sanctioned military brothels was a dispositif or apparatus used by the Japanese government, brandishing their sovereignty in order to reign supreme and quench their colonial ambitions by tending to the sexual health of the militia. Invoking fear among the citizens and abducting girls, paving way for the soldiers to feast upon them in comfort stations, the government's notorious involvement in the sexual incarceration of these women was exposed only after a series of legal battles, an example of which is portrayed in the film *Herstory*. An authentic and honest depiction of the Shimonoseki trials spanning over 23 in number from 1992 to 1998, the film portrays the arduous struggle of 10 plaintiffs who worked as comfort women, in their attempt to acquire an admission of responsibility from the Japanese government.

From the onset of the series of trials, the defendants of the Japanese government posited that since the Korea-Japan treaty of 1965 had finalized all issues, the plaintiffs had no legal claim to reparations despite the fact that all cases of human rights violation had been excluded from the treaty. When the final verdict allowed reparations yet deemed an official apology unnecessary, one among the plaintiffs, Park Soon-nyeo, with burning eyes and a dejected soul, looked straight at the judiciary and yelled, "You fools will never understand human talk" (*Herstory* 01: 51: 39). The court's verdict of providing three thousand dollars as compensation for the mortifying vilification that these women had endured in a lifetime was derided, a mere sum of money being incapable of washing away the horrors braved. The disinclination of the government in recognizing their liability in the ignominy of the estranged women and declining an official apology is another indicator of the episodic exercise of sovereign power.

Comfort Women System vs. Prostitution

The term 'jugun ianfu' was an accepted genteelism for prostitutes, a reference to those women who were forcibly kidnapped or duped into sexual servitude for the Imperial army. The government, the army, and the nationalists successfully launched scurrilous attacks on these hoodwinked women, to which no more obloquy could

reasonably attach. A professor in education at Tokyo University, Nobukatsu Fujioka's remark resonates with the public opinion: "…the Asian comfort women who supplied sex to Japanese troops were not "military sex slaves" dragooned by the Imperial Army but ordinary prostitutes..." (Efron 7). By the end of the Second World War, the Japanese government destroyed all official documents pertaining to the comfort women issue, thus hindering the quest of historians to unravel the truth. The resultant lack of acknowledgment of this injustice by the state as well as the public fomented and sealed the widespread slander that the defrauded women were prostitutes rather than victims of wartime sexual violence. Ascertaining this, is a scene from the film *Herstory*, depicting the conversation between the woman entrepreneur Mrs. Moon, who struggled to bring justice to the former comfort women and a cab driver, who represented the general voice of the public.

> DRIVER. And the grannies should be ashamed too. How can they go on TV and say they sold their bodies? It's obvious they are just lying to get paid. (00 : 18 : 48 - 00 : 18 : 58)

During the establishment of the earliest comfort stations, prostitutes volunteered to satisfy the needs of the Imperial army. But as the colonial ambitions of the Japanese government surged, so did the strength of the army, recruiting young men from all parts of their territories, owing to which there was a paucity of comfort women. This instigated the trafficking or defrauding of innocent girls from Japanese protectorates like Korea into Japan to serve as comfort women. The unwarrantable accusation of comfort women being prostitutes was baseless since they were either abducted or tricked into the ploy without their consent, an aspect differentiating the comfort women system from prostitution. Mere sex was not the only motive of the soldiers who fed off the fear and helplessness of their victims, upon whom they inflicted unbearable torture. The exertion of biopower upon comfort women in order to subjugate them physically, reflects the involvement of the state in exercising authoritarian control over its subjects, especially their body. This aspect of the comfort women system which employs biopower to cripple their resistance is ample evidence to confirm the polarity between the victims of ineffable persecution and the prostitutes who accepted the militia without a struggle. Substantiating this, the opening scene of the film *Spirits Homecoming* demonstrates the confession of a former comfort woman, through which the lack of consent of the victims and its repercussions are explicitly evinced.

> SPEAKER. Women are menstruating but they continue to abuse us irregardlessly…They drag you like a piece of luggage, use you as they would like and when we are broken- sick so to speak, they trash you or kill you. (00 : 01:12 - 00 : 01 : 26)

Divergent power relations between the women and the militia indicate that the power vested upon the soldiers can be the prime factor in crushing the agency of the comfort women. The act which began as scattered occurrences of sexual violence escalated into a legalized trafficking network and authorized military brothels projecting the magnification of power in the wrong hands. It resulted in the incarceration and sexual slavery of women, whose very identity was wiped out and replaced under the label of 'comfort women'.

The state-backed patriarchy, thus played a pivotal role in conveniently brandishing these victims as prostitutes thereby smirching their honour through which the government aimed to salvage their reputation, decimating the comfort women scandal. As the chant goes, "An oppressive state is a macho rapist."

Trauma in terms of Biopower

A study conducted by the National Institutes of Health of USA, investigating the mental health of 26 former comfort women, by analysing and comparing their life histories, depression and DSM-IV diagnosis of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), with that of 24 healthy women, revealed that 8 out of the 26 women still suffered from PTSD, anger control impairment, avoidant behaviour, and intrusive recollections, decades after the end of the Second World War. Having endured sexual torture, starvation, incessant rapes, and being eyewitnesses to several murders, the delicate psychiatric sequelae of these women is a stark reminder of the brutalities inflicted upon them by the Imperial army. The effect of sexual violence is cumulative and the intensity of PTSD multiplies with the severity of abuses, the rate of its pervasiveness being higher in these women than in other victims of war trauma. The survivors live their whole lives being ashamed of their identity as former comfort women and are often suicidal. An account of the former comfort women published in the Korean Herald revealed that after the war ended, she returned to South Korea, finding a livelihood in menial jobs since she spent most of her "money visiting hospitals to cure venereal diseases" which she "contracted from the Japanese soldiers."

A close analysis of history illustrates that compared to those comfort women who were massacred at the hands of the army after their use, the survivors endured

prolonged persecution throughout their remaining lives primarily because the then society considered them to be unchaste and devoid of sexual purity. They lived their lives in anonymity, shielding themselves from the mortifying remarks of the community.

The exertion of biopower by the state which had denied them the choice of death propelled them into a life teeming with hardships, which was even worse compared to the torture suffered at the comfort stations. Crippled from syphilis and torture and psychologically vulnerable, they return home only to be ostracized by their own people for 'selling their body' and are shamed for life. Braving their fears, these women, including octogenarians, exposed the state induced crime and trauma endured at the hands of the Imperial army, only to be judged and harassed, scathing remarks brandishing them as shameless to speak of the abuse which occurred decades ago. According to Foucault's account of power, the patriarchal structures that underpin rape are left unacknowledged. The portrayal of the Shimonoseki trials in the film *Herstory* validates the personal account of a former comfort woman, who is trying to verbalize the trauma and torture that she had endured, amidst the mocking eyes of judiciary.

> WOMAN. When I was too swollen to even poke a needle in, they shouted, 'Stupid! Stupid! Stupid!' then stabbed nails in me! Damn Samurai bastards! They couldn't have done that if they thought of us as humans! (00 : 57 : 12-00 : 57 : 28)

The famous American psychiatrist Judith Lewis Herman states thus: "The conflict between the will to deny horrible events and the will to proclaim them aloud is the central dialectic of psychological trauma" (Herman 57). It required a great will to protest against the long-bred injustice for which these women received neither an official apology nor reparations. The words of a young orphan who aids the elderly Jong-boon, a former comfort woman, in the film *Snowy Road* is significant.

> GIRL. You don't have to feel ashamed. They are the bastards. (1: 48: 44)

Psychiatric interviews and the Structured Clinical Interview for DSM-5 Axis I Disorders were conducted by psychiatrists from the Special Committee for Gender-Equality and Family of Korean Neuropsychiatry Association on 6 biological children of former comfort women. The results indicated that five among the six participants suffered from at least one psychiatric disorder like PTSD, insomnia disorder, or

adjustment disorder and demonstrated symptoms of shame kindred to their mothers concerning the comfort women issue. The evidence gathered asserted the transgenerational transmission of trauma in the offspring of "comfort women", establishing the fact that the true victims were not only the women who suffered the torture of the militia but a whole new generation, forced to endure for a lifetime, the agony of their progenitor. This is dealt in the film *Herstory* where one among the plaintiffs Bae Jeong-Gil accepts the mentally ill son of her companion at the comfort station after her death and raises him as her own son, enduring with patience the physical and mental trauma inflicting by him. Sovereign and biopower together with gendered hierarchy were inextricably linked together in crushing the lives of these victims as well as their progeny.

Japan's Historical Negotionism

Also termed as denialism, it refers to the warping of historical data, faithfully representing the views of those in power who constitute the top-tier of hierarchy. Illegitimate historical revisionism attempts to prevent the expression of those details which are unspeakable, the magnitude of which is beyond any possible description such as the Rape of Nanking or the comfort women system as is Japan's case. Its fundamental aim is to obscure the inequities perpetrated against the victims thereby presenting an idealized version of national integrity, distorting the tales of violence into those which promote nationalism. A stark example of the Japanese historical revisionism is discernable when in 1995, during the fiftieth-anniversary celebrations of the end of the Second World War, certain Japanese historians expounded that the comfort women stories were not to be believed.

According to a report published by Japan's Kyodo news agency, the 1993 "Kono Statement", named after then-Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohei Kono in whose name it was issued, acknowledged Japanese authorities' involvement in coercing the women to work in the brothels. Yet by depicting themselves as victims of western imperialism and their pursuits of war as 'just and heroic' concealing their colonial motives, both the Japanese government and the revisionists aimed to drum nationalism into their future generations. A former professor in education at Tokyo University, Nobukatsu Fujioka expresses his concern regarding the Japanese children who would fail to appreciate their culture on account of exposure to the negative history of Japan (Efron 7). The national control exerted over the screening of secondary history textbooks, aiming to blot out accounts of Japanese invasions and the ensuing violence perpetuated, including that against comfort women, clearly

indicates the connivance of the government in fleeing from its moral culpability through sovereign acts of domination. Judith Lewis Herman's analysis of the behaviour of the perpetrator of crimes validates the aforementioned exertion of sovereign power by the government. According to her,

> In order to escape accountability for his crimes, the perpetrator does everything in his power to promote forgetting. If secrecy fails, the perpetrator attacks the credibility of his victim. If he cannot silence her absolutely, he tries to make sure no one listens. To this end, he marshals an impressive array of arguments, from the most blatant denial to the most sophisticated and elegant rationalization. (Judith 120)

The verdict of the Shimonoseki trials which ruled in partial favour of the plaintiffs as portrayed in the film *Herstory* succeeds in recognizing their lifelong agony and encompasses the essence of the comfort women issue:

> The comfort women system clearly discriminated against women and other races. It violated women's dignity and rights as well as their ethnic pride. Rather than a problem of the past, it's a human rights issue to overcome even today. (01: 49: 49 - 01: 50: 09)

Conclusion

Through the evaluation of the power relation between the government and comfort women, a certain tendency of a deeply entrenched subject-object dichotomy which promulgates supreme obedience from those objects could be discerned. While that between the militia and the women was garish sexual savagery, the government through its employment of sovereign and biopower created a dystopian environment, reigning supreme over both the militia and the women, utilising both the objects according to its whim. The objectification of these women can be alluded to stem from the tortuous gendered power dynamics, particularly patriarchy which deemed their dignity and lives inconsequential.

The social structure and culture of the nation is observed to have been aligned in promoting eroticized violence against the female body with judicial assistance. From the legalization of comfort stations and the Japanese government's avidity in playing down the issue, visible through their historical negotionism to their reluctance in providing reparations to the survivors, each instance could be comprehended as a conspicuous display of power. The gendered hierarchy of this culture can be seen as an active participant in the objectification of these women.

The attempt to seal their unquestionable authority over the citizens, further victimized the vulnerable class of 'second sex' through the stranglehold of gendered power dynamics. When juxtaposed, the agency of comfort women poses as a diametric opposition to the biopower exerted by the militia. The epilogue of *Snowy Road* epitomizes the precariousness of the comfort women issue which is still left unaddressed by Japan: "As of 1 March 2015, there are only 53 victims of Japanese Military Sexual Slavery still alive out of a total of 238. We will never forget those who suffered and left the world without ever receiving an apology from Japan..." (01: 40 : 10).

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