

“Was There Any Martyrdom Worse Than This?”: Literary and Television Representations of “Comfort Women” of World War II

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Abstract

The painful, enduring and distressing legacies of the colonial period have exerted a palpable influence, whether directly or indirectly, on individuals and communities. These influences have significantly contributed to the intricate process of identity formation, notably by leaving indelible imprints on varied modalities of the representations of memory. This article focuses on the representation of the sexual and physical atrocities inflicted upon hundreds of thousands of women from various former Japanese colonies, including Korea, Taiwan, and Indonesia, by the Japanese Imperial Army during World War II. Concerning the media, artistic, and monumental representations, this research involves examining the subject of “comfort women” through the lens of memory studies. The article is in two parts. The first introduces memory studies and specifically the notions of “cultural memory” and “*lieux de mémoire*.”¹ The second part investigates the academic and artistic responses to the issue via the memoir of a former “comfort woman,” Jan Ruff O’Herne’s autobiographical work *Fifty Years of Silence* (2008), and two Korean television dramas, *Eyes of Dawn* (1991) and *Snowy Roads* (2015).

Keywords: comfort women, sexual slavery, memory studies, sites of memory, *Fifty Years of Silence*, *Snowy Roads*, *Eyes of Dawn*

Introduction

The painful, enduring and distressing legacies of the colonial period have exerted a palpable influence on individuals and communities. These influences have significantly contributed to the intricate process of identity formation, notably by leaving indelible imprints on various modalities of the representations of memory. Therefore, colonial memory should not be regarded as merely signifying historical events or static interpretations. Instead, it can be viewed as a subject that can be constructed and interpreted in a multitude of ways depending on the interconnected narratives and discourses at play. Memory as an academic discourse has been an all-encompassing object in literature in the past three decades. Various historians, sociologists, anthropologists, and philosophers have examined histories, societies, and cultures and have developed new theories within the framework of memory, especially in the late twentieth century, including Aleida Assman, Astrid Erll, Cathy Caruth, and Ansgar Nünning.

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¹ Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire,” *Representations*, vol. 6, no. 26 (1989), pp. 7–24.

This representation of the past, the presence of something absent discussed in the field memory studies, has also been extensively expressed in some of the seminal works of Greek philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, and Socrates. In the *Theaetetus* (circa 369 BCE), Plato derives an analogous relationship between the mind and a wax tablet, thus examining the issue of representation with the help of perception and an image of the object. He describes memory as a remembrance of the image or representation of an object previously perceived. The issue of memory is also studied by Aristotle with respect to remembering and recollection, where he offers the idea of memory as a cognitive power that provides us a way to conceive of objects in the past. However, it was not until the 1980s that modern theories of memory emerge, in the works of French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs and German art historian Aby Warburg.²

The *Shoah* (the Holocaust) has been studied intensively, almost obsessively, within the current field of memory studies, as arguably the greatest wound of the twentieth century, leaving behind a void in the memory of the survivors or the intergenerational trauma in the families of the victims. However, there are another set of victims whose identities have been obscured, and who are not given enough space in the literary domain of World War II. This research focuses on the sexual and physical atrocities inflicted upon hundreds of thousands of women from various former Japanese colonies, including Korea, Taiwan, and Indonesia, euphemistically called “comfort women” by the Japanese Imperial Army during World War II. We examine media and academic representations of “comfort women” through the lens of memory studies. Before attempting this is important to map the emergence of memory studies.

Memory is a multifaceted construct that has, over the last two decades, evolved into a pivotal and foundational concept within the realm of scholarly discourse and deliberations across a wide array of different disciplines. The links between culture and memory has been explored in disparate fields of study such as history, philosophy, sociology, literary studies, cultural studies, media studies, archaeology, and the neurosciences. Scholars from such diverse fields have contributed in investigating the core concepts of memory, especially the cultural memory which foregrounds the entire issue of the current study. Contemporary research on cultural memory within the domains of the humanities and social sciences takes its origin in the 1920s with two eminent philosophers and theologians and their key concepts of memory, namely Halbwachs’s sociological inquiries on collective memory and Warburg’s historically inclined research work on the European memory of images. There are three important areas in Halbwachs’s research on *memoire collective*, which paves the way for new dimensions of critical explorations on collective or cultural memory: Halbwachs’s proposition of individual memory within the realm of social framework; his studies of the intergenerational memory forms; and his definition of *mémoire collective* which includes both the cultural transmission of memory and the formation of tradition through that.³

Halbwachs focuses on collective memory, which is formed by individual memory that takes its shape within a sociocultural environment. This collective or cultural memory is created through communication, media interaction, and institutions within communities which could also be taken under the category of oral history in memory studies. While Halbwachs’s

² Axel Heil, Margrit Brehm, and Roberto Ohrt, *Aby Warburg Mnemosyne Bilderatlas: Reconstruction-Commentary-Revision* (Karlsruhe: Zentrum für Kunst und Medien, 2016).

³ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992 [1925]); see also Astrid Erll, *Memory in Culture* (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 14.

theory is based on cultural memory, Warburg’s scholarly pursuit centralizes the recollection of art, specifically the re-evaluation of vivid cultural imagery and symbols from diverse historical epochs and cultural contexts which results in the triggering of powerful memories. Warburg, in *Mnemosyne* (1924-29), emphasizes the significance of works of art as a carrier of cultural memory more than oral speech for the former’s power of surviving for a longer period across many centuries and spaces. Additionally, Sigmund Freud, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Henri Bergson have also made significant contributions to the concept of memory and brought it to the forefront of academic discourse. Freud insists that, “A psychological theory deserving of any consideration must furnish an explanation of memory.”⁴ In the late twentieth century, another ground-breaking idea in ‘new cultural memory studies’ emerged from French cultural history. Pierre Nora’s landmark work, *Lieux de Mémoire* (‘sites of memory’), in which memory, history, and nation are the focus. Jay Winter defines sites of memory as “places where groups of people engage in public activity through which they express “a collective shared knowledge... of the past, on which a group’s, sense of unity and individuality is based.”⁵

Such heritage ‘memory places’ are significant to present and preserve the memories of the past events which are further turned into commemorative practices by the visitors. The twentieth century witnessed more such sites across the world commemorating the lives lost in wars. Nora’s concept of *lieux de mémoire* has become a key vantage point for cultural historians to further extrapolate the commemoration practices and memory. As Soren Kolstrup opines, these sites of memory “are crossroads. They are the points where space and time meet memory.”⁶ Further emphasizing the consequent era of globalization, David Morley and Kevin Robins discuss the significance of such sites as “with our lack of memory, we have to be content with *lieux de mémoire*, places which remind us of the past, of a (broken) memory.”⁷ These sites are, Nora contends, “at once natural and artificial, simple and ambiguous, concrete and abstract, they are *lieux*-places, sites, causes - in three senses - material, symbolic and functional.”⁸ The proliferation of memory studies has brought about an overwhelming insight that since the beginning of the 1990s, the entire Western Europe and North America has been immersed in an era of “memory boom.”⁹ The commemoration at these sites of memory evokes the shared sentiments of the public memory and further symbolizes the significance of the moment with a message of moral values. Sites of memory thus materialize the message of these cultural values. Therefore, it is through these formulations and theories developed in the field of memory studies that the current study of the issue of “comfort women” is undertaken. The painful memories expressed in the testimonies of the surviving “comfort women” whether it is in the form of oral testimony, memoirs, or television dramas form the backbone of the article.

⁴ Sigmund Freud, *A Project for a Scientific Psychology*, Vol. 1 (London: Hogarth Press, 1895), pp. 283- 397.

⁵ Jay Winter, “Sites of Memory,” in *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*, ed. Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), pp. 312-324.

⁶ Soren Kolstrup, *Media History: Theories, Methods, Analysis* (Denmark: Aarhus University Press, 1999), p. 115.

⁷ David Morley and Kevin Robins, *Spaces of Identity: Global Media, Electronic Landscape and Cultural Boundaries* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 87.

⁸ Pierre Nora and Lawrence D. Kritzman (eds), *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past. I: Conflicts and Divisions*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 14.

⁹ Uilleam Blacker, Alexander Etkind, and Julie Fedor, *Memory and Theory in Eastern Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 1.

Jan Ruff-O'Herne, *Fifty Years of Silence: Truth and Testimony*

The history of sexual violence and reports of war crimes against women have existed since the Middle Ages. These acts of domination or aggression towards women during war are sometimes carried out by particular individuals or sometimes by a collective group of armies fighting at the forefront. They are sometimes spontaneous or other times officially organized and sanctioned by the military command with the ludicrous reasoning as to satisfy the sexual needs of soldiers participating in a war. George Hicks provides an instance of the Roman Empire where “slavery ensured a regular supply of captive females for the military brothels which were attached to every Roman garrison or campaigning army.”¹⁰ The subject of forced prostitution, at the turn of the twentieth century, especially in the Europe and British Empire, also circulated both inside and outside the academic discourses. Another research work, *Soldaderas in the Mexican Military* by Elizabeth Salas, also testifies to the existence of sexual slavery and torture during the Mexican Revolution, where hundreds of women were raped, physically tortured, and forced to provide sexual service to the soldiers and federal army alike, and were later labelled as prostitutes by the perpetrators to hide these atrocities. Violence against women, especially during war, is unfortunately still found in the recent decades.

The staggering amount of rape reports and the reality of rape camps existing around the army establishments from Bosnia, Rwanda, or the Central African Republic, for example, are now a part of legal as well as academic discussions. This also forces us to bear witness to the testimony of Albanian women sexually tortured by Serbian soldiers at the start of the twenty-first century. This article discusses the issue of systematic sexual slavery and unimaginable atrocities inflicted upon these “comfort women.” Only 25% percent of more than two hundred thousand women managed to survive after the war; however, they were left with nothing but broken bodies, irreparable psychological harm, and lost families and homes. At the end of the war, some women were murdered by the Japanese army to hide any traces of their heinous crimes, and some committed suicide or died of deadly venereal diseases like syphilis. Laura Barberan further affirms, “Most of the few survivors remained childless, either because their wombs were permanently harmed or because their emotional scars prevented them from forming families, so many have no relatives left who could receive any compensation.”¹¹ Jan Ruff-O'Herne highlights her painful journey to motherhood as she reminisces:

I wanted to start a family but because of all the damage that had been done to my body while a prisoner of war, I was not able to carry a pregnancy through to full term. I had three miscarriages. My third miscarriage was heart-breaking. I was four months pregnant, past the danger point. I even started knitting baby clothes, and looking at cribs and prams. My hopes were high. Then came the pain- suddenly, an excruciating pain... I remember praying, ‘Please God, not again! I am four months pregnant; I can’t lose my baby again.’ But I did lose my baby.¹²

¹⁰ George Hicks, *The Comfort Women: Japan's Brutal Regime of Enforced Prostitution in the Second World War* (London and New York: W. W. Norton, 1994), p. 29.

¹¹ Laura Barberan, *Sex Trafficking in Literature: Transnational Narratives from Joyce to Bolano* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), p. 54.

¹² Jan Ruff O'Herne, *Fifty Years of Silence* (Melbourne: Random House Australia, 2008), p. 152.

The severity of trauma these women suffered at the hands of the Japanese army rendered them incapable of resuming their former identities or making sense of their broken lives as survivors. Describing such horrific moments in her memoir, Ruff-O’Herne comments, “I can find no words to describe this most inhuman and barbaric rape. Was there any martyrdom worse than this? To me, it hurt more than dying. My whole body was shaking. I was in a state of shock. I felt cold and numb and hid my face in the pillow. I felt such shame, I felt soiled and dirty. My body... they had violated it and made it into a place of sinful pleasure.”¹³ The revelation of this appalling ordeal which has now become the subject of, and turned into a literary discourse of its own, however, did not find a voice until the 1990s with the testimony of Kim Hak-sun. It is only through the efforts of various actors such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs), Japanese and Korean historians (particularly Yoshimi Yoshiaki), and activists across the world that the issue of “comfort women” finally came to the forefront on the international stage. It took the survivors fifty years, owing to the stigma around rape victims, Confucian ideology, and shame attached to their past as spoils of war, to finally break their silence and testify about their sufferings publicly.

Feminist scholars from Asia and the West are now researching the subject of comfort women, not merely to propagate their stories, but also to infuse meaning to their historical sufferings and survival. The academic responses to the “comfort women” problematic have surged in the last two decades. For example, Hyun Yi Kang’s study consisting of a vast number of artistic representations of “comfort women”; there are also Korean-American authors who have attempted to weave the horrific world of these women at the “comfort stations” in their fictional works. These include Chang-rae Lee’s *A Gesture Life* (1999), Therese Park’s *A Gift of the Emperor* (1997), and Nora Okja Keller’s *Comfort Women* (1999). Other than fiction, “comfort women” literature also includes non-fiction books as well as documentary films. One striking documentary film, *Silence Broken: Korean Comfort Women* (1999), was produced by Dai Sil Kim Gibson. The filmmaker gathers gut-wrenching testimonies from the survivors. Other than these works, the memoirs of a few surviving “comfort women” have garnered much global attention. These include O’Herne’s *Fifty Years of Silence* and Maria Rosa Henson’s *Comfort Women: A Filipina’s Story of Prostitution and Slavery Under the Japanese Military*, which exemplify the unbreakable courage and insurmountable spirit of such women who had been humiliated, beaten, tortured, and were bereft of their own sense of bodies and identities.

O’Herne’s memoir informs readers about how the Japanese army not only inflicted violence upon them but also aggravated the womens’ victimhood by enforced silence. She attests: “When we reached the camp, the Japanese told us that we were never to tell anybody, ever, of what had happened to us. If we did, we would be killed, along with our families. The silence began then and there, the silence that was forced upon us and would last for fifty years.”¹⁴ It is noteworthy to read in O’Herne’s memoir about her experiences, not just in the military brothel but also at the time of former comfort women’s testimonial acts at the Tokyo Tribunal for War Crimes in 1992. A glimpse of sexual violence from the perpetrators’ perspective is seen when O’Herne, at the Tribunal, confronts one former Japanese soldier:

¹³ O’Herne, *Fifty Years of Silence*, p. 94.

¹⁴ O’Herne, *Fifty Years of Silence*, p. 119.

Did you visit any comfort stations during the war?’ He told me that indeed he had visited the military brothels but not in Java. I asked him, ‘Didn’t you think you were doing anything wrong?’ He answered, ‘no, at the time I did not think there was anything wrong with it. It was all part of the military system. We were told that this was good for our morale. It was given to us. That was what war was all about, women were raped in war, it was our right.’¹⁵

The revelations made by both the victims and several soldiers, five decades after the war, brought out the active role that Japanese military played in establishing these military rape camps, and in procuring innocent women ranging from the ages of 11 to 25, and condoning their prostitution during World War II.

The traumatic memory of each of the surviving “comfort women” are translated into group/collective memories and, rightfully so, turned into narrative memories in the works of fiction or non-fiction writers and other forms of media representations. O’Herne attests to the power of narrativized memory, albeit coupled with shame, “I decided that the way to tell my daughters of my terrible secret was to write the story down in a notebook so they could read it quietly by themselves. Perhaps this was the easy way out but I still felt so much shame. I was not yet ready to tell them the story face to face.”¹⁶ However, it is only through narrativization of the traumatic past that they could heal themselves of the psychological scars they carried all these years. It is only “by speaking out and meeting other war rape victims and being able to forgive, [they] had found healing for [their] tortured mind. Now there was no looking back.”¹⁷

Underscoring the significance of such forms of memorialization, Paula Hamilton, although in the context of the Holocaust, argues that “there will be no frail, rheumy old [women] struggling along the remembered terrains of the front line. But nonetheless, will the rituals of commemoration remain, for such ceremonies are, after all, of the mind: they speak not to the past but to the present.”¹⁸ There are only a few the surviving comfort women left in the world; they have grown old, and the responsibility of their redress falls on us, to remember these women not as victims but survivors, to stand up for their dignity, and to “hope that after fifty years we have learned our lesson, that we are putting the war behind us and that we can work together, towards a world of peace. A world without hatred and fear, without war and violence, but rather a world of peace and understanding, friendship and love and freedom.”¹⁹

Media Representation: The Portrait of Comfort Women in Korean Television Dramas

The first woman to testify at the Tokyo Tribunal in January 1992 was a former Korean “comfort woman” survivor, Kim Hak-sun. After this, Yoshimi Yoshiaki located and published various military documents that implicated the Japanese Imperial Army in planning, constructing, and operating a number of such ‘comfort stations’ around military establishments. However, the important thing to note here is that the Japanese government had yet “refused to acknowledge

¹⁵ O’Herne, *Fifty Years of Silence*, p. 196.

¹⁶ O’Herne, *Fifty Years of Silence*, p. 168.

¹⁷ O’Herne, *Fifty Years of Silence*, p. 179.

¹⁸ Paula Hamilton, “A Long War: A Public Memory and the Popular Media,” in *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*, ed. Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), pp. 299-311.

¹⁹ O’Herne, *Fifty Years of Silence*, p. 177.

official military involvement, maintaining that comfort stations had been managed exclusively by civilian brothel owners and the women had been ‘recruited’ by private procurers. They also dismissed the testimonies of survivors recounting kidnapping, coercion, and forced transport by Japanese military personnel as uncorroborated.”²⁰ Since the government and revisionist historians denied space related to the issue of “comfort women” in their writings, the media texts assumed a significant role in recollecting the memories of the “comfort women” and reproduced them in the form of television dramas in Korea. Although a significant amount of literature on the “comfort women” exists from feminist and human rights perspectives, there certainly exists a lack of such study from media perspectives. Thus, this section focuses on the issue of comfort women representations through two television dramas produced in Korea, *Eyes of Dawn* (1991) and *Snowy Road* (2015), approached from a memory studies framework.

The first drama, *Eyes of Dawn* was produced in the very early years of the recognition of the “comfort women” issue in 1991 and so not many people were aware of this form of sexual violence happened in World War II. This drama helped to bring the issue to public recognition in Korea. We examine how these dramas, along with the existing socio-political milieu, portrayed comfort women on national television, and how they also contributed to bringing together the collective memories of former Korean “comfort women” in the 1990s. As discussed by many theorists and sociologists, these collective memories are not only instrumental in shaping the past and present, but also have the potential to transform future events in both personal as well as public recollections. For instance, Carol B. Schwalbs investigates how American news websites graphically depict contemporary events and extrapolate their role in shaping the collective memories of both Americans and Iraqis by commemorating past events through retrospective programs.²¹ In *Watergate in American Memory* (1993), Michael Schudson analysed the role of media as a significant mnemonic agent for one of the most traumatic domestic political events in post-war American history, through remembering and forgetting.

Amongst the mass media platforms, television is considered one of the most influential mnemonic sites for the production of collective memories. Edgerton affirms that television “is the principle means by which most people learn about history today ... The medium’s nonfictional & and fictional portrayals have similarly transformed the way tens of millions of viewers think about historical figures.”²² It is also believed that Kim Hak-sun “became determined to break her silence” while “watching the news on TV when she was enraged by the denial of a Japanese politician of the existence of the military’s ‘comfort women’ and ‘comfort houses.’”²³ O’Herne states in an interview how she was influenced by watching the testimony of South Korean women on television and thought, “I must back up these women. Now it’s time to speak out.”²⁴ Visual media like television programs have the capacity to

²⁰ Yoshimi Yoshiaki, *Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery in the Japanese Military during World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), p. 7.

²¹ Carol B. Schwalbs, “Remembering Our Shared Past: Visually Framing the Iraq War on U.S. News Websites,” *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, vol. 12, no. 1 (2006), pp. 264-289.

²² Gary Edgerton, “Television as Historian: An Introduction,” *Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies*, vol. 30, no. 1 (2000), pp. 7-12.

²³ So-yang Park, “Silence, Subaltern Space and the Intellectual in South Korea: The Politics of Emergent Speech in the Case of Former Sexual Slaves,” *Journal for Cultural Research*, vol. 9, no. 2 (2005), pp. 169-206.

²⁴ Park, “Silence, Subaltern Space and the Intellectual in South Korea”, pp. 169-206.

encapsulate memories and, in doing so, facilitate the creation of a collective memory. This article examines both visual and literary representation of “comfort women” and suggests that in a socio-political context of erasure and forgetting, these material discourses serve as the most invitational modalities.

The television dramas depict the forced/false recruitment, violence inflicted, allotment, disposal, and the aftermath of the lives of “comfort women.” While *Eyes of Dawn* showed the deceitful recruitment of young girls, *Snowy Roads* portrayed the lives of these women before and after their recruitment as well as the violence inflicted upon them during the assigning process by the Japanese Imperial Army. Since the former programme was produced in the 1990s, the representation of violence and rape scenes differ from *Snowy Roads* which was released in 2005. *Snowy Roads* presented how these “comfort women” were treated as a commodity forcibly given to each soldier “which had no value now and thus needed to be thrown out,” as could be read from the written command at the end of the war, “on-site supplies should all be destroyed.”²⁵ Similarly, the end of *Eyes of Dawn* showed the fate of “comfort women” in a dramatic manner, where the Japanese soldiers were seen shooting at these women repeatedly resulting in them failing altogether to hide their crimes and brutalities. Presenting the aftermath of the war, both the shows depicted how socio-cultural notions about rape victims further stigmatized their shameful past, which prevented the surviving “comfort women” from revealing the hardships they suffered at the hands of the Japanese Army half a century later.

O’Herne also confessed how, “When the war had finished, my people from the camp had rebuked me and judged me and looked down on me and called me a whore. I dreaded the return home with a fearful heart.”²⁶ This is shown in one of the *Eyes of Dawn* episodes, when the protagonist repatriated to her homeland and was judged and loathed by the people in her town for her past as a sexual slave, a “comfort woman,” and was asked many derogatory questions by the locals as well. Discussing the thirty-second episode, Kim mentions how the protagonist is accused of spying on her father’s land and is subjected to a legal trial where, a district counsel questioned her, “Comfort women were prostitutes for the Japanese military troops. Didn’t you receive any money for sexual services?”²⁷ Another character, Ha-Lim Jang, also contested the assertion that these girls were coerced into prostitution. Nevertheless, the defense attorney retorted, “Weren’t able to refuse? Why are you alive?”²⁸ To which, Yoon (the protagonist) responds: “I wanted to survive. I was taken to the Japanese military soldiers when I was only 17 years old. I could not die even after I recognized what comfort women were. I wanted to survive and go back to my hometown. We don’t have any faults. We sold out our body, but you sold out our country. Nonetheless, you survived.”²⁹

On the other hand, *Snowy Roads* adopted the flashback technique to showcase both the present-day hardships as well as the comfort women’s experiences at the military rape camps. The drama portrayed these Korean women as devastated, destitute, and depressed, suffering from trauma and nightmares even after the liberation from Japan: “Jong-bun, who lived as

²⁵ Kim Hwalbin and Lee Claire Shinhea, “Collective Memory of Japanese Military ‘Comfort Women’ and South Korean Media: The Case of Television Dramas, *Eyes of Dawn* (1991) and *Snowy Road* (2015),” *Asian Women*, vol. 33, no. 3 (2017), pp. 87-110.

²⁶ O’Herne, *Fifty Years of Silence*, p.175.

²⁷ Hwalbin and Shinhea, “Collective Memory of Japanese Military”, pp. 87-110.

²⁸ Hwalbin and Shinhea, “Collective Memory of Japanese Military”, pp. 87-110.

²⁹ Hwalbin and Shinhea, “Collective Memory of Japanese Military”, pp. 87-110.

Young-ae for the rest of her life since she had to receive money from the government, did needlework, but barely eked by, even so, people viewed her as stingy.”³⁰ The scene is paralleled to the reality of surviving “comfort women” who also suffered from social ostracism, psychological injury, and physical diseases, and are yet to receive the formal expression of regret/ apology and financial compensation from the Japanese government to the present day.

Kim further explains how *Snowy Roads* ended with a subtitle earnestly urging the audience to bear in mind: “March the 1st of 2015, 185 out of 238 [victims] registered as comfort women, have passed away, and now only 53 survive. We should never forget those victims who have not even received a proper apology but left the world and those who still suffer from war and violence.”³¹ Both programmes thus successfully managed to capture the horrifying lives of the “comfort women” both during and after the war, and highlighted the unimaginable trauma that broke the physical and mental state of these women. To succinctly encapsulate the disparities between the two dramas, *Eyes of Dawn* explicitly blamed the Japanese government for sanctioning and establishing these rape camps, and portrayed the Koreans as mere victims, without shedding light on the Korean mediators in the “comfort women” system, while *Snowy Roads* positively attempted to present such complexities between the two nations. Essentially, the depiction of memory through various media platforms does not merely present a single historical fact or perspective. Representation significantly shapes shared meanings in collective memory, and these mediated memories are intricate and multifaceted. Since media can both serve as a conduit for memory and a reflection of sociological and political shifts, it is essential to explore the dynamics between media representation and collective memory.³²

Conclusion

In this article, the legacies of “comfort women” have been captured through varied forms of representations of the issue in the last three decades within the framework of memory studies. The literary and visual representations such as O’Herne’s memoir, or television programs/dramas discussed in the paper have been largely able to embody the traumatic memories of these women and helped them to form a community of their own beyond their nationalities and cultures. As O’Herne confesses in her memoir “all through the early part of 1992 I had been moved to tears each time I saw the plight of the Korean ‘comfort women’ discussed on television. I watched them with pain in my heart as they sobbed for justice. All I wanted to do was to put my arms around them and hug them. I should be with them, were my thoughts.”³³ These representations of the multi-layered and complex memory of the “comfort women” not only share these collective memories but also substantially construct new meanings of the past events. As the Japanese government has often dismissed the plight of these women, treating them as no more than prostitutes, TV programs like *Snowy Roads* portray the unjust treatment these surviving “comfort women” received in contemporary Korea by

³⁰ Hwalbin and Shinhea, “Collective Memory of Japanese Military”, p. 97.

³¹ Hwalbin and Shinhea, “Collective Memory of Japanese Military”, p. 97

³² José Carlos Rueda Laffond, ‘Televising the sixties in Spain: Memories and historical constructions’, In *On Media Memory: Collective Memory in a New Media Age*, eds. Motti Neiger, Oren Meyers, and Eyal Zandberg (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 156–173.

³³ O’Herne, *Fifty Years of Silence*, p. 165.

reflecting on the fact that the army soldiers who raped these women were recognized and rewarded by the government for their patriotism towards their country during the times of war. The severity of their hardships and trauma even after five decades of war is poignantly depicted in such television dramas.

There are further many news articles that covered these two dramas which not only point out how only representing or recognizing their horrifying past and struggle is not enough, and that reparative acts should be taken immediately. It is also argued that the past should be remembered, and help us make the present better. In his exemplary book, *Comfort Women*, Yoshimi Yoshiaki mentions how the Japanese government not only systemically eradicated official records as the war neared its end, but even refused to give any space to the history of “comfort women” in their school textbooks to camouflage their acts of brutality. Thus forgetting, within the framework of memory studies, is read as a profoundly political and manipulative activity. However, the media, memorial, and literary representations of the “comfort women” issue have been successful in positioning these survivors as living embodiments of history, in providing these women with an opportunity to reclaim the experiences of sexual violence as part of a multifaceted identity, as victims, as survivors, living witnesses, *Halmeonis* (grandmothers in Korean), and peacemakers.