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Music and Dance in the Japanese Military “Comfort Women” System

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Joshua D. Pilzer

Two Women’s Stories

Yi Yongsu was born in the southeastern Korean city of Daegu in 1928 during the second decade of Japanese colonial rule in Korea, which lasted from 1910 to 1945.¹ Her family was quite poor and was unable to afford her schooling; she worked in a factory from a very young age. But she was keen to study, and so she attended evening classes. She had always loved to sing and received some formal training in music. In 1944, at the age of fifteen, she was taken from Daegu by a Japanese businessman and placed on a boat to Taiwan. On the boat she was raped repeatedly by soldiers and others. After that she was taken to Hsinchu, about sixty kilometers southwest of Taipei, where she was placed in a sex camp, imprisoned, and forced to have sex with soldiers. She had been made a sexual slave of the Japanese military.

The camp was near an air force airport that served as a base for kamikaze pilots, and as the war turned desperate for the Japanese, the number of suicide missions increased dramatically. One of these pilots came to visit Yi Yongsu several times and fell in love with her. One day, he told her that he was leaving on a suicide mission and wouldn’t be coming back. “He gave me his photo and the toiletries he had been using. He had come to me twice before and said he had got venereal disease from me. He said he would take the disease to his grave as my present to him. Then he taught me a song.”² In 2004 she sang this song for me at her home in Daegu:

1 A note on the romanization of Korean in this article: throughout, I use the system called the Revised Romanization of Korean to romanize Korean words, except for when I am quoting an author who has used a different romanization system. This accounts, for instance, for the occasional spelling of *gisaeng* (female professional entertainer) as *kisaeng* in quotations.

2 Keith Howard, ed., *True Stories of the Korean Comfort Women: Testimonies Compiled by the Korean Council for Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan and the Research Association on the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan* (London: Cassell, 1995), 93.

I take off with courage, leaving Taiwan behind,
Riding and rising above waves of gold and silver clouds.
There is no one to see me off,
And this little one is the only one who cries for me.

I take off with courage, leaving Hsinchu behind,
Riding and rising above waves of gold and silver clouds.
There is no one to see me off,
And the only one who cries for me is Toshiko.³

Through the song Yi Yongsu learned where she was—she hadn't known before. The song was "Hikokinori no uta" (Song of the pilot), a Japanese military song (*gunka*) associated with kamikaze pilots. He had changed the words, adding his own place of departure and putting in the Japanese nickname he had given her, "Toshiko."

After the war, Yi Yongsu returned to the newly partitioned Korean peninsula and began her long life as an outsider in postwar South Korea. She was reluctant to marry, and she was mainlined into the burgeoning South Korean domestic drinking house industry, where she had to pour drinks, sing, and socialize with male customers. Later she ran a shop, worked in markets, and sold insurance. She never bore children, although she married an elderly man at the age of sixty, feeling "a little sad that I would die without ever having had the opportunity to wear a white veil."⁴ In 1992 she came forward and began her life as an activist, seeking justice for herself and other women who suffered as she had during the war.⁵

Mun Okju was born in 1924, also in Daegu, to a family of four children. Her father died when she was eight, and her family was desperately poor. She did housework, worked in a slipper factory, and took some classes at a *gwon-beon*, a private school and agency for traditional female entertainers (variously called *gisaeng*, *ginyeo*, or other names). As a teenager, before completing her courtesan training, she was already being called to sing at drinking parties.⁶

In 1940 Mun Okju was abducted by Japanese military personnel, sent to Manchuria, and forced to provide sexual services for between twenty and thirty soldiers a day. She lost her virginity this way. She escaped her enslavement in Manchuria and returned to Korea but was conscripted back into sexual slavery and spent the remainder of the war shuttled around Southeast Asia in

3 Translation from the Japanese by the author. All translations, in Korean and Japanese, are by the author unless otherwise noted.

4 Howard, *True Stories*, 94.

5 Yi Yongsu's testimony can be read in Howard, *True Stories*, 88–94. An English translation of her testimony is in Hanguk Jeongsindae Munje Daechaek Hyobuihoe and Jeongsindae Yeonguhoe, *Gangjero kkeullyeogan Joseonin gunwianbudeul* (Seoul: Hanul, 1993), 121–32. She is also featured prominently in director Byeon Yeong-joo's documentary *Sumgyeol* (*My Own Breathing*; 1999).

6 Mun Okju with Morikawa Michiko, *Beoma jeonseon ilbongun "wianbu" Mun Okju halmeoni ildaegi* (Seoul: Areumdaun saramdeul, 2005), 49.

sexual bondage to the Japanese military. An accomplished singer, she was often called to sing at officers' banquets and farewell parties, often alongside Japanese *geishas*.⁷ At the end of the war she returned to her mother, but other members of her family spurned her and considered her presence in the home a disgrace to the family. About a year later she left home to resume her training to be a *gisaeng* and became one of Daegu's celebrated traditional female entertainers.⁸

This article considers the wartime experiences of music and dance of Yi Yongsu, Mun Okju, and other women who were Japanese military "comfort women," a euphemism for the 50,000 to 200,000 girls and young women forced into sexual slavery for soldiers and affiliated civilians by the Japanese military during the Asia-Pacific War (1931–45).⁹ The comfort women system was perhaps the largest coordinated effort of wartime sex trafficking and forced sexual labor in human history, despite the near ubiquity of sex work in the environs of modern militaries.¹⁰ The facts of the comfort women system were passed over in the decades after the war ended for several reasons. The Allies and other governments overlooked this and other Japanese wartime atrocities in the interest of establishing profitable international relations with Japan and because the concept of sexual slavery was in its infancy, and the comfort women were generally assumed to have been voluntary sex workers. Furthermore, most survivors hesitated to reveal their experiences for fear of being disowned, being deemed unmarriageable, or facing other sorts of social discrimination.

In the late 1980s Japanese and Korean leftist and feminist activists and scholars began to uncover and document the comfort women system, to seek survivors, and to advocate for historical justice and social welfare for surviving victims. Mun Okju and Yi Yongsu were two of the many hundreds of women who came forward as survivors of the sexual slavery system to testify to their experiences and to join the social movement often called in Korea the "comfort women grandmothers' movement."¹¹

7 Mun and Morikawa, *Mun Okju halmeoni ildaegi*, 106.

8 Mun Okju's testimony is also published in Hanguk Jeongsindae, *Gangjero* (147–65), and published in English translation in Howard, *True Stories*, 104–14. Her life story is richly documented in a volume dedicated to her life, published first in Japanese as Mun Okju with Morikawa Michiko, *Mun Okju: Biruma sensen tateshidan no "ianfu" datta watashi* (Tokyo: Nashinokisha, 1996) and then in Korean as Mun and Morikawa, *Mun Okju halmeoni ildaegi*.

9 The large disparity in these figures results from different estimates given in Japanese military and governmental documents of the number of comfort women per soldier or laborer and different calculations of the rates of turnover. Yoshimi Yoshiaki bases his lower figure on a reported ration of one sexual slave to one hundred soldiers in the Twenty-First Army in 1939. He bases his upper-figure estimate on another official document that claims one sexual slave for every thirty soldiers or laborers. See Yoshimi Yoshiaki, *The Comfort Women*, trans. Suzanne O'Brien (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 92–93. The Japanese military's destruction of records has made precise estimation difficult.

10 See Cynthia Enloe's survey of the deep relations between sex work and militarism in *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 49–107.

11 See C. Sarah Soh, *The Comfort Women: Sexual Violence and Postcolonial Memory in Korea and Japan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008) for an extended discussion of this social movement.

The two women's testimonies share many similarities, for example, childhood poverty, coerced conscription for sexual slavery, prolonged and forced sexual labor, and postwar lives as outsiders in South Korea. The accounts diverge in many places as well, for example, place and length of captivity and the intensity of sexual violence each woman experienced, pointing to a profound diversity of wartime and postwar experience of Japanese military comfort women survivors.

Another striking similarity in the testimonies, however, is the prevalence of references to music, dance, and performing arts institutions. These include descriptions of prewar artistic training, performances, the wartime presence of professional entertainers such as Korean *gisaeng* and Japanese *geisha*, song lyrics, postwar activity as performers, and other activities.

When I first encountered survivors' testimonies as a PhD student in ethnomusicology in 2001, I was surprised to find many references to song, dance, performing arts institutions, and—although fewer—instrumental music. I have spent the subsequent years working with survivors in South Korea and attempting to discover reasons why the performing arts, and song in particular, were important enough to survivors and to the comfort women system to appear so often in the women's testimonies. In my book *Hearts of Pine: Songs in the Lives of Three Korean Survivors of the Japanese "Comfort Women,"* I discuss one set of reasons: the postwar utility of song in South Korean public and intimate cultural spheres as a means of dealing with traumatic experience and cultivating social competence, identity, and relationships.¹²

This article is about another set of reasons and another era of music and dance in the women's lives. The comfort women system was an extreme wartime extension of the Japanese and Korean colonial sex-and-entertainment industry, in which girls and women were often, as in the nonwartime sex industry, expected to sing, dance, and otherwise perform for clients in addition to sexual labor. Thus music and dance were quite present, if not ubiquitous, in the world of the comfort women. In this article, drawing on the large number of published testimonies and some of my personal conversations with survivors, I assemble a picture of the complex place of music and dance in the comfort women system. I focus on the experiences of Korean victims and survivors, who likely constituted a majority of the comfort women, whose testimonies have been collected most intensively, and whose cultural and historical backgrounds I have the training to begin to understand.

The sex industrial cultures of modern militaries roughly follow the conventions of nonwartime sex industries. As wartime militaries often travel far from their home countries, the character of wartime sex industries is often the result of a collusion of local and guest sex industrial systems and cultures. As a result, while sex industries are a common part of twentieth-century military

¹² Joshua D. Pilzer, *Hearts of Pine: Songs in the Lives of Three Korean Survivors of the Japanese "Comfort Women"* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

culture, the place of the performing arts in each differs dramatically. In some cases they are accorded little place. Second World War German military culture had both a sex industry and places for performance, but they rarely seem to have coincided: the wartime Nazi military brothel system was focused on rationalized heterosexual intercourse and had little use for the collusion of sex and entertainment.¹³ American military bases in Asia throughout the Cold War sometimes took on the character of East Asian sex industries, as in the case of the sex industry established for the Allied occupation of Japan, which closely resembled the comfort women system in many respects, including the frequency of occasions for singing and dancing.¹⁴ The sex industry for the Allied military seems to have prioritized dance floors and public dancing, which was common in American entertainment culture and courting ritual at the time. The sex industry surrounding American military bases in South Korea was more fully Americanized in this respect, and dancing was and remains central there. Such public dancing provides opportunities for the ritual display of female bodies and for the enactments and imitations of courtship, connection, and conquest that are part of the act of purchasing sex and the sexual and metonymic for processes of neocolonial domination.¹⁵

The comfort women system and the early twentieth-century Japanese sex-and-entertainment culture on which it was based afforded a place to such public dancing and for spectacles of quasi courting and individual sexual achievement. But the public performance of song and informal, semiprivate drinking and singing predominated. In the comfort women system, such performances provided opportunities less for the display of individual male prowess and more for the collective affirmation of projects of gendered, colonial domination and submission, sanctified by the spaces of staged performance.

In this article I discuss how this complex collage of performance in the comfort women system helped to naturalize, legitimize, and otherwise support colonial domination, sexual violence, and war. I also consider how, within this fraught scene of naturalization, performance became a tool by which some

13 See Julia Roos, "Backlash against Prostitutes' Rights: Origins and Dynamics of Nazi Prostitution Policies," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 11, nos. 1–2 (2002): 67–94. Roos argues that the purpose of this was to streamline sexual desire to the production of an ideally controllable masculinity.

14 Tanaka Yuki goes as far as to consider the Occupation sex industry an extension of the comfort women system. See Tanaka Yuki, *Japan's Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery and Prostitution during World War II and the US Occupation* (London: Routledge, 2002).

15 In several interviews, two former comfort women who were funneled into this sex industry in the late 1940s and 1950s described their work as social dancers, meeting soldiers on the dance floor and dancing in various formal and informal styles. Katharine H. S. Moon, in her *Sex among Allies: Military Prostitution in U.S.-Korea Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), discusses dancing in the camp towns surrounding American military bases in South Korea throughout postcolonial history. What for some is clearly a parody of courtship on the dance floor is quite real for others, as so many of the liaisons begun in such circumstances have ended in marriage. The dance-floor model of sex work is popular worldwide: see, for instance, Henry Trotter, *Sugar Girls and Seamen: A Journey into the World of Dockside Prostitution in South Africa* (Auckland Park SA: Jacana, 2008); and Mark Padilla, *Caribbean Pleasure Industry: Tourism, Sexuality and AIDS in the Dominican Republic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

comfort women furthered the cause of their own survival. I analyze the role of performance in the process of *habitation*, which musician and Holocaust survivor Szymon Laks discusses in his memoir of life as a musician in Auschwitz-Birkenau.¹⁶ I take habituation to be the active process of creating a Bourdieuean *habitus*—a sense of the rules of the game—and a sense of its naturalness.¹⁷ My thinking is informed by Aaron Fox’s discussion of performative naturalization and poetic denaturalization, the dyad of feelingful signification and resignification that makes music such a fertile site for the production of culture and social relations.¹⁸ In particular, I am interested in how performance naturalizes social relations through juxtaposing different sentiments and relations: friendship and citizenship; familial love and nationalism; women and the colonized; men and the colonizer. Music and dance in the comfort women system were spectacles of the wartime web of social roles and the affinities that held them together.

Within these webs, however, some girls and women found ways to survive either by playing by the rules or by modifying them. As a part of this examination of music and dance in the comfort women system, I examine how song became an important resource for some girls and women in their struggles for wartime survival as a means of improving their practical situation and of sustaining themselves physically, psychologically, and socially. This discussion is informed by Michel de Certeau’s thinking about people’s resourcefulness in the face of relatively inflexible structures of social power.¹⁹ My consideration of how the girls and women of the comfort women system used music and dance to make do within their highly constrained wartime lives requires us to think beyond the reductive categories of “resistance” and “submission” into terrain that is more ambivalent and ultimately more hopeful in its promise of illumination and understanding.

The Comfort Women (*Ianfu*) System

I begin with a brief overview of the comfort women system’s origins, scope, and consequences in order to present the broader context of music and dance in the comfort women system. Legally sanctioned and administered sexual labor has a long history in modern Japan and ended only with the passage of the Law for Prevention of Prostitution in 1956. Red-light districts have existed in Japan since the early seventeenth century, but the late nineteenth century and onward saw a tremendous flourishing of sex-and-entertainment culture in Japan, with a strati-

16 Szymon Laks, *Music of Another World* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1979).

17 See Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).

18 Aaron A. Fox, *Real Country: Music and Language in Working-Class Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 36.

19 In a well-known passage, Certeau describes this kind of social action as “tactics,” a kind of improvisational maneuvering within a schema. He contrasts this with “strategy,” large-scale efforts to dramatically change social systems, which are primarily the domain of the powerful and of political movements. I think the distinction is useful, and I focus in this article on things one might call “tactical”; but I go to pains to avoid this militarized and hence profoundly masculinized language to represent women’s performative resourcefulness. See Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), xix.

fied scene of *geisha* houses, salons, and drinking houses catering to men across the modernizing class structure in the era of Japan's entry into the international economy.²⁰ In 1933 forty thousand drinking houses were operating nationwide, typically staffed by girls and women who socialized with patrons, poured drinks, sang and danced, and in many cases provided sexual services.²¹ The early twentieth-century Japanese sex-and-entertainment industry forms an important template for much of the performing arts activity in the "comfort stations."

With the beginnings of Japanese colonization throughout Northeast Asia in the late nineteenth century, Japanese girls and young women began to be sold or sent for overseas sex work. These women were called *karayuki-san* (China or foreign-bound people), and the business that profited from their sexual labor would provide the direct prototype and much of the institutional infrastructure for the creation of the comfort women system.²²

With the massive mobilization of the Japanese population and military that surrounded the Asia-Pacific War, the overseas Japanese demand for sexual services grew exponentially. The Japanese military and private entrepreneurs slowly constructed the system of Japanese military sexual slavery between the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931 and the end of the Asia-Pacific War in 1945, conscripting girls and young women from across the terrain of the Japanese empire. With the stated goals of combating the spread of sexual disease among soldiers and deterring soldiers from raping local women, the military established prison-brothels throughout the entirety of the Japanese empire. These were euphemistically called *ianjo* (comfort station). The girls and women who were held in these places and forced to have sex with soldiers were given a euphemistic name as well—*ianfu* (comfort woman). The first comfort stations were set up in Japan, Korea, Manchuria, and Taiwan. As the empire expanded, so did the system of sexual slavery, stretching from far Northeast Asia to the South Pacific and mainland Southeast Asia.

Sexual slaves were drawn from across the Pacific and East Asia: Indonesia and mainland Southeast Asia, the Philippines, the Pacific, China, Taiwan, Korea, and Japan itself. Korea had been a Japanese colony since 1910, and the proximity of colonial Korea to Japan, its established colonial bureaucracy and transportation network, and the presumed "cleanliness" of its young female population meant that likely the largest percentage of comfort women came from Korea. Another reason for the large numbers of Korean girls and young women in the comfort women system was the well-developed state of the Japanese colonial sex industry in Korea and its networks of human trafficking. This

20 For a discussion of the early history of red-light districts, see Alice Yun Chai, "Asian-Pacific Feminist Coalition Politics: The *Chôngshindae Jûgunianfu* ('Comfort Women') Movement," *Korean Studies* 17 (1993): 67.

21 Miriam Silverberg, "Constructing a New Cultural History of Prewar Japan," *boundary 2* 18, no. 3 (1991): 71.

22 Silverberg, "Constructing," 67–68. See also Yamazaki Tomoko, *Sandakan Brothel No. 8: An Episode in the History of Lower-Class Japanese Women* (1975; Armonk NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1999), an extensive biography of one victim of the *karayuki-san* that explores the history of this industry in depth.

industry, which had been growing with Japanese encouragement since the late nineteenth century, blossomed under the Japanese colonization of Korea (1910–45) and provided networks for obtaining and trafficking sexual slaves.²³

Most of those taken as sexual slaves were teenagers, although some pre-teens and older women were conscripted.²⁴ Most were deceived with promises of other kinds of work and then made sexual slaves. Others were simply forcibly rounded up or abducted, as Yi Yongsu and Mun Okju were. Many were recruited from the colonial sex-and-entertainment industry—from rural and urban drinking houses, from courtesan (*gisaeng* or *ginyeo*) training institutes (*gwonbeon*), and elsewhere—through deception or abduction.²⁵

The comfort women system catered to all the different strata of the Japanese military and associated civilians, and this is one reason why survivors report a tremendous diversity of experience during their terms as comfort women. Some girls were made private sexual slaves of officers, although they were often turned over to service for common soldiers after officers tired of them. Slaves assigned to the rank and file often had to serve dozens of soldiers in a single day. Some sexual slaves were moved out of general service to act as private sexual servants of officers. Some comfort women did various sorts of military support labor, such as nursing or textile work in the day and sex work in the evenings.

The comfort stations themselves were quite diverse as institutions. Some resembled and functioned somewhat like brothels. Others were makeshift, temporary structures that bore little resemblance to other establishments in private sex industries and in which girls and young women were subjected to incomprehensible sexual violence. Much of this varied according to the category and rank(s) of military personnel each comfort station was designed to cater to, a fact that had great significance for the culture of music and dance in the comfort women system.

The Musical Cultures of the Comfort Women System

Sexual labor and female entertainment have long been linked in Japan and elsewhere throughout East Asia, and the line between amorous play or work and

23 Song Youn-ok, “Japanese Colonial Rule and State-Managed Prostitution: Korea’s Licensed Prostitutes,” *positions* 5, no. 1 (1997): 173–80.

24 For this reason, I refer to wartime sexual slaves as “girls and young women.”

25 Despite the presence of courtesans in the comfort women system and the fact that many comfort women were recruited from courtesan institutes, there is nonetheless a quite clear distinction between the comfort women, a system of sexual slavery, and the traditional institutions of courtesanship, which trained women in various entertainment and other professions—dance, music, literary composition, medicine, cuisine, crafts, and so on—and which throughout history veered toward and away from engaging in sexual labor and sexual relations with clients and patrons. During the Japanese colonization of Korea, the traditional institutions of courtesanship, which had been attached to government, were privatized, and many courtesans were drawn into the modern sex-and-entertainment industry. Some remained primarily performers and artists and in postcolonial South Korea were designated as Human Cultural Treasures, held positions at the National Center for Korean Traditional Performing Arts, became pop singers, and so on. See Joshua D. Pilzer, “The 20th-Century ‘Disappearance’ of Korean Professional Female Entertainers during the Rise of Korea’s Modern Sex-and-Entertainment Industry,” in *The Courtesan’s Arts: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, ed. Martha Feldman and Bonnie Gordon (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 295–311.

sexualized performance has long been strategically blurred.²⁶ This was so in the early twentieth-century Japanese domestic and colonial industrialization of sex and entertainment, where music and dance played significant roles in socializing and sexual display. Although many comfort women were confined exclusively to sexual and menial labor, it is not surprising to learn that in the comfort stations, many women were made to sing, dance, and perform for and with officers and common soldiers at banquets, organized shows, and elsewhere. These performances, as a theater of solidarity and domination, energized soldiers for war in various ways and conferred legitimacy on wartime projects of violence and domination.

Sex and sex-and-entertainment industries the world over are marked by several ritual qualities—the use of these places for transformation and for breaking taboos and for the loosening of conventional morality; the quality of transience, of temporary encounter; ritual consumption; and so on. Boys are brought to brothels to make them men in a ritual of gender domination of female others; and upright male citizens are allowed certain flexibilities in their temporary incursions into the zones of consumptive sexual “play” associated with sex work—the kinds of play that often involve music and dance.²⁷ The ensuing transgressions of social taboos or relaxation of the facades of power create powerful spaces for forming social relationships and creating certain kinds of group solidarity. Such ritual transformations were all in play in the comfort stations, both in performances of music and dance and in the performances of sex and the abuse of the comfort women.

The comfort women system was arrayed across the entire hierarchy of the Japanese military, from officers, to the rank and file, to affiliated civilians, and its entertainment aspect was similarly hierarchical. Sometimes officers’ comfort stations had Japanese *geisha* or other professional entertainers in residence. Survivor Ha Gunja relates that “in the house next door there were Japanese women who didn’t receive guests but performed on musical instruments. They made their faces up in white and wore kimonos.”²⁸

A small but significant number of Korean *gisaeng* (female professional entertainers) and *gisaeng* trainees were absorbed into the comfort women sys-

26 This seems to have been true for many global courtesan traditions historically: Bonnie Gordon and Martha Feldman refer to the “perilous duet” of music and eros that seems to characterize most traditions of world courtesanship. See their introduction to *The Courtesan’s Arts*, 10.

27 There is an extensive literature on sex work, and much of it pays significant attention to the role of play, music, and dance. A stunning investigation into and overview of the myriad social functions of sexual play in modern Japan can be found in Anne Allison, *Nightwork: Sexuality, Pleasure, and Corporate Masculinity in a Tokyo Hostess Club* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). Tiantian Zheng’s *Red Lights: The Lives of Sex Workers in Postsocialist China* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009) describes a recent Chinese case, set almost exclusively in karaoke rooms. Also see Trotter, *Sugar Girls and Seamen*; and Padilla, *Caribbean Pleasure Industry* for other examples of the persistent relationships of dance, music, and sex work.

28 “Receiving guests” is a euphemism for sexual services. Hanguk Jeongsindae Yeonguhoe and Hanguk Jeongsindae Munje Daechaek Hyeobuihoe, *Junggugeuro kkeullyeogan Joseonin gunwianbudeul*, 69.

tem; and they, along with other sexual slaves who had shown themselves to be talented in music and dance, were called on to perform and socialize with officers at such clubs. Mun Okju reports being chosen to participate in such events: “There were about ten *geishas* at the officers’ comfort station, and they all dressed in colorful kimonos. Most of them were about five or six years older than we were, some as much as ten years older. I learned how to sing many of the songs that the geishas sang.”²⁹

Yi Sangok was taken to Palau as a sexual slave and remembers a new shipment of girls and women arriving:

Among the new arrivals were some entertainment girls, *kisaeng*, one of whom had been well known in Pyöngyang. She was older than the rest of us and attracted many men. After her arrival, many men wearing Japanese costume visited. They called for the *kisaeng* and made them sing. . . . Some of the *kisaeng* danced well and others could play the zither, *kayagüm*. One sang popular folk songs from the Korean southwest well. Even they had to serve the men.³⁰

Many girls and young women who were in general confined to serial sexual servitude and who had no prior performing arts training were expected to transform themselves into “song-and-dance girls” on occasion, singing and dancing on stages and pouring drinks, and singing and dancing for and with soldiers. Yi Okpun describes public performances from her time as a comfort woman in Taiwan:

On weekday evenings we were made to sing, dance, and play the violin in the bomb shelter. Even then we weren’t allowed to sleep properly. The presence of officers in the shelter stopped the rank and file from approaching us. The shelter was huge, 4 km long, big enough to accommodate all the soldiers. We were taught how to play the violin by the soldiers so that we could entertain them. They had eight instruments. If we couldn’t play well, we were beaten. The men drank heavily and would quickly become very violent. Because we had to sing to entertain them, I still remember about 51 military songs, one about the commando unit, others praising Taiwan, lively Korean folk-songs, songs of blind men, “Cheongchun-ga” (Song of Youth’s Spring),³¹ of comfort stations, of *samurai*, of pilots and so on. The song dedicated to the commando unit went:

See the aircraft in the blue sky; my heart flies with it.
The engine has started and I turn the wheel.
Mother, I am going before you: when you hear of my death,
Please record my name in the temple;
When you receive my ashes, please hug them as if you were hugging me.

²⁹ Mun and Morikawa, *Mun Okju balmeoni ildaegi*, 106.

³⁰ Howard, *True Stories*, 130.

³¹ In the original English translation this song title is translated; I include the original song title for clarity.

The song of the blind men ran “If my eyes could see I would know what you look like,” while the song dedicated to life in the comfort station went something like “My body is like a rotting pumpkin left out in summer.”³²

Hong Aejin, Jang Chunwol, Pak Okseon, and Mun Pilgi relate similar stories of formal and informal public performance, which typically mixed officers and common soldiers together with comfort women.³³ Yi Yongsu was made to sing on deck for gathered soldiers during her transport by sea to Taiwan.³⁴

These performances, often short programs of varied entertainment, are reminiscent not only of Japanese drinking house culture but also of the many different kinds of revues and variety shows that flooded imperial Japanese media and daily life and that reached the colonies and the terrain of war as well. “Japanese avant-garde intellectuals called the 1930s the ‘revue age’ (*rebyū no jidai*),” writes Jennifer Robertson in a discussion of revue culture as a technology of Japanese imperialism.³⁵ The famous all-female Takarazuka review, among others, traveled throughout the colonies and the theater of war performing for soldiers. Some of the performances that comfort women were made to participate in seem to have been attempts to re-create the atmosphere of revue shows and the musical numbers of war-era film. When there were no girls or women present, some Japanese soldiers cross-dressed and put on shows by themselves.³⁶

Such shows often traded in exotic representations of colonial subjects and others, and so it is no surprise that comfort women were asked to sing non-Japanese songs, such as the Korean folk songs mentioned above. Yi Sangok remembers singing one of these in such a performance: “In Palau, just before the Pacific War broke out, I once danced ‘Arirang’ on a stage. I had learnt it from Japanese soldiers. They would often sing ‘Arirang.’ ‘Arirang’ was a folk-song that became famous as a patriotic song in the 1920s.”³⁷ Pak Sunae reports singing “Arirang” onstage for Japanese soldiers.³⁸ The “Arirang” that both women refer to is a modernized take on the “Arirang” tune family of Korean folk songs made popular through Na Un-gyu’s anticolonial film *Arirang* (1926). It was wildly popular in 1930s Japan and issued in many Japanese-language versions.³⁹ Such Japanese versions are complex and partial Japanizations of the song. The melody, sung at the time in both the main central Korean penta-

32 Howard, *True Stories*, 100–101.

33 For Hong Aejin and Jang Chunwol, see Hanguk Jeongsindae, *Junggugeuro*, 49, 117. Pak Okseon spoke of this to the author at the House of Sharing, South Korea, 2003; Mun Pilgi did so at the House of Sharing in 2004.

34 Hanguk Jeongsindae, *Gangjero*, 126.

35 Jennifer Robertson, “Mon Japon: The Revue Theater as a Technology of Japanese Imperialism,” *American Ethnologist* 22, no. 4 (1995): 981.

36 Robertson, “Mon Japon,” 975.

37 Howard, *True Stories*, 130.

38 Hanguk Jeongsindae, *Gangjero*, 249.

39 For an examination of the colonial history of “Arirang,” see E. Taylor Atkins, “The Dual Career of ‘Arirang’: The Korean Resistance Anthem That Became a Japanese Pop Hit,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 66, no. 3 (2007): 645–87.

tonic mode (*gyeonggi-tori*) and its Westernized version, is remade in Japanese intervallic structure. Most noticeably, the neutral third (major third in most Westernized versions of the song) is lowered to an equal-tempered minor third, bringing the melody in line with the modern Japanese *yonanuki* (“omit 4 and 7”) scale. Japanese versions from the colonial era contrast an untranslated Korean refrain with Japanese verses:

(K) Arirang, arirang, a-ra-ri-yo.	Arirang, arirang, a-ra-ri-yo.
Arirang gogae-reul neomeoganda.	Crossing over Arirang pass.
(J) Tōku hanarete aitai toki wa	When we’re far apart and wish to meet
Tsukiga kagamini narebayoi.	Would that the moon would become a mirror.

Japanese versions of Korean folk and popular songs exhibited this pattern throughout the twentieth century, marking cultural and linguistic difference and distance with untranslated Korean text while mediating that sense of foreignness with Japanese verses.

If we imagine this song in performance by comfort women on stages for the entertainment of soldiers and sung together with soldiers in social settings, we begin to understand some of the reasons for such performances. Soldiers, hearing the song sung by a Korean girl or young woman and watching comfort women dance to the song, could experience Korea as a feminine, half-intelligible exotic. They could imagine themselves in the perspective of the longed-for loved one. The song could thus fulfill colonial romantic fantasies and feminize the subjugated Korea, implying the silent presence of Japan as masculine. It thus performed a gendered colonial domination, affirming the rightness of colonial domination with reference to the traditional division of power between genders.⁴⁰ In addition, “Arirang” and other songs like it could raise troop morale by reaffirming Japanese military solidarity in domination and affirming the centripetal ethnicity and the masculinity of that dominant solidarity. Altogether, performances of “Arirang” in the comfort station proved a compelling reinforcement of key colonial and military solidarities and beliefs. They were compelling examples of what James Scott calls the public transcript of subordination, a performance through which the powerful confirm control but also a strategy through which the subordinated pacify authority by performing their subjugation.⁴¹

Many Japanese popular songs that comfort women survivors report singing contributed to this public transcript of colonial and wartime subordination. One of these is the popular wartime film song “Shina no yoru” (China nights),

40 Naila Ceribašić discusses a similar case: the representations of Croatia as a loose, undisciplined woman in wartime Serbian popular music. See her “Gender Roles during the War: Representations in Croatian and Serbian Popular Music 1991–1992,” *Collegium Antropologicum* 19, no. 1 (1995): 96.

41 James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 2.

which Han Okseon remembers singing at a gathering of troops and that many other women sang.⁴² The song presents an exotic image of colonial Shanghai and its women and recalls the story of the film, in which a Japanese officer tames an unruly yet pure Chinese woman.⁴³ Japanese popular music scholar Christine Yano finds such strains of exoticism running through much of mid-century popular song and finds there an equation of modernity with a desire for exotic others.⁴⁴ Masculinity and imperial subjectivity—two pillars of wartime military culture—depended on the gendered domination of the exotic, neatly bound up with modernist tropes of consumption that animated the sexual violence of the comfort stations.

Other songs from the various genres that Yi Okpun mentioned—popular songs, military songs, and other folk songs—were also enlisted for these purposes, to reinforce other facets of group solidarity, to rehearse loyalty to the nation, and to channel memories of the homeland, which most soldiers believed they were defending against the threat of European American world domination. Japanese military songs (*gunka*) played a key role here, as they had done through the many wars since the beginnings of Japan as a modern military-political entity.⁴⁵ Military songs affirmed key wartime relationships, such as camaraderie, love of family, and loyalty to the nation, and linked these relationships in chains of sentiment and responsibility. As a result, the sense of concreteness that inheres in everyday relationships, such as friendship, is transferred to other, often more abstract relations, such as that between subject and nation. The converse is also true, that everyday social relations take on heightened significance as they are fused to other relationships and imbued with their lofty sentiments. Yi Yongsu's "Song of the Pilot," which begins this article, is an example of a scenario that juxtaposes different sorts of social relationships and sentiments—a love relationship and the absolute fealty of subject to nation implied by the *kamikaze's* sacrifice. Another more famous example is the canonical *gunka* from 1905 "Senyū" (War comrades), which survivor Bae Chunhui sang for me, about a soldier who refuses to desert his fallen comrade:

Here many miles from our country, the Manchurian

Red sunset shines across the field where my friend lies beneath a stone.⁴⁶

42 Hanguk Jeongsindae Munje Daechaek Hyobuihoe and Yeoseong Gukje Beopjeong Hanguk Wiwonhoe Jeungeon Tim, *Gangjero kkeullyeogan Joseonin gunwianbudeul 4: Gieok euro dashi sseumeun yeoksa* (Seoul: Pulbit, 2000), 85.

43 For a discussion of this song, see Pilzer, *Hearts of Pine*, 119–20.

44 Christine Yano, "Defining the Modern Nation in Japanese Popular Song, 1914–32," in *Japan's Competing Modernities: Issues in Culture and Democracy*, ed. Sharon A. Minichiello (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998), 257.

45 Junko Oba discusses the history of the *gunka* genre at length in her important article "To Fight the Losing War, to Remember the Lost War: The Changing Role of *Gunka*, Japanese War Songs," in *Global Goes Local: Popular Culture in Asia*, ed. Timothy J. Craig and Richard King (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2002), 225–45.

46 Also discussed in Oba, "To Fight," 230.

“War Comrades” juxtaposes the longed-for homeland with the death of a friend, painting a scene in which there is no room to question that this friend has been killed in battle on behalf of the nation.

Other examples of this work of association in military song abound, embracing the relations between children, mothers, fathers, and other key relationships. “Fubo no koe” (Father’s and mother’s voices) is one such example, written in 1944, at a time of mass evacuations of children from urban centers in Japan in anticipation of Allied bombing:

Tarô goes to father’s hometown,
Hanako goes to mother’s hometown.
What was the sound I heard there?
On the mountain peak, a bird in a cloud,
Perhaps it’s father’s voice from far away, giving us hope.⁴⁷

Soldiers would have interpreted this song in a variety of ways. Some would hear in it the threat of Allied bombings and think of their own father’s and mother’s voices. Some would imagine themselves in the role of the father, praying on behalf of the children. The association of the bird in the cloud with the father’s voice links the father with the natural environment of Japan. A network of social relations—children, parents, hometowns, nature, nation—comes together through metaphor and imagining. This network of associations and their associated sentiments naturalizes the relations between nation, environment, and family and provides rationales for obedience to the nation and for war.

“Father’s and Mother’s Voices” is one of the many Japanese popular songs now considered a military song that have their origins as children’s songs, evidence of the deep continuities between children’s music and military musical culture that government education cultivated in prewar and wartime Japan.⁴⁸ The song departs from the realm of stereotypical “military music” with its marches, percussion, and brass instruments, lilting in a gentle waltz time. Military songs with school origins were often taught to children by female teachers, and recorded versions are often sung by women, frequently supported by group refrains. If the legacy of female sex-and-entertainment industries is one reason why comfort women were variously made or asked to sing military songs and dance for soldiers, another is that this presence of the female voice in recorded military song and school settings provoked nostalgia for childhood.

Yet another reason is the well-developed tradition of intersubjective singing in Japanese popular song. Men sing from women’s perspectives and vice-versa; travelers sing from the perspective of those they have left behind. Yi

47 The song can be heard at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z_X6VzJBCeE.

48 See Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney’s extensive discussion of the relations between school songs and military culture in her *Kamikaze, Cherry Blossoms, and Nationalisms: The Militarization of Aesthetics in Japanese History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 130–42.

Yongsu's rendition of "Song of the Pilot" is an example of such intersubjective song practice, as she sings the song from the perspective of the pilot who left her behind. The intersubjective song tradition blends subjectivities in the rehearsal of social relations and foregrounds empathy and other sentiments involved in those relations rather than a single perspective. When songs like these reference and blend multiple social relations and identifications, they suggest that the different social relations depend on one another. Hence, to fight for one is to fight for them all. Man as protector of woman and children, woman as house-minder, young, colonized female subject as rightly subordinated comfort woman—all of these roles find naturalization and rationalization in the network of interdependent social relations and sentiments that these songs portray, design, and refine.

Put plainly, one of the principal functions of music and dance in the comfort stations was to naturalize sexual violence and war. By drawing everyday sentiments, memories, and social relations together with the abstract notions of national loyalty and the purposes of war, and by naturalizing the relationship between Japan and the colonies as a relation of gendered dominance, music and dance helped create the patina of normalcy for soldiers at war and in the comfort stations at the same time as they formalized and legitimized relations of domination and the practice of war and sexual violence.

This sense of normalcy and the rules of the game seems very close to Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*, "the system of structured, structuring dispositions . . . which is constituted in practice and is always oriented towards practical functions."⁴⁹ Music and dance, therefore, in creating and structuring social roles and their affective relations, helped to create this *habitus*. This creative process is possibly part of the *habitation* that Holocaust survivor Szymon Laks wrote about. "They say that one can get used to anything, to the worst, to the most monstrous things. But I have never been able to fathom the mystery of the typical camp phenomenon that cannot be called anything else but *habitation*. Habituation to everything that is going on around us and of which we naturally become indifferent witnesses," writes Laks in his memoir of his internment in the Nazi death camp Auschwitz II-Birkenau I, where he served as conductor of the Birkenau men's orchestra.⁵⁰ Music and dance in the comfort stations were key practices of habituation, which helped to bring the sense of a coherent social world into being, helped to accustom people to it, and taught them the rules of the game. This was so for soldiers as well as for some comfort women: many survivors of Japanese military sexual slavery speak about the varying degrees to which they became accustomed to life in comfort stations, how they had their own everydayness; for most, this habituation was an important strategy of survival.

The dance and musical activities of the comfort women outside the kinds

49 Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 52.

50 Laks, *Music of Another World*, 86–87.

of open performances I discuss above varied widely, depending on the kind of comfort station and the relative tolerance of owners—ranging from strict censorship to active encouragement. Some Korean comfort women were forbidden from singing in their native language or on their own. Yi Yeongsuk recounts an incident from early in her time at a comfort station: “I felt really miserable and began to sing a Korean folk song. A soldier rushed in from outside and threatened me with his sword. This incident made the proprietor very angry. He scolded me and beat me with an iron rod. Those who had been there already told me never to sing in Korean—if we did so, the soldiers would think that we were making fun of them.”⁵¹ Yun Duri also recounts instances of censorship in her comfort station: “We had to sing anything in Korean in secret, since if we were caught we would be severely reprimanded.”⁵²

Often, however, owners sanctioned or tolerated different kinds of expressive behavior for comfort women outside official performances for soldiers and allowed them to sing in their native languages. Some owners and military authorities allowed or promoted events for comfort women to sing, dance, and play together and tolerated different kinds of casual singing.⁵³ The owner of the Manchurian comfort station where Yi Bonghwa resided went as far as to promote social events for the female residents.

About once a month, if there was a day off when we didn’t take guests, the owner would buy meat and the women would cook, eat, and party. On those days there were some women who brought soldiers who they liked. I never invited a soldier. Those days were typically not Sundays but Fridays or Saturdays, and we’d gather in a big room and play *janggo* (hourglass drums) and sing Korean songs for fun. On those days we’d wear kimonos. On days like that we didn’t have sexual relations with soldiers, they just went home.⁵⁴

Many women remember casual singing practices intended for themselves only. Mun Okju remembers that “on the rare occasions when we had something to laugh about in our torturous life, and when we felt lonesome or miserable, we would sing in unison or hum together quietly.”⁵⁵ Im Geum-a recalls: “The girls would drink and sing songs. There was a *changga* [an early genre of Korean popular song] that started ‘Our hometown’. . .”⁵⁶

The owners who tolerated a sense of play or of sung expression in the comfort stations often knowingly or unknowingly gave a formal place to the

51 Howard, *True Stories*, 52.

52 Howard, *True Stories*, 190.

53 “Play” is a translation of the Korean verb *nolda*. Many women used this word in their descriptions of singing and dancing in comfort stations. It is a common verb used across generations in the Korean language to refer to entertaining activities.

54 Sunday was typically the busiest day at Yi Bonghwa’s and many other survivors’ comfort stations (Hanguk Jeongsindae, *Junggugueuro*, 92, the text quote is from 93).

55 Howard, *True Stories*, 107.

56 Hanguk Jeongsindae, *Junggugueuro*, 106.

expression of traumatic experience in comfort stations. This incorporation of such expression into the formal regimens of the comfort station may have played a role in naturalizing the suffering of the comfort women and habituating them to their lives as sexual slaves. But it is quite clear that such informal singing practices alone and in groups were quite important to some women as a means of retaining their sense of self and their social world and of self-consolation in the course of traumatic experience.

Jeong Haksu remembers:

When the sadness piled up this way I sang songs about my hometown. “*Arirang*, *arirang*, *arariyo*, *arirang*, going over Arirang Pass.” “Bongnam-a, don’t cry: when you leave home, whether it rains or snows, work hard, say goodbye to your mother and don’t worry.” “The train is leaving, black smoke and the leftover smoke makes me cry.” “When shall I be able to go home? Where are my mother and father? Big brother, younger sibling! Your big sister is in Manchuria.”⁵⁷

She borrowed melodic materials and refrains from folk songs, such as the common version of “*Arirang*” and “*Bongnam-a uljimara*” (Don’t cry, little Bongnam) and inserted lyrics of her own in a common compositional-improvisational practice among people of her generation colloquially called *taryeong* (ballad).⁵⁸ She sang of her suffering, but she also sang to console her siblings, an example of the use of the structured expression of sentiments in song as a means of strengthening social ties and a sense of one’s place in a social world of affinities and responsibilities. She also sang to encourage herself in her labors, which recalls Tia DeNora’s discussion of music as a “technology of self”—a means of compelling oneself to certain kinds of behavior and an audible demonstration of one’s capacity to function as a social actor.⁵⁹ That enabled the social actor, by putting suffering into words, to objectify experience and in so doing establish a sliver of distance from it.

Jeong Haksu turned to Korean folk songs for consolation and self-motivation. But there are plentiful examples of comfort women singing Korean popular songs as well during the war. Yi Yongnyeo remembers singing Baek Nyeonseol’s 1940 “*Beonji eobneun jumak*” (A drinking house with no address).⁶⁰ Yun Duri sang Yi Hwaja’s 1939 “*Eomeoni jeonsangseo*” (Dear Mother). Such colonial-era Korean pop songs are often ruminations on the rapid social trans-

57 Hanguk Jeongsindae, *Junggugeuro*, 161.

58 This sense of the term, retained in the often improvised and highly compositional folksong genre “*Sinsae taryeong*” (Ballad of life’s trials), should not be confused with the many popular, rather codified folk songs that are often grouped together using the same word, *taryeong*, such as “*Gae taryeong*” (Ballad of the dog), “*Sae taryeong*” (Ballad of the birds), “*Changbu taryeong*” (Ballad of the traveling entertainer), and so on.

59 See Tia DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

60 Hanguk Jeongsindae, *Gangjero*, 223.

formations, population displacements, and marginalizations that characterized the colonial era. Girls and young women held as comfort women seized on songs that could be related to their experiences. “A Drinking House with No Address” lamented a lonely life in a far-flung drinking house, and Yi Yongnyeo could have associated this narrative with the comfort station where she was held in Burma. Kang Ilchul also sang this song during the war.⁶¹ Yun Duri sang “Dear Mother” as a lament about her inexplicable separation from her mother:

By some sin in my former life I am parted from my mother
and on mornings of blooming flowers and evenings when birds sing
I strike my breast and moan.⁶²

People of this generation, especially women, often take remarkable liberties with popular song texts as well as folk songs, and during the war some girls and young women modified lyrics to make songs speak to them more readily. Many comfort women survivors have continued to adapt song texts throughout their lives.⁶³

Owing to the diversity of kinds of comfort stations, the differing dispositions of owners, and the various motivations of individual comfort women, there was a great diversity of degrees and kinds of engagements with song and dance in comfort stations. Some participated vocally in the social life of the comfort stations; others withdrew into silence, although this seems to frequently have been a listening silence. Im Geum-a mentions that when other girls sang, “For my part, I listened to *changga*, but couldn’t sing well.”⁶⁴ Pak Sunae also remembers consoling herself through listening to other women singing.⁶⁵

The many comfort women who withheld their voices in both song and speech did so for diverse reasons: psychological breakdowns, traumatic withdrawal, strategic and tactical self-restraint. “In the ‘comfort station’ I hardly spoke, I just cried and cried,” Im Geum-a testified.⁶⁶ “I don’t think I spoke to anybody except for Kobayashi [a soldier] and Poksun [a fellow comfort woman],” Kang Deokkyeong recalled of her time in a comfort station in Japan. “Whenever I bumped into any of the other women, we would exchange glances and nod. . . . I lived in my own world.”⁶⁷

On some of the occasions when Kang Deokkyeong did use her voice it was for strategic reasons related to survival. She attempted to befriend the military policeman who had forced her into sexual slavery, Kobayashi Tadeo,

61 Interview with the author, Gwangju, Korea, 2004.

62 Howard, *True Stories*, 190–91.

63 See Pilzer, *Hearts of Pine*, 82–87.

64 Hanguk Jeongsindae, *Junggugeuro*, 106.

65 Hanguk Jeongsindae, *Gangjero*, 247.

66 Hanguk Jeongsindae, *Junggugeuro*, 106–7.

67 Howard, *True Stories*, 182.

hoping to obtain permission from him to run away. He promised to let her go home soon. Once, when he came to her at the comfort station, she sang him a song in an attempt to elicit sympathy:

Ah, crossing from one mountain to another,
I came to the Women's Volunteer Corps a thousand miles away from home
But I was captured by a sergeant
And my body torn asunder.⁶⁸

This song was based on a Japanese military song (*gunka*) that had been adopted for use by the Women's Volunteer Corps, an organization that conscripted girls and women for labor throughout the Japanese empire and that funneled many girls into the comfort women system. Kang had joined the Volunteer Corps and then been forced into sexual slavery by Kobayashi when she tried to escape. She had rewritten the song to express her experience as a comfort woman, early evidence of a creative streak that would see her become a celebrated painter in the years of the comfort women grandmothers' movement.⁶⁹ But her attempt to elicit his sympathy backfired: "One day, I sang [the song] to Kobayashi, but he quickly stopped me. From then on, he didn't visit me as frequently as before."⁷⁰

Kang Deokkyeong's story sheds an important light on the often strategic nature of many of the girls' and young women's listening, singing, dancing, and socializing with soldiers. As we found out in Yi Yongsu's case at the article's outset, singing could be a means of discovering information about one's situation or of passing information. Certainly, comfort women generally socialized with soldiers because they were forced to; but in the interests of survival, many girls and young women socialized with and sang and danced for or with soldiers, hoping to obtain various sorts of help. Mun Okju tried to elicit the sympathy and affections of soldiers by singing songs they liked, like the popular wartime Japanese film song "Shina no yoru" (China nights), mentioned above.⁷¹ She was often rewarded with tips.⁷² Comfort women could also seek to have their sexual workloads lessened in exchange for entertainment work or private sexual servitude.

⁶⁸ Howard, *True Stories*, 182.

⁶⁹ Many of these paintings have become iconic in the movement for reparations and apology from the Japanese government on behalf of the survivors of the comfort women system. Many of Kang's paintings can be found in two collected books of survivors' paintings: Nanum ui jip, *Ilbongun "wianbu" halmoni geurim moeum "Motdapiin kkot"* (Seoul: Nanum ui jip, 2000); and Nanum ui jip, *Ilbongun "seongnoye" pihe halmoni jakpumjip* (Seoul: Nanum ui jip, 2004). Her paintings are discussed in some depth in Bae Hongjin's *Geurim sogeuro deureogan sonyeo: Han ilbongun wianbu halmeoni uihan daepil jakgaui dokbaek* (Seoul: Mento Press, 2008). One of her works adorns the cover of my *Hearts of Pine*.

⁷⁰ Howard, *True Stories*, 182.

⁷¹ Mun and Morikawa, *Mun Okju halmeoni ildaegi*, 56.

⁷² Mun and Morikawa, *Mun Okju halmeoni ildaegi*, 81.

Some did manage to escape through connections with soldiers that they developed. During her time in a Manchurian comfort station, Mun Okju became close to an officer who obtained a travel permit for her to go back to Korea.⁷³ This is one among many instances of how habituation to the “rules of the game” of the comfort women system—the performance of sentiment in imitation of other sex industries—allowed survivors to sustain themselves and ultimately to survive the war and traumatic sexual violence. Kim Sundeok also managed to escape with the help of an officer.⁷⁴

Many of the comfort women were young girls entirely unprepared for the sexual violence they would experience during the war, sundered from family and everyday bonds of affection. Some comfort women seem to have sought affection in relations with soldiers. In Yi Yongsu’s encounter with the kamikaze pilot, she not only learned where she was and obtained some toiletries; she told me that she found, in the “Song of the Pilot” and the affection it expressed, some reminder of a reason to live that helped sustain her through the rest of her confinement and the long postwar period.⁷⁵ She told me that she didn’t fall in love with him, as he had with her, but that she was grateful for his affection all the same. Such feelings may have been a form of Stockholm syndrome, but there is no denying their importance to some girls and young women who survived sexual slavery and that songs are practices of focusing, exchanging, and preserving such sentiments.

There was also something potentially transgressive about the soldier’s love for Yi Yongsu—the love of a kamikaze pilot, a paragon of Japanese fascist virtue, for a lowly Korean sexual slave. In his song, he spoke of flying toward death and being mourned only by her, calling her by name: no community, family, or friends cry for him. The love relation either stands in for all of them or strategically ignores them in a gesture of critique in love, a moment of instability in the narrative of heroic sacrifice for the nation. The relations between love and sacrifice for the nation that the song depends on for its power are unstable in their conjuncture.⁷⁶ The outcomes of these relations are unpredictable in practice. Each act of association, like those that I have discussed above, had the potential to backfire and become something other than what was intended by the various songwriters and the military officials who propagated it.⁷⁷ To paraphrase Fox, much of the slippage happens in moments when poetic text is denaturalized in acts of modification, such as when the pilot rewrote the song

73 Hanguk Jeongsindae, *Gangjero*, 154.

74 Interview with the author, Gwangju, Korea, 2003.

75 Interview with the author, Daegu, Korea, 2004.

76 Marshall Sahlins, *Islands of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), xiv.

77 In “To Fight the Losing War, to Remember the Lost War,” Junko Oba demonstrates how this worked in the whole unfolding of *gunka* (Japanese military song) as a genre, demonstrating how the popularization of the genre led to its uses as a forum for questioning the motivations of war (35) and for detaching notions of friendship from loyalty to the emperor and attempting to restitch them to a less militant sort of nation (39).

to include Yi Yongsu's Japanese name, or when Kang Deokkyeong rewrote the Women's Volunteer Corp song to express her experiences as a comfort woman. Those moments of denaturalization then endure to varying degrees in renaturalized performances.⁷⁸

These moments of rewriting and Mun Okju's narrative of escape are slivers of hope, moments when the performing arts proved useful in the cause of survival and sanity.⁷⁹ By contrast, the bulk of Kang Deokkyeong's experience and many other women's accounts show music or the other performing arts in a different light. In her case they did not yield advantage, engender sympathy, or otherwise come to the rescue. For some soldiers, like Kang's kidnapper, Kobayashi, or the soldier who threatened Yi Yeongsuk when she sang in Korean, such expressions of emotion were alienating, transgressions of unspoken rules concerning the boundary between comfort women and themselves. For others, as we have seen, the performances of comfort women confirmed the rightness of gendered colonial domination and strengthened soldier solidarity through rehearsing that domination. Channeling the atmosphere of nonmilitary sex-and-entertainment industries, such performances also helped to reinforce that the comfort women system was a sphere of social life beyond the normal sphere of family and morality, dooming the girls and young women to temporary status in soldiers' lives and helping them regard comfort women as objects for consumption and disposal.

Conclusion

In the introduction to her seminal *Music in the Holocaust: Confronting Life in the Nazi Ghettos and Camps*, historian Shirli Gilbert notes the prevalence of narratives of resistance in many histories, national projects of memorialization, and popular culture concerning the midcentury European Holocaust and the pride of place often given to the performing arts—especially music—in these narratives.⁸⁰ While acknowledging the importance of such narratives to survivors, she discusses the problematic assumptions on which they often rest: ideas of solidarity among the imprisoned, and assumptions about foreknowledge of the fate that awaited most of them. From one perspective, the “resistance art” narrative is a species of the redemptive narrative of art that is so pervasive in European American writing and thought about music, dance, and other performing arts. In the growing literature on the performing arts and violence, the redemptive narrative comes under frequent assault, and in Ana María Ochoa's

⁷⁸ Fox, *Real Country*, 36.

⁷⁹ To this we might add all of those episodes—biographical, cinematic, and otherwise—where music delivers us from catastrophe, such as the climactic episode of Holocaust survivor Wladyslaw Szpilman's memoir *The Pianist: The Extraordinary True Story of One Man's Survival in Warsaw, 1939–1945* (New York: Picador, 2002).

⁸⁰ Shirli Gilbert, *Music in the Holocaust: Confronting Life in the Nazi Ghettos and Camps* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2005), 1–20.

pithy characterization, it has given way to a negative dialectic of disenchantment and hope.⁸¹

In the preceding examination of references to music, dance, and their associated institutions in testimonies of former comfort women, we find good reasons to turn away from resistance, redemption, hope, and despair: the stratified nature of the comfort women system; the diversity of survivors' experiences and testimonies; the variously casual and systematic promotion of music and dance as components of the system; and the variety and complexity of uses that victims put the performing arts to all make it difficult to reduce the social power of music and dance to its role in "resistance," "complicity," or a dyad of both. Music and dance were tools of recruitment, doorways into the world of industrialized sex and entertainment that gave on to the comfort women system, and part of its machinery of sex trafficking. They were means of performing domination and submission, often strategically. They were tools of indoctrination, naturalization, and habituation, a habituation that was sometimes a strategy of survival. They were means of sentimental exchange that could lead to the strategic betterment of a slave's situation. They were strategies both of playing the game and of pushing it to its breaking point—sometimes playing into the fantasies of militarized, imperial masculinity, sometimes getting soldiers to cross forbidden lines, to become complicit in escape plans, to break rules and fall in love in ways that troubled imperial subjectivity and militarized masculinity. And they were means of channeling home and identity and tools for characterizing the experience of wartime sexual violence as an aberration.

For a number of comfort women, music and dance seem to have been means of something we might call outright resistance, and some uses of the arts point to complicity; but most of the performing arts activity in the comfort stations exists beyond that simplistic distinction and throws its usefulness into question. It is our task to turn away from this dyad and toward a messier process by which people perform in pursuit of day-to-day survival, normalcy, escape, selfhood, and each other. Pushing through easy assumptions about these performing arts' redemptive or totalizing potentials, one finds a more vital account of music's social power—and thus of the roles music and dance can play in suffering and survival, in harm and human flourishing, and in the often intermingled nature of these categories of human experience.

Reading what survivors of the comfort women system have to say about music and dance provides us with an unusual window into human experience, telling us as much about life and history as about the ambivalent nature of the performing arts in instances of war and sexual violence. In so doing, these accounts help those of us who have thus far avoided such experiences by luck or privilege to begin to fathom that which is so difficult to comprehend. They also

81 Ana María Ochoa, "A manera de introducción: La materialidad de lo musical y su relación con la violencia," *Trans: Revista Transcultural de Música* 10 (2006), <http://www.sibetrans.com/trans/articulo/142/a-manera-de-introduccion-la-materialidad-de-lo-musical-y-su-relacion-con-la-violencia>.

help to rewrite history, incorporating the creative products and the perspectives of the dispossessed.

The presence of the performing arts in the comfort women system is evidence for the complexity of that system in the face of its typically simplified portrayal, an argument that C. Sarah Soh has made extensively in her *The Comfort Women: Sexual Violence and Postcolonial Memory in Korea and Japan*. Additionally, the presence of music and dance in the comfort women system is proof positive of the continuity that connects wartime sex industries with those in times of supposed peace, helping us to understand that the events of war happen to a large extent as part of social arrangements already in place and not as the result of their breakdown. Music and dance also are one set of concrete structural and historical linkages that connect the wartime sex industry and its egregious violence against women with other East Asian sex industries and ask us to think critically about those industries as well.

Through the way that music and dance demonstrate the interdependency of militarism, colonialism, gender relations, sex, and sexuality, they are a reminder that wars, conflicts, and colonial encounters are gendered activities and that genders and sexualities can be militarized.⁸² Many of the social actors and victims of war and conflict are women; and much of what happens in war and conflict situations is gendered and sexualized violence, patterned by and patterning its counterparts in so-called times of peace.

82. The recent interest in music, violence, and conflict has a small but powerful presence of scholars interested in the gendered and sexual contexts and foundations of war and conflict: for instance, Ceribašić, “Gender Roles”; Ceribašić, “Defining Women and Men in the Context of War: Images in Croatian Popular Music in the 1990s,” in *Music and Gender*, ed. Pirkko Moisala and Beverly Diamond (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 219–38; and David McDonald’s article on Palestinian masculinity and protest music, “Geographies of the Body: Music, Violence and Manhood in Palestine,” *Ethnomusicology Forum* 19, no. 2 (2010): 191–214.