



Crying shame: war crimes, sexual violence, and the cost of ‘speaking out’

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First submission: 19 October 2014

Acceptance: 21 March 2015

Retelling violence can heal. It can also hurt. Post-Second World War exigency silenced numerous victims of sexual violence. The legacy of this ‘silence’ and the brutality of the crimes remain divisive in Asia. Yet, when breaking silence, victims pay a martyr’s price. Their trauma appropriated for wider agendas. Personal suffering commodified as national pain. Scarred bodies and psyches used as criminal evidence. In the hands of others, memories take on currency beyond personal pain and outside circles of healing. In courts, testimonies become valued only for probative worth and legal weight. Politicians use trauma as diplomatic leverage. Restitution claims monetise scales of suffering. No simple formula exists for trauma’s emotional arithmetic. Sharing experiences can provide relief, even release. However, this article shows that, in crying shame, survivors also pay a steep cost for speaking out. For some, it may be better to keep silent.

The life of the dead is set in the memory of the living (Cicero).

What has been forgotten [...] is never something purely individual (Walter Benjamin)

Chinese director Lu Chuan's stunning film *Nanjing! Nanjing!/City of life and death* (2009) reveals the power and perils of traumatic memories, especially of sexual violence.¹ One of the film's most resonant scenes sees a crowd of hundreds shuffle fearfully into an old church in the Nanking Safety Zone (Askew 2002).² The haven organised by members of the international community in Nanjing depended on the good graces of the Japanese. Subject to constant fear, intimidation, and raids, the Safety Zone's organisers were forced into unbearable decisions to save as many refugees as possible. The crowd listens resignedly as two Zone organisers, John Rabe and 'Miss Jiang', explain an ultimatum presented by the commanding Japanese officer. "Today, 100 of you will be leaving us, I'm so sorry," begins Rabe. "The Japanese have threatened that if we don't hand over one hundred women, they will destroy the refugee camp," continued Miss Jiang. "In return for your sacrifice, they will supply the camp with food, clothes, and coal [...] our children will make it through the winter." The women in question were to work for three weeks in sexual slavery as 'comfort women' for the Japanese army.³ They were being asked to sacrifice their bodies to save the lives of others.

- 1 This title requires some explanation. I am grateful to the reviewer who drew attention to the title's unwittingly reference to the notion of 'crying rape' (when shamed women falsely allege sexual violence for revenge or financial compensation). Of course, this was never my intention. I have elected to keep the 'Crying shame' title for two reasons. First, it speaks to the literal pain experienced by victims of sexual violence who speak out – actual crying and very real feelings of shame. Secondly, the title forms an idiomatic allusion to the ongoing suffering of victims of mass sexual violence – a crying shame.
- 2 The "Nanking Safety Zone" was an *ad hoc* demilitarised quadrant of the city set up by members of the international community and local humanitarians to protect Chinese citizens from Japanese military violence. The area provided some safety as a refugee camp, but was frequently raided by Japanese soldiers. The International Committee for the Nanking Safety Zone, or later Nanking International Relief Committee included German businessman John Rabe, several journalists, doctors, missionaries, businessmen and doctors.
- 3 'Comfort women' or *lanfu* was the euphemism used to refer to the system of sexual slavery and forced brothels set up by the Japanese military in nearly all occupation zones. Tens of thousands of women were violated. Lu Chuan's portrayal of a 'comfort station' in *Nanjing! Nanjing!* is somewhat apocryphal. 'Comfort stations' were set up in Nanjing, but only after the initial surge of mass murder and rape. This should not be conflated with the large-scale institutionalised and regimented *lanfu* system. Although the structure of abuse differed dramatically between 'comfort women' and victims of spontaneous outbursts of sexual violence, survivors of both share a painful essence of

The collective audience stands in stunned silence, until one woman from the back raises her hand and speaks: “Mr. Rabe [...] I’ll go.” All heads turn in unison toward the volunteer. The crowd parts to let her come forward. Only sounds of weeping punctuate the haunting moment, which lingers until one-by-one other hands are raised. “I’ll go.” Simple words that present a moment of strength and courage yet open an avalanche of pain and suffering. The film’s spare black and white cinematography reinforces the impossible choices faced in Nanjing. The scene’s sharp close-ups of single – silent – tears streaming down the faces of the women who come forward and the family members who watch them go captures the raw humanity of their sacrifice. The gritty scenes that follow show the harsh realities of their subsequent debasement. The film does not hide from the graphic details of rape or the horrors of life in the imperial army’s forced brothels. Yet, the courage, not the horror, sticks in the viewer’s mind. Lu Chuan powerfully appropriates personal sacrifice and physical trauma as patriotic duty, even glory. Although moving, his film also reflects the malleability of traumatic memory. In Lu Chuan’s hands, suffering sexual violence transforms into a shared and willing martyrdom detached from actual survivor feelings and historical facts.

The intense – and deliberately evocative – humanity of Lu Chuan’s scene stands in stark contrast to the impersonal treatment of the ‘Rape of Nanking’ and its victims by the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (IMTFE) held in Tokyo 1946-1948 and other post-war trials. Like most courts of the era, IMTFE lawyers presented graphic material in artificially ‘objective’ terms, downplaying emotions to construct ‘rational’ and ‘credible’ accounts of the accused’s guilt or innocence. Decades before ‘victims’ rights’ entered the vocabulary of international justice, IMTFE prosecutors treated victims only as symbols of Japan’s wartime criminality instead of people in pain and needing support. Defence attorneys added insult to injury by contesting and denying violations. Tokyo judges weighed survivor stories on probative scales of justice unconcerned with restorative principles. Indeed, victims were undervalued as individuals with lived experiences to such an extent that the trial record rarely names – let alone gives voice to – the violated. Generic descriptors such as “a Chinese woman”, “a little girl”, “a grandmother” replaced personalities (IMTFE 1946-1948/1987: 40135). Anatomical representations erased humanity: “Japanese soldiers desecrated *the bodies of victims* who had been raped and killed [... inserting] foreign substance[s] into the *female organ* and *leaving the body exposed* to public view” (IMTFE 1981: 40132) (my emphasis, JS). In Tokyo, victims of sexual violence formed bodies of evidence in the name of justice. The burden of ‘truth’ prioritised over shame or suffering or anger felt

violation. Thus, both are relevant to the article’s discussion of traumatic memory, bearing witness, and internalising suffering.

by victims. As a collective symbol of accountability, courts may hold value to some survivors. For most, the post-war courts robbed individuals of agency and meaning. As we shall see later, many survivors who stayed silent fared better in the long run, because they maintained control over their experiences until ready to speak out.

Neither the appropriated, yet jarring, intimacy of Lu Chuan's film nor the IMTFE's forced 'objectivity' and expropriated truths gets to the heart of the matter. Their limitations as vehicles of traumatic 'truth' speak to the complex riddle of justice and memory. No rape victims testified in person at the IMTFE regarding events in Nanjing, Manila, or elsewhere. On a macro level, this selective silence demands redress. Lost victims, survivors, and communities scarred by imperial Japan's atrocities deserve acknowledgement and atonement. A 'full' telling of events could have led – and could still lead – to more effective reconciliation, clearer historical accountability, and greater political stability in the region, especially when considering the individual stakes at play. Yet, it is too easy to blame ongoing memory controversies and lingering suffering only on the judicial silencing of victims of sexual violence after the war. Voicing pain may even heal some individuals. But would it have been best for all victims? Is speaking out enough? Is anything ever 'enough'? This article suggests not. In fact, it demonstrates that silence benefited certain survivors. Time may not heal all wounds, but it allows victims to speak out on their own terms, in their own way, and within a safer context and space.

'Speaking Out', therefore, can both heal and hurt. Once in the public domain, intimate memories of violence take on their own lives. Individual suffering becomes communal pain valued for criminal evidence, political leverage, public outrage, 'righting' wrongs, and other agendas. Considering these challenges, it may be better to keep silent until ready to come forward. This article explores several individual examples to access a wider phenomenon, namely how speaking out helped and hurt survivors of sexual violence at the hands of the Japanese in the Second World War. I deliberately employ a dialectical approach (healing or hurting; speaking out or keeping silent), not to suggest that they form the only possible outcomes when addressing traumatic memory, but rather spark inquiry into the nuanced space between extremes. By exploring the human cost of speaking out, it recognises the benefits of staying silent – at least for a time. This argument is intended to be provocative, not reductive. The article advances one side of an equation to illustrate the vulnerability of memory when rape and other gendered crimes gain national and international weight on the world stage.

1. Bearing witness, feeling whole

Increasingly, legal theorists, clinical practitioners, and other experts present 'speaking out' as the best road to individual recovery and collective reconciliation. Explorations of memory controversies often focus on aggressor societies who re-violate atrocity by not accepting 'guilt' or 'responsibility'. Ongoing memory controversies, political instability, and unresolved questions of war guilt lend urgency to bear witness. In an ironic twist, victims become expected to help perpetrators heal. In theory, by bearing witness, survivors force violators to confront 'the truth' and acknowledge 'guilt'. 'Speaking out' purports to heal victims, perpetrators, and the global community. Though not without merit, this model assumes that acknowledging guilt suffices to reconcile affected communities. Tragically, however, healing trauma is never so straightforward. Indeed, 'speaking out' can be simultaneously 'good' for, and harmful to affected individuals and communities. Because of this duality, alternatives to testimony, such as keeping silent, must be acknowledged.

Legal scholar Nicola Henry (2010: 1099) suggests that "[t]he privileging of disclosure over silence does not capture [...] what it might mean to speak of 'unspeakable' crimes at certain points of time, place, and context". Henry uses "unspeakable" both figuratively (i.e., the violence so terrible, it beggars description) and literally (i.e., trauma that survivors actually cannot – or will not – put into words). Others scholars likewise reflect on the "ambivalence", "after-effects", and "frictions" of speaking out (Colvin 2004, Ross 2003, Shaw 2007). This article goes a step further by treating "unspeakable" as an active choice that helps some victims recover and gain agency. The argument is not intended as a full therapeutic and historiographical corrective, but rather provides a counterbalance to the normative assumptions that bearing loud witness facilitates swift justice and promotes fuller healing. History proves that 'speaking out', judicial verdicts, or receiving public apologies never fully heals wounds of violation. Recovery and reckoning may be impossible for some. In the very least, survivors should be given the space, time, and support needed to come forward when – and if – it suits their own impulses rather than prevailing ideas of accountability, reconciliation, and rights.

The true, lasting impact of trauma is latent. Psychological responses, including repetitive flashbacks and even re-enactments, plague victims long after the actual incident. Historians of China Diana Lary and Stephen MacKinnon (2001: 8) explain: "The scars of war take many forms. Some of them are visible, constant reminders of loss; others are hidden, festering quietly in darkness". Put another way, Chinese author and artist Jicai Feng (1996: 96) notes: "As soon as the flesh stops hurting you forget about it. But the pain in the heart cannot be forgotten".

Victims of sexual violence are particularly haunted. Intimacy poisoned, shame internalised, and healing difficult. Survivors live a vicious paradox finding comfort in 'normalcy', knowing always that they will never feel truly 'normal' again. The tragic injustice of such a shadow existence amplifies the pressure to speak out. From an outside perspective, shamed silence seems cruel and unfair. Yet, if internalising pain provides social and personal stability, then silence may prove the best hope for recovery. The sting of memory fades. In time, survivors may love and laugh, have families, careers, and experience full and healthy lives. Then, as free as possible from agendas, in comfortable personal spaces, with support networks in place, victims can carve niches for remembrance, even forgiveness. Places where they can bear witness on their own terms, rather than for the specific benefit or aims of others. As mentioned, this approach is not the only option, but it should be recognised and validated, especially since silence is a path taken by many survivors of atrocity.

2. Losing voice: the cost of speaking out

This article demonstrates that trauma is far too complex to treat with a panacea such as 'bearing witness'. Looking at violent memories seven decades old proves that sadly, there are no easy solutions. Many victims do benefit from speaking out. However, the women explored in this article paid a price for speaking out. Because of the deep social stigma, enduring personal shame, profound physical violation, emotional catastrophe, and the appropriation of memory, survivors of sexual violence may gain by keeping silent, at least until ready to go public and with access to appropriate support mechanisms. This assertion is potentially controversial, even offensive. It must be prefaced, therefore, with both a staunch defence of the rights of survivors who have benefited from speaking out, and a direct acknowledgement that silence can often be forced and unwelcomed. While the findings of my research suggest that staying silent helps some victims cope, I must also recognise that forced silence and unelected anonymity brings painful outcomes. Put simply, victims need a voice in order to 'speak out' and power to choose staying silent (Caruth 1996, Langer 1998).

Even if ready and willing, few victims of trauma have the means to articulate atrocity. For one thing, Scarry and others have demonstrated the unique "unshareability" of traumatic violence.⁴ Sexual violence becomes especially "unspeakable" and difficult, particularly in courtroom settings ill-suited to the emotional rawness of violation.⁵ Survivors must also deal with social and structural

4 See Bennett 2005, Caruth 1996, Krog 2000, Radstone 2005a, 2005b, Scarry 1985.

5 See Berger 1977, Burgess & Holmstrom 1974, Campbell 2002, Finley 1989, Giller 1998, Henry 2009,

obstacles that prevent coming forward. Structural poverty, security concerns, fear, shaming stigma, amnesia, and other such contingencies rob victims of their voice. Social anthropologist Arthur Kleinman, for instance, argues that victims need an environment of “trust” before speaking out about their experiences. This assertion speaks to a practical (as opposed to psychological) explanation for the “latency” of traumatic recall. For personal safety, victims are often not in a position to publicly “remember” until the existing regime or conflict has ended or social and family pressures have eased (Kleinman 1995). Many victims also fear “not being believed” or that “others will not listen and will not understand”, or may fear implicated governments and attackers who actively seek to intimidate or discredit survivors (Henry 2010: 1101-2).

Limitations of capacity can also inhibit speaking out. Primo Levi, Eli Wiesel, and other famous keepers of traumatic memory write powerfully about the need to break silence. Levi (1988) declared speaking out the “duty of the living” and the “imperative of awakening”. In his Nobel Acceptance Speech, Wiesel (1986) averred: “I swore never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation. We must always take sides. [...] Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented”. The power of their words, however, presents a dilemma. Writing is a pure gift. Public speaking requires skill and training. Advocacy demands aptitude and an activist inclination and spirit. Personal suffering may spark advocacy, but only a rare cohort of storytellers have Levi or Wiesel’s innate eloquence. They are gifted outliers rather than the norm. Few victims will ever articulate horror at the level of Nobel laureates. The world is a better place thanks to individuals like Levi and Wiesel, but their strength skews perspectives on memory and survival. Some of the pressure to speak out, therefore, has grown out of unusual histories rather than normative experiences. Victims cannot – and should not – be expected to speak effectively about their suffering, especially if they do not want or are not able to: it is too unfair a burden to place on those who have suffered so much already.

The shame of violation and the guilt of survival can engulf individuals. The social and personal pressure to stay silent becomes enormous. Personal humiliation can be so powerful that it forces many, probably most, victims of sexual violence to self-censorship. Pressure to keep silent is especially strong for survivors of institutionalised mass sexual violence such as comfort women who suffered so long and whose violations represented societal surrender and weakness. Shame in the lanfu system spread to family and community members at large. It was not limited to the individuals who were actually assaulted. The regimented system of abuse left communities feeling a profound and abject sense of failure

and impotence. Comfort women came to represent surrender, occupation, subjugation, and association that forced generations into silence. On the other hand, survivors of spree atrocities such as Nanjing can be – and are – cast as tragic national heroes or symbols of resilience and resistance. Korean 'comfort woman' Kim Bok-dong kept her dark secret until the death of her husband in 1981, because of internal rather than external strain. "Even as I returned to my homeland, it never was a true liberation for me. How could I tell anyone what had happened to me during the war? It was living with a big lump in my chest" (Yamaguchi 2013). Likewise, Felicidad de Los Reyes, a Filipina 'comfort woman' told researchers that she felt so 'dirty' that for years the only two people she told were her husband and mother (Brown 1995). A Taiwanese survivor reflected on the long afterlife of shame: "I could not tell that story to [my husband]. I have never told it to anyone. How can you tell such a thing?" (Testimony 3). Her choice to remain anonymous – a choice that must be respected – shows limits in speaking out, even within a sensitive and supportive environment. Unencumbered by the crushing weight of decades of silence, she still felt the need to protect her identity and apologise for her own suffering: "Even now when I think about it, tears come to my eyes. Oh [...] I am sorry to make you hear such a terrible story" (Testimony 3). Her enduring pain alone suggests that many others, perhaps the majority of the victims, never felt they could come forward. They died feeling safer in silence or too afraid to speak out.

In addition, there are costs to 'speaking out'. Once 'out', memories are no longer survivors' alone. The experiences of Xia Shuqin highlight the vulnerability of traumatic memory once 'on trial' (Sedgwick 2009). Xia, a young girl who watched her family being slaughtered during the 'Rape of Nanking' during the winter of 1937-1938, was not named or present at post-war trials. Her story, however, figured prominently in testimonies by prosecution witnesses such as John Magee, an American missionary in Nanjing who smuggled videos of the atrocities out of China during the war. In Magee's hands, Xia's experience became probative tools for Tokyo prosecutors. "A little girl of about eight or possibly nine told me the story," Magee testified. Japanese soldiers stripped two teenage girls. "They then raped these girls I don't know how many times, and killed them." Although Magee did not see the residence until several weeks after the attack, he confirmed that eleven people were murdered. "The blood was spattered everywhere," he told the court (IMTFE 1946-1948/1987: 3911-2). Only two people survived the attack: Xia Shuqin and another family member. Rather than challenge the testimonies' particulars, defence attorneys broadly targeted Magee's allegations as "his own creation or hearsay" (IMTFE 1981: 47263). In other words, the defence treated Xia's suffering not as her own, but rather as misappropriated half-truths told by someone else.

Not afforded the opportunity to testify in person at the IMTFE, Xia ultimately bore witness against the Japanese in the court of public opinion. Later in life, the “little girl” from “no. 7 Sinkai Road” became “named” – and showcased – as a symbol of China’s wartime survival. Her family used as martyrs to Japanese aggression (Xu 1995). In part, Xia owes her profile to the court that used her nameless story. Indeed, her experiences may have been forgotten without the decision by IMTFE prosecutors to use the ‘Rape of Nanking’ as a defining atrocity of the war and positioned Xia’s story as representative suffering of the incident. Xia’s internal memory and experience belong to her alone, but her story continues to be appropriated for other agendas. Xia has become a lodestar for controversy, waging a personal fight in an international memory war whenever tensions rise between China and Japan over war guilt. Xia is placed in the middle of every dispute, her individual trauma sold as communal pain, her truth contested and attacked by historical ‘revision’. Xia is ‘out’, but being out compounds her suffering. “What angers me the most”, she once explained, “[is when critics] claim I am a false witness. This is unbearable” (Xia 2000).⁶ Having lost control of her narrative early, Xia now has no choice but to endure the “unbearable” cost of both truth-telling and denial. Xia seems to embrace this role. Yet, the manipulation and contestation of her experiences serves as a warning to others coming forward or ‘speaking out’.

Easter Garcia Moras’s experiences and tales of mass rape offer a different perspective on the cost of ‘speaking out’. Along with dozens of other women and girls, Moras was rounded up and forced into sexual slavery at Manila’s Bay View Hotel in February 1945. Unlike Xia Shuqin, Moras had the opportunity to bear witness in person to US Army inspectors at a post-war commission of inquiry. Like Xia, however, once recorded by others, Moras’ story stopped being wholly her own. Her traumatic memory transformed from personal suffering into legal evidence. Alongside other victims with similar accounts, prosecutors in Tokyo and elsewhere used Moras’ experiences to condemn Japanese actions. She appeared in court not in person, but in words. Her written affidavit was read selectively to support internal trial objectives, not to address emotional or individual needs.

Fulsome truth-telling requires safe spaces, sensitive audiences, and support networks. Personal participation by victims, perpetrators, and observers helps retain the humanity of traumatic narratives. Challenging a rape victim’s credibility is harder in person than on paper. Courts rarely form ideal places for such healing, at least historically. Trials “only punish the guilty. [They] never heal the wounds of the victims” (Feng 1996: 184). Put another way, “Revealing intimate details of

6 In this particular instance, Xia issued a lawsuit against two Japanese scholars, Shūdō Higashinakano and Toshio Matsumura.

sexual violation is extremely difficult for sexual violence survivors, particularly in front of strangers in a courtroom and particularly when cultural and social barriers to disclosure dictate what can and cannot be said in a public context” (Henry 2010: 1105-6). Easter Moras’s violent memories became vulnerable to abuse as soon as she told investigators about what she endured. They stopped being hers entirely once entered into the court record – at least from the perspective of tribunal participants. Interaction regarding Moras’s trauma between trial President William F Webb of Australia and Pedro Lopez, the Associate Prosecutor for the Philippines, showcases the callous indifference engendered by written, as opposed to in-person, testimony. In a memorable exchange, Webb asked: “Mr. Lopez, why do you stop there? The next answer shows that rape was committed. Do you want us to guess at rape and be uncertain of it?” In response, Lopez explained: “[I]n preparing this evidence out of a mountain pile of evidence [...] we were confronted with the problem of how much to use [...] at the back of our minds was an honest desire to expedite the case in order to help the court” (IMTFE 1981: 12534-5) (my emphasis, JS). Help the court. Build a strong case. Not heal Moras’s pain or consider her feelings.

Worse still, Moras’s suffering was obvious, despite Webb’s concern about “guess” work. “I was forced to lie down on the bare floor. They lifted my dress up to my waist and tore off my pants,” read the testimony before Webb’s interjection. “I was struggling, kicking, and striking out with my arms, but the one who was holding me down slapped me about my face [...] when I finally got exhausted, I lay on the floor like a log” (IMTFE 1981: 12534). The unspoken, unshared details of violation represent natural reticence in victims’ recall of sexual assaults. Courts, however, demand more proof and more direct evidence. Both the original criminal investigators in Manila and Justice Webb in Tokyo pushed for particulars of the case.

I was raped between 12 and 15 times during that night. I cannot remember exactly how many times. I was so tired and horror stricken that it became a living nightmare. The Japs would come singly and in groups drag me from the room hardly before I had fallen to the floor from a preceding [*sic*] raping, and would again take me and do it to me over and over (IMTFE 1981: 12536).

Finished with the heart-wrenching tale of gang rape, both Lopez and Webb moved on to the next atrocity and the next victim. “We offer in evidence IPS Document No. 2886,” the prosecutor announced. “Admitted on the usual terms,” responded the Australian judge. Easter Moras, on the other hand, lived with memories and scars her entire life. Moras’s testimony helped convict her attackers. It served a broad objective of “justice” and may even have felt

rewarding. Yet, the manipulation of her story as evidence shows what can be lost once people come forward.

The ultimate question, then, remains: Was being 'out' good for the women in question? Who benefitted the most from their stories, and how? Not the victims; at least, not in these cases. Both women lost ownership of their traumatic narratives to legal objectives and political agendas. Moras's written affidavit was presented, debated, and picked apart in Tokyo without Moras having the opportunity to detail, explain, or defend the account. For members of the court, Xia's pain was valuable only for its probative worth and dramatic effect. Moras was present in name, Xia was present in sympathy, but neither had agency. The experiences of both women were intimately personal, yet they lost control of both the scope and the specifics of their accounts. If benefits do come from being 'out', neither Moras nor Xia was there to gain from them.

3. Choosing silence, keeping quiet: recovery, reflection, reckoning

Ironically, the desire for silent healing and the urge for public retribution come from the same root. Faced with the war's extreme violence, people wanted to move on through amnesia or accountability – both laudable aspirations. The atrocities witnessed, recorded, and experienced were truly horrific. In an infamous mass rape and murder at the "Price Residence" in Manila, for instance, Japanese soldiers reportedly urinated on corpses and encouraged a pig to lick up the blood spilled on the floor (IMTFE 1981: 12407).⁷ In the Manila Barrio of Sampaloc, a young pregnant woman named Francisca Bernard was assaulted with a bayonet while in labour, and then raped (IMTFE 1981: 40420). At De La Salle College, a Japanese soldier "attempted to have intercourse" with the corpse of fourteen-year-old Fotunata Salonga, "although rigor mortis had set in" (IMTFE 1981: 12413). Sexual slaves who became pregnant from their assaults bore constant reminders of the pain and lifelong proof of the violation (IMTFE 1981: 40421). Others were permanently disfigured. For example, Japanese soldiers mutilated Bernardino Calub, the "houseboy" to a wealthy Manila family. Tied to a pillar, the soldiers "cut off his genitals and thrust his severed penis into his mouth" (IMTFE 1981: 40400). The debilitating shame of living through such trauma drove thousands of victims to the solace of public silence. Who can blame them?

7 President Webb dismissed the story. "The pig episode is not worth giving any attention to [...] we don't know under what the circumstances of these people died, whether illegally or otherwise" (IMTFE 1981: 12408).

Suffering in silence never meant passive surrender. In the bleakest moments of the war, survivors found ways to resist and assert agency. At the Bay View Hotel, women used menstruation and other physiological deterrents to carve out moments of respite (IMTFE 1981: 12525). Easter Moras's sister Evangeline, for instance, avoided being raped this way (IMTFE 1981: 12530). Others survived by using sexuality to manipulate the emotions of Japanese 'sweethearts' and gain favourable treatment. They promised love to save themselves from worse violence (IMTFE 1981: 12525). Women sacrificed themselves to protect others. In one instance at the Bay View Hotel, "three prostitutes told their fellow captives that they would submit to the Japanese and thus attempt to protect the younger girls and married women" (IMTFE 1981: 12526). Turning lust against itself, a Turkish woman "successfully and resourcefully dissuaded a would be attacker by claiming she was too old and removing and showing her false teeth to prove it. She then kept her daughter safe by hiding her underneath her skirt" (IMTFE 1981: 12526). Post-war choices reflected a similar pattern of quiet strength and elective silence. At least some survivors took matters into their own hands by consciously choosing to move on without 'speaking out'. Although their choice may not please scholars seeking the 'whole truth', enduring in silence speaks volumes about human resilience.

The impulse to keep silent may fade over years. Fear, anger, and shame can cement into public outrage. Many individuals needed silence for long enough to catalyse pain into advocacy and agency. When reached organically and promoted by supportive environments, this transition empowers victims and communities. Instead of an imposed or appropriated process, in the right context bearing witness becomes a self-driven push for accountability and restitution. Some of the most influential – not to mention politically and legally 'successful' – activists did not speak out until well after their violation. The Korean 'comfort women' who filed the first class-action lawsuit against the Japanese government in 1991 certainly followed this pattern.⁸ Other individuals likewise turned years of silence into powerful activism. During the war, the Japanese army forced Jan Ruff-O'Herne into sexual slavery at a brothel in Selarang, Indonesia, then The Netherlands East Indies. She and other women were raped and beaten nearly every day for over four months. Ruff-O'Herne (2007) later recalled: "I'll never forget that fear. You know, it runs right through your body like electrical currents [...] a fear that has never left me". That fear and shame overwhelmed Ruff-O'Herne for decades.

8 The Tokyo Women's International War Crimes Tribunal on Japan's Military Sexual Slavery, convened in December 2000, represents another striking example of comfort women advocacy. More of a public hearing or mock trial than a formal and binding legal process, the 'tribunal' nevertheless formed a powerful exorcism of Japan's wartime actions. Over a hundred surviving comfort women testified in person or remotely. The tribunal completely changed the memory landscape.

She explained: "I was too ashamed. You think, 'What will they think of me?' You know? 'I can't tell this. What will they think of me?'" (Ruff-O'Herne 2007). For nearly 50 years, Ruff-O'Herne told no one.

Two events in the early 1990s changed everything. First, she heard about Korean 'comfort women' breaking their silence and pursuing legal action against the Japanese government. At the same time, media reports began to circulate about horrific incidents of sexual violence in the Bosnian conflict. Ruff-O'Herne realised that coming forward about her own experiences could help others get through their pain. 'Speaking out' at home to her family liberated Ruff-O'Herne. She became a global human rights activist. Clearly, bearing witness helped Ruff-O'Herne. So too did the intervening years of silence. Without that time to mature, reflect, and build supportive networks, her 'speaking out' experience could have been markedly different. Ruff-O'Herne (2007) said: "They are like my heart and my soul, you know [...] We suffered this together. We went through this together. I will do anything for them". The bond of shared trauma – and silence – produced a core of committed advocate survivors, fighting individual demons for common goals: recognition and reckoning.

Keeping silent also allows time for personal forgiveness and reflection. Instead of anger, some survivors seek acceptance. Maria Rosa Henson, for instance, had much to be angry about. She was first raped by a Japanese soldier in February 1942, and suffered several other sexual assaults over the next year. Then, in April 1943, soldiers abducted Henson at an army checkpoint outside Angeles on the northern Philippines island of Luzon. She was sent to work at a 'comfort' station where Henson was violated countless times over the following months. "There was no rest, they had sex with me every minute," she remembered (Testimony 2). After being rescued by guerilla fighters in early 1944, Henson told no one about her experiences. When she did come forward in 1992, Henson did so as an act of goodwill rather than reprisal. Years of silence had changed her. "I had learned to accept suffering. I also learned to forgive," Henson noted. "Half a century had passed. Maybe my anger and resentment were no longer as fresh" (Testimony 2). As the first Philippines comfort woman to come forward, Henson's magnanimity set the tone for other victims. She started the Lolos Kampanyera Survivors Organisation, a support group for other victims. Until her death in August 1997, Henson worked tirelessly for peace and reconciliation.

The sheer brutality of the violence experienced by the Japanese army's sexual crimes made fast recovery impossible. It took time to heal the physical and emotional wounds. At the same time, this natural healing impulse to keep violation secret undermined judicial efforts and complicated evidence gathering. Henry (2010: 1100) notes: "The problem is that silence is counterproductive to

recognition and justice. Historical silence of wartime rape [...] helped secure impunity for these crimes". Opting for silence also goes against the "common therapeutic assumption [...] that telling one's story is imperative [for] interpersonal psychological recovery" (Henry 2010: 1099). In other words, internalising pain contravenes clinical practice and legal sensibilities. Fixating on what is lost to silence, however, overlooks what is gained. Individual survivors and wider victim communities alike can benefit from the safety of historical distance; the insulation of time past. When justice operations force victims into the open before they feel ready or appropriate, and manipulate personal memories for probative aims, healing should trump punishment. Silence should be acknowledged as a powerful rehabilitation tool and an appropriate response to violence. It rarely is.

4. Closure

Two related pressures now drive 'comfort women' and other survivors to break the silence. First: age. Even the youngest victims are now approaching the end of life. The second impulse stems from the refusal by influential Japanese leaders to acknowledge wartime atrocities. Kim Bok-dong explained to an Osaka crowd in 2013: "I'm here today, not because I wanted to but because I had to. I came here to ask Japan to settle its past wrongdoing. I hope the Japanese government resolves the problem as soon as possible while we elderly women are still alive" (Yamaguchi 2013). Ruff-O'Herne (2007) puts it more bluntly: "Time is running out for these comfort women. They're all getting old". Recent controversies include current Japanese Prime Minister Shinzō Abe visiting the Yasukuni shrine in December 2013 and his outright denial of the 'comfort women' system during Abe's first term as Prime Minister (Sim 2014).⁹ In May 2013, the mayor of Osaka, Tōru Hashimoto, caused outrage by suggesting 'comfort women' were "necessary" and "normal" (Anonymous 2013a). More extreme examples exist, such as the hate-song called *Slashing Koreans* by the far-right Japanese rock band Scramble, which derides Korean women as "prostitutes" and calls for renewed violence against surviving 'comfort women' (Anonymous 2013b). No wonder, then, that many survivors of sexual violence still feel more comfortable in silence, the fear of violation never fully dissipated. They are running out of time, but may ultimately prefer to stay quiet; a choice that must be accepted.

The catastrophic typhoon Haiyan in November 2013 brought about a poignant illustration of just how long traumatic memory affects people. Japan, like many countries, sent aid to the Philippines in the storm's aftermath. This aid included

9 In October 2014, Abe took a small step toward rapprochement by quietly sending a ritual offering to Yasukuni rather than paying his respects in person.

a deployment of Japanese defence forces to assist in managing the developing humanitarian crisis. Despite good intentions and the crushing need for help, the return of Japanese soldiers to the archipelago unsettled some surviving 'comfort women'. Richilda Extremadura, the executive director of Lila Pilipina, an advocacy network for 'comfort women' in the Philippines, protested the deployment: "As victims of wartime sexual slavery, the lolas find the presence of Japanese troops a threat to their emotions" (Calunsod 2013).¹⁰ The haunting legacy of violence speaks volumes to the enormity of the pain caused by Japan's military during the war. The advocacy of Lila Pilipina, on the other hand, highlights the potency of 'speaking out' once in a position to do so effectively, from positions of strength, and on your own terms: Finding solace inside first, before going public.

Full justice and reconciliation must accommodate and acknowledge the needs of everyone affected, instead of those that make the most sense for political, legal, or social aims and conform to other exigencies. This article's argument stems from historical sources, not scientific research, clinical practice, or social work in the field. Its findings are drawn not from "data", but from experiences; the result of delving deep and sensitively into the memories and lives of historical actors. It forms a piece of research into the past that values contingent behaviour (like silence) as lived emotions rather than immeasurable anomalies or outliers. The experiences discussed in this article are historically significant, even if not statistically so. Given the scale of atrocity and the common impulse to keep silent, however, the "contingent" existences explored may well have been the "norm".

Ultimately, the difficult legacy of sexual violence in the Second World War suggests that a long and winding way forward awaits survivors of similar atrocities in Bosnia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guatemala, the Solomon Islands, and elsewhere. Testifying and 'speaking out' might be the answer, especially as courts and other arenas of justice and reconciliation embrace more victim-conscious practices. However, the stories told in this article also suggest that for some (perhaps for most) keeping silent will be the only (and sometimes best) option. It certainly must be on the table for consideration. Giving voice to victims and/or survivors should form part of the healing process, but the events and individuals outlined in this article reveal the human cost of stories once told. Trauma, therefore, must be shared on survivor terms. The long afterlife of suffering serves as a powerful reminder to keep trying to get it 'right' now and in the future, by exploring and accepting all options: including keeping silent after violence.

10 'Lola', a Tagalog honorific for elderly community members, is now used to refer to surviving comfort women. Lila Pilipina is an organisation of former comfort women.

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