

MEDIA FOR JUSTICE AND HEALING: The Case of Philippine Comfort Women Survivors

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Abstract

This essay examines the role played by the media in helping Filipino comfort women survivors find justice and healing. It traces the history of media coverage of comfort women in the Philippines, contextualized against general international media on the issue. It also explores the ways that new media is raising awareness on this issue, arguing that the media have played, and will continue to play, a critical role in keeping the stories of the comfort women alive.

This article examines the role played by the media in helping Filipino comfort women survivors find justice and healing. *Justice* is considered in terms of recognition by the Japanese government of the country's role in sexually enslaving the comfort women during the war, and in the public recognition of the truth of the comfort women's experiences. *Healing* is considered in comfort women survivors being able to speak out about what was once considered a taboo subject, and coming to terms with their grief and suffering.

This paper traces the history of media coverage of comfort women in the Philippines, contextualized against general international media on the issue. It also explores the ways that new media is raising awareness on this issue, arguing that the media have played, and will continue to play, a critical role in keeping the stories of the comfort women alive.

The international community only took notice of the plight of

comfort women in the 1990s, as survivors of comfort stations began to come forward and speak about their experiences. In the Philippines, Maria Rosa Luna Henson was the first comfort woman survivor to share her story, encouraged by a radio interview. Since then about 400 Filipino comfort women survivors have shared their stories, inspired by learning of other women like them through the media.

The media play a central role in shaping our view of the world. Beyond providing mere information, media should stimulate public dialogue and contribute to the public's understanding of important issues. At their best, media inspire humanity towards greater good. By capturing stories of incredible courage, strength and determination and disseminating them to a wider public, media create an informed citizenry that can contribute to meaningful change. They also breathe inspiration into those who come in contact with them, as in the case presented in this article about a group of extraordinary women and their journey of overcoming grief and suffering, in their quest for justice and healing.

Comfort women and media

Between 1932 and 1945, thousands of women, who came to be known as “comfort women” were rounded up and imprisoned in “comfort stations,” brothels where they were restrained for a certain period with no rights, under control of the Japanese military, and forced to engage in sexual activity with Japanese military personnel (Yoshiaki 2000). It is estimated that between 80,000 and 200,000 comfort women were drafted, misled, captured, and abducted by the Japanese Imperial Army during World War II, forced into a system of rape and enslavement (Factbook on Global Sexual Exploitation: The Philippines 2007). Eighty percent of these were from the Korean peninsula, others were from the Philippines, China, Taiwan, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Netherlands (Sancho 1998). Since Japan's defeat, these women have lived with the physical and emotional scars of their enslavement in silence. After the war ended, many of these women found their way back to their families. Some were abandoned, seen as causing “dishonor” to their families. Others were never able to talk about the terrible things that they went through, for fear of being alienated from society and their loved ones, left to live and die alone. Such is the price that women enslaved by the Japanese military during the Asia-Pacific War have paid for over six decades. Meanwhile, the Japanese government has consistently refused to admit national responsibility for their acts of sexual enslavement during the war. Part of World War II, the Asia-

Pacific War began on 18 September 1931, when the Imperial Japanese Army attacked and occupied Manchuria in northern China. Japan later launched an all-out invasion of China on July 7, 1937. The Asia-Pacific War refers to both the Asian phase of the war, from 1931 to 1941, and the Pacific phase of World War II from 1942-1945.

This article analyzes the role of media in helping comfort women along their journey towards justice and healing. The term media refers to all channels through which information is disseminated to the public – print, radio, television, film, advertisements, Internet, and new media such as text messaging. In this article, media also refers to individuals and groups making use of the various communication channels to disseminate information, such as journalists and broadcast networks. The media construct reality. They are responsible for the majority of the observations and experiences from which we build up our personal understandings of the world and how it works; much of our view of reality is based on media messages that have been pre-constructed and have attitudes, interpretations, and conclusions already built in (Pungente 2009).

Media for justice in this article refers to the role of media in helping the comfort women find justice through recognition by the Japanese government of the country's role in sexually enslaving the comfort women during the war (be it by mere admission verbally, by public apology from the Japanese government, or by granting compensation to the comfort women), and by making the world acknowledge the truth of the comfort women's experiences. Such an ideal is at the heart of what democratic states regard as the "Fourth Estate" – the press, a media institution related to governance that seeks to keep watch over those in power through scrutiny of possible abuse and misuse of the powers of public office (Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility 2007).

Media for healing is considered in terms of media's role in helping comfort women survivors speak out about what was once considered a taboo subject, and coming to terms with their grief and suffering.

By breaking through the shame and anguish that kept comfort women survivors silent for decades, their stories teach us many lessons about our shared past and even inspire others to speak out about similar ordeals. Their bravery in speaking up about their experiences has also helped shape the freedom that Filipino women enjoy today. There are valuable lessons to be

learned in their stories of pain, perseverance, and persistence to claim justice for themselves and others like them. The media play a critical role in opening the world's eyes to the reality of the situation. Public response to media coverage of the plight of comfort women shows that there is a collective concern for the violation of these women's human rights. Advocates for the justice and healing of comfort women continue to increase over time. This shows that people are not apathetic – they will respond to a press that stimulates the community without pandering to it, that inspires people to embrace their responsibilities without lecturing or hectoring them, that engages their better natures without sugarcoating ugly realities or patronizing their faults (Moyers 1996).

The table at the end of this article provides a brief historical account of the history of comfort women and their fight for justice – to be recognized as victims of war under the Japanese. It shows how significant socio-political changes took place as a result of comfort women survivors speaking out, which catapulted the issue into international discussions. The table also includes information on increasing public awareness over time as a result of media coverage.

This article looks specifically into the powerful role that media plays in helping former comfort women break free of the chains of their haunted past. Media has played and continues to play a significant role in raising the profile of this issue and influencing the former comfort women in the Philippines to share their stories in order to attain justice – not only for themselves, but also for the women who continue to suffer oppression and sexual exploitation today. Understanding the plight of these women who came before us will help present and future generations grasp more fully the current trends of female exploitation today (such as mail order brides, sex workers, etc.), as we come to terms with the experiences of our grandmothers or *lolas*, as the comfort women in the Philippines came to be called. Being elderly women, the former comfort women in the Philippines have been given the term of endearment *Lola*, the Filipino word for grandmother. According to Nelia Sancho (1998), an advocate for Filipina comfort women, survivors from other countries are also given the local term of endearment for grandmother, e.g. *halmoni* for Korean survivors, *ahma* for Taiwanese survivors.

By sharing the stories of our *Lolas*, the brave comfort women survivors, we send a message to the world that rape is never to be tolerated, and institutionalized, that organized rape such as that suffered by the comfort

women is absolutely unacceptable. This is a message that speaks strongly today, as it did during the war, to violators of human rights. As a staunch advocate for comfort women survivors put it:

The Comfort Women relive their experiences every time they speak them. But they speak them so that history will know and understand and document these acts, they speak them so that we may be aware of the consequences of war, they speak them so that we may rise above these acts and never let them occur again (Friends of Lolas blog 2007).

Brief history: media coverage of comfort women

The international community only took notice of the plight of comfort women in the 1990s, as survivors of comfort stations began to come forward and speak about their experiences. The slow unfurling of the plight of comfort women began in Korea, triggering a similar movement in the Philippines. Through public statements and suits filed against the Japanese government, survivors have repeatedly requested for Japan to own up to its responsibilities. They have called, and continue to call on the Japanese government to investigate and reveal the truth about its wartime conduct, acknowledge its war crimes, punish those responsible, issue apologies and pay compensation to all its victims, and educate younger generations about Japan's war crimes, so as to prevent their repetition (Yoshiaki 2000).

Media attention on comfort women was initially stirred in 1962 when Senda Kako, a journalist researching war for the Japanese newspaper *Mainichi Shimbun*, uncovered a previously censored wartime photograph showing two women wading in the Yellow River, whom he discovered to be comfort women (Yoshiaki 2000). He eventually published a book about this in 1973 (*Military Comfort Women*). It was verified and supported by other Korean journalists, but remained obscure for two decades. Other publications trickled in, and eventually the issue became a topic of fiction, documentaries, and other broadcast media, which prompted more comfort women to come forward, as documented in the book *True Stories of the Korean Comfort Women* by Keith Howard.

In 1979, Japanese director Yamatani Tetsuo released the film *Okinawa no harumoni* (*An Old Lady in Okinawa: Testimony of a Military Comfort Woman*). The film was about the life of a Korean woman living in Okinawa, Pae Pong Gi (1915-1991), who became the first Korean comfort woman

to be publicly identified. Before her death, Pae Pong Gi also appeared in a Korean documentary by Pak Sunam released in 1991, entitled *Chongshindae Arirang*.

International awareness began to grow as media was presenting more stories of former comfort women. Growing public attention was magnified in 1990 by the first widely told story of a comfort woman who made her case public: 67-year old Kim Hak Sun came forward to tell her story at a Korean Church Women United group gathering (Howard 1995). By December 1991, Kim and two other plaintiffs filed a lawsuit at the Tokyo District Court. They testified that they had been forcibly taken as comfort women by the Japanese military, for which they sought an apology and compensation from the Japanese government (Howard 1995).

Media coverage of the issue and increasing concern from the international community further elevated the comfort women issue on the international agenda. Many considered the demand for restitution as a symbol of “women’s liberation” and an “awakening of civic consciousness” (Barkan 2000).

In 1992, one of Japan’s leading newspapers, the *Asahi Shimbun*, published the Japanese archive documents obtained by Professor Yoshimi, a renowned Japanese historian and researcher, establishing the direct role of the Japanese military in maintaining a huge network of military brothels known as ‘Comfort Houses’. It was during this time that Japan’s Chief Cabinet Secretary Kato admitted that the Japanese Imperial Army was in some way involved in running military brothels. The Japanese admission of guilt was followed by a limited apology and immediate demands by activists for compensation of the victims.

It was also in 1992 that the comfort women issue was raised at the United Nations – at the Commission on Human Rights, the Working Group on Contemporary Forms of Slavery, and the Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities. NGOs advocating the cause of comfort women were formed around the world, such as the Task Force on Filipino Comfort Women in the Philippines and the Washington Coalition for Comfort Women Issues, based in the United States.

An international public hearing was held in Tokyo, also in 1992, where former comfort women and forced laborers testified about their

experiences. International law experts also met here to discuss the relevant international legal issues related to the plight of comfort women.

As media around the world covered the various stories on comfort women, those comfort women who remained silent were inspired to speak out. At the same time, more and more people who learned of their ordeal were passionate to help these women by supporting their cause, to help them find justice and healing. (See table at the end of this article for more information on media coverage of the issue.)

In September 1992, 65-year old Maria Rosa Luna Henson became the first Filipino comfort woman to speak out in the Philippines about her ordeal as a sex slave in Angeles, Pampanga. Since then, over a hundred other women victims from the Philippines have come forward to share their stories, inspired by the survivors they learned of through various media channels.

Through their courage and activism, survivors have forced the Japanese government and public opinion throughout Asia and the rest of the world to rethink the atrocities of war committed by Japan, and the debt incurred for the price that these women had to pay. We must make the stories of these former comfort women known now, before they pass away, least we leave the terrible experiences of a whole generation forgotten, and the lessons from those atrocities unlearned. Media plays a big role towards achieving this end – by recording their stories to ensure that future generations know the stories of the *lolas* and continue to pass on the lessons learned from their experiences.

Yoshimi Yoshiaki (2000), founding member of the Center for Research and Documentation on Japan's war responsibility, discusses the challenges in raising awareness on the plight of comfort women:

Japanese recollections of the war often downplay, if not neglect, the issue of comfort women, disregarding their victimization in terms of gender, ethnicity, and class. The dominant Japanese accounts of the war brand armed conflict as universally evil and equate suffering of Japanese with that of other Asians – this obscures the sexism, racism, and imperialism that spawned the comfort stations.

The manner in which comfort women are depicted by victimized nations neglects the true survivors' status as members of an oppressed

gender and/or class, and also ignores the discrimination they have been subjected to at home since the end of the war. Eager to attract or maintain Japanese development aid and investment, the postwar governments of Asian nations colonized or occupied by Japan during the war have often been reluctant to press issues of Japan's responsibilities to its victims. Survivors' public testimonies have not only challenged Japanese public memory but also forced other Asians to reconsider the official accounts that have shaped their memories of the war since 1945.

Through the years, media has been instrumental in educating the public about this important issue. Though media coverage of comfort women was initially weak, they have nonetheless influenced and continue to influence Filipino comfort women to come out with their stories. Media plays a critical role in educating others about this issue, pushing the stories of the comfort women further into the limelight. This drums up awareness and increased action for the plight of former comfort women.

Women in cultural shackles

There are certain cultural influences that forced comfort women to remain silent on their experiences of sexual slavery under the Japanese military during World War II, or prevented the full story from being told. Over the years, many people have had to bear certain burdens acquired through no fault of their own, such as that of being born a woman. Throughout history, cultural beliefs dictated by a patriarchal society have stifled women's lives. This is seen in the plight of a comfort woman, who has struggled between the dictates of the socio-political-cultural environment she has been born into, and finding ways to lead her own life, in her own terms.

Many of the former comfort women died during their enslavement or have passed away since the end of the war. Those who survived continued to suffer after the war from the trauma of their experience, into their old age and sometimes up to their death. Former comfort women must struggle to cope with the physical and emotional consequences of their enslavement, which include disease, debilitating injuries, sterility, and psychological trauma (Yoshiaki 2000). They have also faced discrimination and abuse in their families and communities because of their victimization, through no fault of their own, and so they continue to suffer decades after the war has ended.

Cultural beliefs are a major contributing factor to this long drawn out silence. Many comfort women will forever remain unknown, whether buried away in their foreign lands or places of exile, or still unwilling to stand up and demand for justice. Rape is not something one can easily talk about. Seeking justice does not come easily, especially since reputations and family honor are at stake. Rape victims have been known to end up feeling responsible for what has happened to them. With a high moral value placed on female virginity in Asian societies, rape meant defilement and condemnation to a life of isolation and alienation (Hicks 1995). Thus, the comfort women came out of their wartime experiences defiled, yet unable to accuse their abusers – they had everything to gain by keeping silent and everything to lose by making accusations (Hicks 1995). Cultural norms of the times they lived in meant that pretending this systematic brutalization had never taken place was in fact an act of kindness to the comfort women (Hicks 1995).

Culture thus served to imprison former comfort women into keeping silent about their past, lest they defile their name and that of their family.

The stigma of sexual assault has also kept comfort women in shackles, forcing them to keep silent. According to Maita Gomez of the Asian Centre for Women's Human Rights, victims of rape are mortified by a sense of utter degradation, by a feeling of desecration that cuts deep into the core of their being. Along with the feeling of isolation, Gomez says that victims of sexual assault also feel a great need to re-examine every detail of their experience. This is their way of seeking to expunge an unreasonable but nevertheless real sense of guilt, shame, and disgust (Gomez 2000). These symptoms and difficulties are even more pronounced for those who have experienced more brutal forms of sexual assault or repeated rape, like the comfort women.

For instance, in Korea, when the comfort women returned home, they were considered neither faithful nor chaste. Their families feared the ostracism they would suffer if others discovered the shameful past; the women became an extra burden, and there was little chance to marry them off (Howard 1995). In the Philippines, Cristeta Alcober was terrified to return to her hometown in Tacloban City. She was ashamed of what people would think of her upon discovering that she was raped by Japanese soldiers. Her fiancée abandoned her when he discovered this, as people told him that Cristeta was “a left-over of the Japanese” (Sancho 1998).

Media move Filipino comfort women to speak out

In the Philippines, the news about the existence of Filipino comfort women first appeared in the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* on March 10, 1992, inspired by a document unearthed by Representative Hideko Itoh of Japan's Diet – a medical report dated March 19, 1942 (Sajor 2000). The document spoke of a Japanese physician having conducted a medical examination on nineteen Filipino comfort women in Iloilo to prevent the spread of venereal disease among the Japanese soldiers, and included a sketch where a comfort house was situated near the plaza in Iloilo City (Sancho 1998). This spurred the establishment of an NGO, the Task Force on Filipino Comfort Women, to launch a search of the remaining survivors and raise awareness on the issue. The campaign included a radio appeal in August 1992 calling on the former comfort women to come out and tell their stories through a telephone hotline. The Task force did not know whether there were still living survivors in the Philippines (Sancho 2007).

The first to respond was 65-year old Maria Rosa Luna Henson or *Lola Rosa* as she is fondly called. A month after sharing her story with the Task Force in September 1992, the Task Force members organized a press conference and her public testimony was in the front pages of most of the newspapers and carried by television news, including the Japanese media (Sajor 2000). The Task Force lobbied the Philippine government to investigate the issue further. Eventually more women came forward to share their stories, inspired by *Lola Rosa's* example – including *Lola Gertrude Balisalisa*, *Lola Tomasa Salinog*, *Lola Amonita Balajadia*, and *Lola Anastacia Cortes*. All of them responded to appeals and testimonials of former comfort women that they heard on the radio. In April 1993, eighteen Filipino women plaintiffs, accompanied by Task Force coordinators Nelia Sancho and Indai Sajor filed a lawsuit at the Tokyo District Court of Japan in what is considered a step toward claiming justice for women victims (Sancho 2007).

It is estimated that there are about 400 Filipina survivors of sexual slavery documented since 1992 through various organizations supporting the plight of the Filipino comfort women victims of Japanese military wartime sexual atrocities (Sancho 2007). Around one-fourth of these former Filipino comfort women have passed away without seeing the light of justice for their unimaginable sufferings during the war (Sancho 2007). But those still alive continue to express their strong demand for official state apology and legal compensation from the Japanese government. However, many are sick, weak

and about to die (Sancho 2007).

As more victims of the Japanese sexual atrocities during the war came to share their stories, three groups of comfort women and other victims of Japanese military sexual violence were organized in the Philippines. LILA Pilipina Lolos was founded in 1994 and consists of about 175 documented survivors (Sancho 2007). Malaya Lolos was founded in 1997 and consists of more than 100 documented survivors of mass rape at the Bahay ng Pulang Lupa, or the “Red House”, in Candaba, Pampanga (Sancho 2009). Lolos Kampanyera para sa Kapayapaan at Kumpensasyon (Grandmothers Campaigning for Peace and Compensation) was organized in 2000 with an initial list of about 135 survivors (Sancho 2007). The main members are exclusive to the three groups. However, eight members of the Lila Pilipina are now members of the Lolos Kampanyera, mainly for geographical practicalities – six members are based in the provinces of Davao, Iloilo and Capiz, and have lost communication with the Lila Pilipina staff, and opted to participate instead in the activities of the Lolos Kampanyera group (Sancho 2009). The activities of these organizations spurred further media attention on the issue, and encouraged other former Filipino comfort women to speak out.

According to Nelia Sancho, Coordinator of the Asian Women Human Rights Council (AWHRC) Manila office, Chairperson of LILA Pilipina, and Coordinator of Lolos Kampanyera, the Philippine media has played a crucial role in emboldening the Filipina survivors of Japanese military sexual slavery to speak out over the last 15 years. This is particularly so in the early period - from 1991, when Korean survivor Kim Hak Sun was featured in Philippine news, and during the years 1992-1997, which Sancho regards as the peak periods for public attention on the comfort women issue (Sancho 2007). It is clear that media has played an important role in encouraging former comfort women in the Philippines to seek justice and healing in one way or another.

Lola Rosa decided to speak about her experiences as a comfort woman when she heard Nelia Sancho and a colleague from Gabriela, a Philippine women’s group working to free women from all forms of economic and political oppression and discrimination, sexual violence and abuse, neglect and denial of their health and reproductive rights, discussing sex slaves of the Japanese army on Philippine AM radio DZRH in August 1992 with broadcaster Ducky Paredes. (Ducky Paredes started out as a radio broadcaster on AM radio. He has been writing for Philippine publications *Malaya* and *Abante* since 1993.) Lola Rosa recognized herself as one such “sex slave”,

however, she did not have the courage to contact them right away due to the shame and stigma of being raped. After hearing another radio interview with Sancho about comfort women, Lola Rosa decided to contact Ducky Paredes. He brought Lola Rosa to the Task Force on Filipino Comfort Women to be interviewed. After Lola Rosa shared her ordeal as a “comfort woman” and other facets of the violence and exploitation at different stages in her life, she was asked what she wanted to do. She said if there was a possibility to make the Japanese government accept their responsibility for the crime of sexual enslavement of young girls like her, she would like to press for the claim for compensation (Sancho 2007). Sancho and other members of the Task Force warned Lola Rosa of the publicity that would follow the steps needed to course her claim through a legal lawsuit, and the public hearings to pressure the Japan Diet to file a draft post-war compensation bill.

Lola Rosa thought this over, and a month later, she made the firm decision to press for legal action against the Japanese government in order to claim for compensation and an apology. On 12 September 1992, the Task Force on Filipino Comfort Women-AWHRC organized a press conference. Here, Lola Rosa shared her experience in World War II, and demanded for compensation and an apology from the Japanese government. It was a well-attended press conference with journalists from the local and international media. Lola Rosa became an instant sensation. She was, after all, the first Filipina survivor to come out in decades - in fact, almost 50 years after World War II ended (Sancho 2007).

Many other survivors started coming out soon after Lola Rosa, as a result of the consequent press coverage. In 1993, a lawsuit involving eighteen Filipina survivor plaintiffs was filed in April 1993. Then, in September 1993, another twenty-eight survivors followed. Widespread media coverage on Filipino comfort women by both the local and foreign news agencies followed these events. (For samples of news coverage, see listing on M. Evelina Galang’s blog, Friends of Lolos http://labanforthelolas.blogspot.com/2007_09_09_archive.html.)

The plaintiff survivors had court hearings for the lawsuit in Japan for a period of 7 years – from 1993 to 2000. This provided a good source of narratives for the media to print or broadcast: there was a television soap opera done on stories of the comfort women; the narratives of the Filipina survivors became a popular topic for many television programs (Sancho 2007).

A series of TV documentaries by the Probe Team was broadcast on the GMA network: an episode entitled “Healing the Wounds” was broadcast in 1992, featuring Lola Rosa Henson; “Japina” was broadcast in 1995, which was about a play of the same title (“Japina”) being staged at the Cultural Center of the Philippines, portraying the life and history of a Filipino family who had undergone three generations of Japanese exploitation: from comfort women, through the present-day *japayukis*; “A Lost Cause” was broadcast in 1994, and was about Japanese Prime Minister Murayama’s failure to give any attention to the comfort women issue during his visit to the Philippines; “Comfort Women Divided,” broadcast in 1996, was about the offer by the Asian Women’s Fund of 18,500 US dollars for each comfort woman and how it divided the Filipina comfort women – for Lola Rosa, it meant salvation from poverty and the end of her long struggle, while for others, it was but an attempt by the Japanese Government to evade full legal responsibility for its war crimes; “Comfort Gay,” broadcast in 2000, featured Walter Dempster’s story as the last living comfort gay in Manila (Probe Productions 2009).

When the Asian Women’s Fund was offered by the Japanese government to Filipina survivors, this became another series of sensational coverage as the Filipina survivors led by Lola Rosa decided to receive the Fund against the wishes of the legal redress support movement – another source of rich narratives came out of this controversy. The Japanese government established the Asian Women’s Fund (AWF) in 1995 to offer compensation to “comfort women”. From the perspective of groups in Japan and elsewhere that are demanding state compensation, the AWF is an expedient designed to evade Japan’s legal responsibility (<http://www.jpri.org/publications/workingpapers/wp77.html>). In its maiden presentation on the GMA Network of *Probe Files* in 2003 entitled “Bahay na Pula,” broadcast journalist Cheche Lazaro tackled the issue as she discussed the struggle of the brave lolas, examined why the international court ruling remained unenforced and what the Philippine government had done to help Filipina sex slaves secure the formal apology and damages which they sought from Japan and which the court awarded them two years prior to the airing of the show (Probe Productions 2009).

The film *Markova: Comfort Gay* directed by Gil M. Portes was released in 2000, which told the true story of Filipino-Jamaican Walter Dempster, Jr, otherwise known as Walterina Markova. The film recounts Markova’s childhood – growing up with an abusive older brother, his life as a stage performer and cross dresser, and being forced into prostitution along

with his friends during the Japanese occupation of the Philippines. The story goes that after watching a TV documentary about the Japanese occupation of the Philippines and seeing the comfort women share their stories, Markova decided to tell his own painful story to reporter Loren Legarda. The film brought to light a long-hidden chapter in gay history and recounted the story of a nation's struggle for self-determination and its own internal battles involving intolerance, conformity and expectation; it also documented the ultraconservatism of the 1930s, the horrors of the occupation, the travails of the Marcos years and the long struggle toward liberation (Makilan 2005). The film was included in the 2002 Seattle Lesbian and Gay Film Festival and 26th San Francisco International Lesbian and Gay Film Festival.

In his old age, Markova stayed at the Home for the Golden Gays in Pasay City, where other older gays who have been victims of society's discrimination also took refuge (Makilan 2005). As of this writing, the author has not found in-depth information on comfort gays in the Philippines. But according to Nelia Sancho, comfort women survivors who have now passed away recounted stories about comfort gays being held in the Japanese army's garrisons.

In 2007, the *Lolas Para sa Kapayapaan at Kumpensasyon*, the Buhay Foundation for Women and the Girl Child, and the Asian Women Human Rights Council published a book documenting part of the third batch of Filipino comfort women who have come forward with their stories. The book referred to is Nelia Sancho's (ed.) *Justice With Healing: An Anthology on the Lolos Kampanyera Survivors of WWII Japanese Military Sexual Slavery in the Philippines* (2007). It shows that more comfort women have broken their silence encouraged by media. In 2003, for example, Aurora Alba Agrasada from Roxas City, Capiz Province was tuned in to the local AM *Radyo Bombo* when she heard Cora Bermejo from Roxas City urging former victims of sexual slavery by the Japanese army during WWII to share their experiences and demand justice. Lola Aurora was encouraged to share her story by this and by TV features she had seen on comfort women. Excelsa Delgado Apolinario from Pontevedra, Capiz heard the same appeal on the radio. She, too, was encouraged to speak out because of this radio broadcast and stories on comfort women that she read about in newspapers.

According to Nelia Sancho, there are many such stories that have yet to be documented. She said that all of the comfort women survivors who decided to speak about their ordeal expressed relief at being able to do so –

they considered this as a major part of their healing. Whether or not they receive compensation or a formal apology from the Japanese government, it is enough for the survivors to find others like themselves with whom they can relate. They are comforted by public recognition of their traumatic experiences, which they regard as a step towards justice. Knowing that they have supporters to push for their cause makes their battle worth all the blood, sweat and tears of their long and winding journey.

In July 2007, comfort women topped the international and local news media once again following the passage of the US House of Representatives resolution 121, calling on the Japanese government to formally acknowledge and apologize for its role in the coercion of women into sex slavery during World War II (<http://www.support121.org/> accessed 9 October 2007). Women's rights activist M. Evelina Galang, who has been instrumental in lobbying for House resolution 121, has stressed the significance of this act. In her blog on the issue of comfort women, particularly Filipino comfort women, Galang said:

"I witnessed our Congress state for the record, that Japanese Imperial Army abducted and enslaved over 200,000 women and girls during World War II. No matter how much the government of Japan denies this truth, we now have a historical record...challenging Japan's denial. The women have been standing before the Japanese courts, before gates of their embassies and at conferences trying to set the record straight, but Japan has literally ignored them. Now the U.S. has gone on record about this human rights violation and many other nations are well on their way to contributing to this historical account so the women's experiences cannot be washed away.

"...passing House Resolution 121 in the U.S. Congress...has brought awareness and light to this subject matter, it is an avenue for educating those who have not heard of the plight of the former 'Comfort Women.' The story has been kept a secret by the women and their families -- sometimes out of shame, and at times it is because Japan has worked hard to deny and cover up the truth. But for the most part, this issue has not had a venue or reason to be taught outside of the small communities of activists like Gabriela Network, Babae and Filipina for Rights and Empowerment. But U.S. involvement has brought this issue forward. Everyone should be involved. This is a human rights issue. It is about people and what we have done to and allowed to do to one another.

The passing of House Resolution 121 has inspired other nations to make like resolutions -- among them Canada's Motion 291 and the Philippines House Resolution 124" (Galang 2007).

New media provides leverage for the Lolas

The proliferation of new media (i.e. websites, blogs, online forums) raising awareness on comfort women has provided further impetus for social and cultural change. The wide reach of the Internet means that more people learn about the plight of former comfort women at a faster speed. New media are used more as a platform for awareness-raising, to transmit the texts or narratives of the Lolas. For instance, news features, images and video material on comfort women may be downloaded from the Internet (from website like youtube.com, flickr, geocities). There are also many websites and blogs advocating the rights of comfort women, and these sites continue to grow. *The Friends of Lolas* blog organized and managed by M. Evelina Galang, for instance, advocates the struggle of the Lolas for justice. It seeks to educate the public on the "comfort women" issue, to launch initiatives for the inclusion of the truth of "comfort women" issues in our history, and to campaign against historical repetitions of militarism and wars of aggression (Friends of Lolas blog, <http://labanforthelolas.blogspot.com> accessed 17 October 2007).

The rise of the World Wide Web has led to greater efficiency in communicating this issue on a wider scale, bringing together like-minded groups and individuals to take action for justice for the *Lolas*. For example, a website and e-mail brigade was set up to solicit support for a petition pushing for US House Resolution 121, to attain justice for comfort women. The Comfort Women House Resolution Petition garnered over 2,200 international signatures – House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and the House of Representatives, in a unanimous voice vote passed House Resolution 121 on 30 July 2007 (Go Petition 2007). This sort of achievement would have taken much longer, or perhaps may not have happened at all, without the Internet. The rapid advancements being made in information-technology, particularly with regards to the World Wide Web, is helping to drum up more awareness on Filipino comfort women amongst Filipinos and others around the world.

In 2009, Amnesty International launched an online campaign in Australia to highlight the hidden tragedy of comfort women (www.amnesty.org.au/comfort) as a run up to August 15th, the anniversary of World War II's end. People were asked to create their own butterfly, the campaign's symbol

for hope. Each online butterfly created was accompanied by a message to Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd urging him to join almost all other Allied countries in calling the Japanese Government to account for their role in sexual enslavement during the war. Over 18,000 Australians sent butterflies to their leaders telling them it's time for Australia to officially pass a motion urging the Japanese Government to recognize and compensate survivors of 'comfort stations'. This campaign helped educate thousands of people beyond Australia about comfort women – aside from the website, the butterflies appeared across social networks Facebook and Twitter.

While traditional media channels such as print, radio, television and film directly involved the participation of comfort women survivors, new media channels are used by the younger generations supporting their cause as part of advocacy activities. Aside from numerous blogs and websites on comfort women, information about the issue is also sweeping across Facebook, Twitter and other social networking sites. A search for “comfort women” on Facebook shows at least 1,400 results, with half of the results being linked to the World War II comfort women issue that this article discusses. Searching for images related to “comfort women” on Google shows over 17 million results.

New technology and the opportunities presented by the Internet is increasing awareness on the issue and gathering more support for the cause like never before. According to Evelina Galang, who has done research on comfort women for over 10 years and manages the blog *Friends of Lolas*, media channels have certainly played a big role in achieving justice and healing for the Lolas. After a visit with the Lolas of LILA Pilipina in August 2008, Galang reflected on the positive change in their demeanor and behavior over the years, noting their transformation “from victims to survivors, to heroines to wild and wise characters and counselors”.

The value of media in the Lolas' lives

The cases presented in this article have shown how media has played a crucial role in encouraging Filipino comfort women survivors to speak about their experiences. From the shrouds of secrecy that the first comfort women from Korea and the Philippines first tentatively emerged to speak of their experiences during the war, communication on this issue has grown in leaps and bounds. In the Philippines, radio served as the main stimulus for comfort women to come forward with their stories, as they heard other

survivors share their experiences, beginning with *Lola Rosa*. Today, shame is no longer a major issue to contend with for the aging and ailing survivors. They are eager to share their stories, hoping for justice and reparation, for the mere acknowledgement by the Japanese government that they were in fact forced into becoming comfort women. By speaking out, they yearn, at the very least, for healing from the torment of their silence.

Media is an essential and a powerful force that can move others to act in an attempt to right what is wrong, and is very much capable of breaking the deafening silence of injustice. The opportunities, ideas, and changes they stir up can provide, as Nelia Sancho says, “an alternative space, a horizon that asks and invites us to think, to feel, to challenge, to connect and dare a dream.” More women are responding to this challenge, daring to dream, to step out of the social and cultural imprisonment that they were forced to fall victim to.

It has taken the rise of feminism among Asian women to bring the comfort women issue to the attention of the world. The issue is being spearheaded mostly by women activists. In countries where the women’s movement is relatively inactive, or where there are no leading figures to espouse the cause, comfort women remain a non-issue. The absence of champions was responsible for the long lack of interest. Politics and government remain male-dominated everywhere. Asian women may seem to have accepted their fate passively for millennia – but those days are passing. The revolutionary idea that women too are human, have rights, and can demand justice is taking hold. The energy and dedication with which the Filipinas steamrolled their own reluctant government is an illustration of the power of a cause over inertia and vested interests (Hicks 1995).

No doubt, media is a powerful and influential tool as it serves to drum up awareness on the issue and inspire former comfort women to speak out for justice and healing. One need only look at Nelia Sancho’s proud collection of media clippings and TV footage on the comfort women interviews by media from the Philippines and other Asian countries over a span of almost 15 years. She says that it is hardly a complete collection of Philippine media coverage of the issue, but it gives a very good sense of how the media has interpreted the *Lolas’* narratives. Sancho commends the local and regional media for helping the Filipino comfort women in their quest for justice and healing. These include:

- An article in the *Japan Times*, published on 11 August 1996, entitled “One sex-slave group will let members accept fund”, about the controversial Asian Women’s Fund being offered to comfort women in the Philippines
- An article in the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, published on 7 June 1996, entitled “Payments for Japan sex slaves rejected”, about the group LILA Pilipina’s rejection of a payout to comfort women survivors, and instead seeking an apology from Japanese Premier Ryutaro Hashimoto
- An article in the *Japan Times*, published on 12 May 1996, entitled “Textbooks to tell of sex slaves – comfort women go on syllabus at junior high schools”
- An article in *Manila Standard Today*, published on 6 February 1998, entitled “Lolas return apology letter to Japanese”
- An article in *Manila Standard Today*, published on 18 December 1996, entitled “Lila comfort women vow rallies at Japan embassy”.
- An article in the *Japan Times*, published on 17 May 1997, entitled “Wartime sex slave recounts experiences for the court”
- The *Friends of Lolos* blog (<http://labanforthelolos.blogspot.com>) provides links to a comprehensive list of international media coverage of the comfort women’s fight for justice
- Using online search engines will also bring up countless sources of news and information on the issue of “comfort women”

Media should continue to keep an eye on the issue of comfort women - it should not merely be relegated to the past. The lives of our Lolos are intricately woven with our own. Beyond helping the Lolos in their journey towards justice and healing, media have also shaped the public’s understanding of the issue. By understanding the Lolos’ experiences and learning more about them, we can develop solutions to other issues reproduced under the structures of sexual exploitation. This could help, for instance, in better understating and dealing with generations of overseas migrant workers based on the internalization of motherhood and femininity: our grandmothers were “comfort women” in the 1930s-1940s, our mothers were involved in sex tourism and mail-order bridal services in the 1970-80s, and now our daughters are entertainers and caregivers (Azurin & Mahiwo 2007). We must slip out of the traditional approach which handles the Japanese military “comfort women” issue as a past issue and recognize that it still affects us today – easy to locate but unseen in our history as it is reproduced in ‘everyday life’ (Azurin & Mahiwo 2007).

We must not forget the stories of the *Lolas*, and how their lives touch each and every one of us. We see in each of them the characteristics of our own loving grandmothers. It is difficult to imagine how their childhood and teenage years were wrought with unimaginable suffering. What courage, strength, and determination it takes for anyone to take justice into their own hands – by enduring lawsuit after lawsuit, holding protests at Japanese embassies worldwide, and going the extra mile to make their voices heard. Their persistence and perseverance of these elderly, ailing women puts the younger apathetic generations to shame.

For decades, the claims and cries of the comfort women survivors were ignored by governments – including those of the Philippines and the Republic of Korea for a time. Many activists and organizations have toiled for years, and still push on, to continue the fight of the *Lolas*.

Time is literally running out, as the few remaining comfort women are in their 70s, 80s and 90s, many of them ailing and bedridden. Thousands of them have perished without any formal recognition of their plight and have had to live with being slandered as prostitutes and willing partners in the vicious exploitation they fell victim to (Justice for Comfort Women, <http://www.justiceforcomfortwomen.org/?pg=background> accessed 16 October 2007). Theirs is a generation that is dying. Will we allow their stories to be left in the shadows, to die with them? The media must always help us remember.

Chronology of Key Dates and Events Highlighting the Issue of Comfort Women

DATE	EVENT
1894-1895	Sino-Japanese War
1904-1905	Russo-Japanese War
1905	Korea is made a protectorate of Japan
1910	Japan annexes Korea
1914-1918	World War I

Source: Washington Coalition for Comfort Women Issues, Inc. (WCCW)

NOTE: Underlined text refers to events that garnered particular publicity and/or media interest related to the comfort women issue.

1925	Japan ratifies the Convention for the Suppression of Traffic in Women and Children, with reservations as to the application of the Convention to its colonies, i.e. Korea, Taiwan and Kwantung and as to the setting of the age of minority, making it 18 instead of 21.
1927	Japan withdraws its aforesaid reservation about the age of minority and accepts the age of 21 set out in the Convention.
1931	Japan invades Manchuria.
1932	Japan sets up military controlled comfort houses/stations in Shanghai.
1937	Japan takes Nanking in what is notoriously referred to as the “Rape of Nanking”, also marking the beginning of the systematic establishment of military comfort stations in China and elsewhere.
1937-1945	Asian and Pacific War
1937-1942	The Japanese military sets up a network of comfort stations wherever it sends its’ troops.
1942	Japan occupies the Philippines.
1943	Cairo Declaration refers to the status of Korea indicating that it should be free and independent. Moscow Declaration foreshadows war crimes trials at the close of war and again refers to the status of Korea.
1945	Potsdam Declaration foreshadows the creation of an international war crimes tribunal for Japanese and German war criminals and further defines crimes against peace, war crimes and crimes against humanity. The Cairo, Moscow and Potsdam Declarations indict Japan and Germany for their war of aggression,

<p>September 2</p> <p>November 15</p>	<p>war crimes, crimes against humanity and crimes against peace, during World War II. The United Nations Organization is established.</p> <p>Japan signs the instrument of unconditional surrender, and World War 2 ends.</p> <p>The Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces submits his report (released by the allied translator and interpreter section), entitled: "Amenities in the Japanese Armed Forces", which contains detailed documentation on comfort stations of the Japanese military.</p>
<p>1946-1948</p>	<p>Allied nations also create "satellite" tribunals in Asia and the Pacific to try Japanese war criminals (Classes "B" and "C").</p>
<p>January 19, 1946</p>	<p>Proclamation establishing the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (IMTFE) to try Japanese war criminals (Class "A").</p>
<p>1948</p>	<p>The Batavia Trial is held in Indonesia, includes a trial of Japanese military personnel who forced about 35 Dutch women to become Comfort Women.</p>
<p>1951</p>	<p>The San Francisco Peace Conference is held. The treaty of San Francisco between Japan and the Allied Powers is signed.</p>
<p>1956</p>	<p>Japan is admitted as a member of the United Nations.</p>
<p>1965</p>	<p>Japan enters into a bilateral treaty with the Republic of Korea (though not Comfort Women's claims).</p>
<p>1970-1980</p>	<p>There is considerable public unrest and opposition to the 1965 treaty in the Republic of Korea.</p>

November	<p>testifies in public that she had been forcibly taken as a Comfort Woman by the Japanese military.</p> <p>Yoshida Seiji, Japanese ex-labor mobilization director, of Yamaguchi Prefecture confirms in the newspaper <i>Hokkaido Shimbun</i> that he took part in wartime employment, by force and deceit, of Comfort Women by the Japanese military.</p> <p>Mr. Watanabe, Press Director, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan, states on NHK Television that evidence was insufficient to warrant an investigation.</p>
December	<p>A lawsuit is filed by Kim Hak-soon and others against Japan, in the Tokyo District Court, for damages and other compensation.</p> <p>The Government of the Republic of Korea requests the Japanese Government to conduct an investigation.</p> <p>The Japanese Government initiates an investigation.</p>
December 12	<p>January 1992</p> <p>January 13</p> <p>The Asahi Shimbun publishes the Japanese archive documents obtained by Professor Yoshimi, a well-known Japanese historian and researcher, establishing the direct role of the Japanese military in maintaining a huge network of military brothels known as 'Comfort Houses'.</p> <p>Chief Cabinet Secretary Kato admits for the first time that the Japanese Imperial Army was in some way involved in running military brothels.</p>

<p>February</p> <p>May</p> <p>July</p>	<p>The Comfort Women issue is raised at the United Nations Commission on Human Rights.</p> <p>The Comfort Women issue is raised at the United Nations Working Group on Contemporary Forms of Slavery.</p> <p>The Task Force on Filipino Comfort Women (an NGO) is formed in the Philippines.</p>
<p>August</p> <p>September</p> <p>December</p>	<p>The Japanese Government makes public findings releasing 127 documents admitting the involvement of the Japanese military in organizing military brothels.</p> <p>The Comfort Women issue is raised at the United Nations Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities.</p> <p>Lola Rosa, the first Filipino surviving Comfort Woman, speaks out in public.</p> <p>Washington Coalition for Comfort Women Issues, Inc. is formed.</p> <p>An international public hearing is held in Tokyo. Former Comfort Women and forced laborers testify about their experiences. International law experts meet to discuss the relevant international legal issues.</p>
<p>February 1993</p> <p>May</p>	<p>The Comfort Women issue is once again raised at the United Nations Commission on Human Rights.</p> <p>The Comfort Women issue is once again</p>

<p>August 4</p> <p>August</p> <p>November</p>	<p>raised at the United Nations Working Group on Contemporary Forms of Slavery. The Japanese Government once again repeats its stand that all claims have been settled under bilateral treaties and that Japan is not required legally to pay compensation to individual victims.</p> <p>The Japanese Government issues a carefully worded statement admitting an unspecified role in the military brothels, yet rejecting legal responsibility for them.</p> <p>Japan continues to contend the brothels were not a “system” and not a war crime nor crime against humanity.</p> <p>The Comfort Women issue is raised at the United Nations Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities.</p> <p>Twenty-four members of US Congress write to Japanese Prime Minister Hosokawa urging his government to investigate the sexual slavery of Comfort Women.</p>
<p>April 1994</p> <p>June</p>	<p>The United Nations Commission of Human Rights appoints Ms Radhika Coomaraswamy as Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, with a special brief to investigate crimes against Comfort Women.</p> <p>Large protests on behalf of Comfort Women and other victims on Japanese war crimes confront Japan’s emperor Akihito during his visit to San Francisco, Washington, DC, Atlanta, and New York City.</p>

	<p>that the “Comfort Women system was created and administered by the Japanese State and Imperial Army and implemented by related authorities” and that “immediately after the war the Japanese government issued orders to destroy or burn all evidence...on Comfort Women.” The Bar Association recommends that Japanese government pay individual compensation and takes other measures.</p>
March	<p>United Nations Commission on the Status of Women NGO workshop adopts resolution supporting Comfort Women.</p>
July	<p>The Japanese Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama offers formal personal apologies to Comfort Women.</p> <p>The Japanese Government announces establishment of Asian Women’s Fund.</p> <p>The United Nations Commission on Human Rights 47th Session adopts resolution on the Prevention of Crime & the Treatment of Offenders. Japan Times reports that the Justice Ministry is “hiding war crime records” concerning comfort women. The Ministry states that in order to protect the privacy of convicted war criminals, it will refuse to release records of public trials of persons accused of crimes against Comfort Women.</p>
August	<p>Japanese Prime Minister Murayama offers what the Washington Post describes as “a near apology” for wartime</p>

<p>September</p>	<p>atrocities against China, Korea, and other Asian nations.</p> <p>Second version of the “Private fund” plan begins fundraising. This version offers payments to individual Comfort Women survivors, but rejects government responsibility for the system of military brothels, and rejects charges that the Comfort Women system was a war crime or crime against humanity as defined in customary norms of international law. Comfort Women and support organizations strongly criticize the “Private Fund” plan.</p> <p>United Nations’ Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing adopts resolution supporting Comfort Women, despite intense lobbying effort by Japanese government representatives.</p>
<p>January 1996</p> <p>April</p> <p>August</p>	<p>The United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against women, Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, issues detailed report on crimes against Comfort Women to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights.</p> <p>The United Nations Commission on Human Rights, bowing to intense pressure from Japanese representatives, adopts “compromise” resolution that “takes note” of the Coomaraswamy report. Observers from NGOs contend that the resolution is calculated to evade Japanese state responsibility for war crimes and crimes against humanity.</p> <p>The Special Rapporteur of the United Nations Sub-Commission on Human</p>

<p>October</p> <p>December</p>	<p>and other teaching materials present history in “a fair balanced manner... also victims must be compensated and that they should submit a report of implementing U.N.’s recommendations by June, 2006.”</p> <p>Judge Henry Kennedy dismissed the Comfort Women class action lawsuit filed in Sep. 2000.</p> <p>Hague Tribunal (Mock) held in Netherlands; Japan’s war criminals were prosecuted.</p>
<p>May 2002</p> <p>December</p>	<p>The Asian Symposium Demanding Liquidation of Japan’s Past held in Pyongyang, North Korea.</p> <p>The appellate Hearing on the Comfort Women was held at the D.C. Circuit Court.</p>
<p>June 2003</p>	<p>Judges Douglas H. Ginsburg, Judith W. Rogers, and Davis T. Tatel dismissed the appeal of the Comfort Women.</p> <p>Cong. Lane Evans (D-IL) introduced H. Con. Res. 226, urging Japan should formally issue a clear and unambiguous apology for the Comfort Women issues.</p>
<p>July 2004</p> <p>December</p>	<p>United States Supreme Court issued an order in the Comfort Women case <i>Hwang v. Japan</i>; Petition granted, judgment vacated and case remanded for further consideration in light of <i>Republic of Austria v. Altmann</i>.</p> <p>A petition was filed with the Supreme Court, and won. When the Supreme Court decided <i>Altmann v. Austria</i> last</p>

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