Forcibly Taken Korean Military ‘Comfort Women’ 4: 
History Rewritten through Memories

Testimony Team in Korean Committee for the Women's 
International War Crimes Tribunal 2000 for the Trial of 
Japanese Military Sexual Slavery at the Korean Council for the 
Women Drafted for Japanese Military Sexual Slavery

Translated by the UCI Translation Team

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Preface for Revised Edition

It has been ten years since *Forcibly Taken Korean Military ‘Comfort Women’ 4: History Rewritten through Memories* was first published. In publishing this revised edition of this collection of testimonies, I would like to look back upon the changes and progress made in the research on the victims’ testimonies and oral histories, as well as the issues surrounding the Japanese military ‘comfort women’ over the past ten years.

Since the 1980s, there has been a gradual increase in yearning for the democratization of Korean society. It is within this climate that “writing history from below” has naturally taken shape. This has been expressed by a variety of flows, including the student movement and the labor movement, and feminism and the movement for “coming to terms with the past” (*hwagae ch’ongsan*). In this social milieu, there is an interest in the question of subaltern, which has only scarcely been represented in the history-writing of Korea. In addition, the influence of new trends of history-writing, such as ordinary life history, cultural history, and micro history on testimony research is undeniable. Thinking back upon the Testimony Team in Korean Committee for the Women's International War Crimes Tribunal 2000 for the Trial of Japanese Military Sexual Slavery (hereafter, ‘2000 Women’s International Tribunal’) at the Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Japanese Military Sexual Slavery was located in this atmosphere of those times. Representatives from more than ten Asian countries
convened at the '2000 Women's Tribunal, an unprecedented international citizen's tribunal. For the purpose of documenting the facts-finding, the testimony team was launched in April of 1999. There were approximately thirty researchers in total who voluntarily participated in the collection of testimonies, many of whom worked tenaciously until the last phase of publication of this book. I think the reason this collection of testimonies was able to suggest new methods after its publication in 2001 was that the testimony team incessantly tried to answer many unexpected challenges and questions they encountered. In taking advantage of this opportunity to publish the revised edition of the book, I would like to describe the process and learnings during this time, ten years after the original publication.

This collection of testimonies posed questions regarding the survivors’ subjectivities and thus suggested a new way of survivor representation. In this collection, while the testifiers (survivors) are portrayed as survivors, they are also represented as victims, grandmother(old) women, and individuals with names. The representation of the victims as such varied and dynamic subjects enabled us to liberate them from the engrained stereotypical images that our society held of them at the time. It seemed that through this collection of testimonies, the identity of ‘comfort women’ as victims was acknowledged, and, at the same time, the dominant idea that the survivors’ identities were unquestionably victims in one hundred percent of the cases and thus static could be deconstructed to a certain degree. These victim-survivors of violence are portrayed
without shedding a tear, being seen as an enlarged full-face portrait instead of a side silhouette in this collection. We tried to capture each survivor’s esprit and each woman’s most beautiful traits. It was an invaluable opportunity, in my view, to represent the women who diverge from the frozen image of “victims holding much han (resentment)” in Korean society at that time.

This perspective was vital, as it enabled the testimony team to construct a framework through which the speakers’ testimonies could be heard and elucidated. For instance, only when we recognize their own subjectivities can we discover that many did not reveal their past as ‘comfort women’ even to their own children, not because they were ashamed of the defilement of their chastity, but rather because they took a proactive means to protect their children, as well as themselves, from society. It was the society who clung to the sacredness of chastity, not these women. In this way, these women are not merely victims; they have been reborn as high-spirited survivors who have lived through a rough and forlorn period of Korean modern history. While the ‘comfort women’ survivors are a metaphor for all the Korean women who have endured colonization and war, could not this new image of them provide us with an opportunity to reinterpret the identity of contemporary Korean women and of Koreans?

From the perspective of postcolonialism, focusing on the subaltern’s experience and testimony has become one of the methods through which colonial history can be reviewed. This method does not heed the voice that was unified by an ethnically homogeneous people’s yearning for liberation, nor is it the ignition of
proletariat class positionality as seen from the Marxist perspective. Rather, as Gayatri Spivak proclaims, we need to acknowledge that we do not have a methodology, the right perspective, for listening to that voice. It is the task of decolonization to establish a subjectivity that is re/defined by a overdetermined positionality that includes class, national identity, and gender. This task is not about confronting or criticizing imperialism; rather, it should be developing a consciousness and critique ‘from within oneself.’ And we must seek a ‘rewriting history’ through such a voice.

Although the above mentioned discoveries by the testimony team about the survivors’ subjectivity could have been influenced by existing postcolonialism theory and feminism, I contend that many aspects of this perspective were in fact shaped by the encounters with the survivors. Should I say that when the testimony team put aside their biases and conventional beliefs, the survivors’ authentic selves were revealed? In this respect, the testimony research project may be linked with the attitude of Zen. To break away from the fixed image of victims does not mean condoning or reducing the magnitude of their suffering. Rather, it is the opposite. The suffering of the Japanese military’s ‘comfort women’ did not end nor peak with their rape at the ‘comfort stations’. Some victims were never able to live life afterwards with a vigorous spirit; some, as women, were never able to give birth to a child or receive love from a man; some have borne witness to the continuous suffering of living in secret, extreme poverty and with compromised health. From these testimonies, we can see that suffering from being a ‘comfort woman’ was personal, multifaceted, and ongoing into the present as well.
With that in mind, the dominant perspective in our society that merely focuses on the rapes these women suffered at the ‘comfort station’ has perhaps been the product of the patriarchal view that recognizes their sufferings only in terms of chastity or sexuality. The rapes these women suffered as ‘comfort women’ are more than a crime against their chastity; it was a crime against humanity, and should be more rigorously analyzed as a structural product of colonialism, the patriarchal system, and militarism. There are multilayered dimensions in the organized crime of the Japanese military sexual slavery system—the satisfying of men’s sexual desire for the militarist war, misogyny under patriarchy, and instrumentalization of the colonial Koreans. But isn’t it those old ladies, not the law, who can tell us what this crime denotes and what its consequences were? This is because the sufferings have continuously been constructed throughout their entire lives. In addition, we should not forget these are the testimonies of the survivors, starting with Kim Haksoon (Kim Hak-sun), who came out to shatter the “huge oblivion of Asia” that no one had mentioned over the past sixty years.

In this way the testimony team paid much attention to the method of testimony research while raising questions about the perspective that has othered these women in the name of ‘victim investigation.’ In order to draw close to these women’s sufferings, shouldn’t we listen more closely to the victims’ viewpoints, pains, and sobbing? But “how” or “for what” should we listen carefully? A well-known scholar Elaine Scarry, who enquires into the question of pain, asks, ‘how to express physical pain in language.’ Pain exists in a different level from human language; however, we
would not be able to elicit sympathy from neighbors’ pain if it is not expressed in language. Therefore, the pain awaits representation. In this respect, we should be cautious about that the victims’ testimonies are not the language of the victim but the language that already “view” their sufferings. The testimonies are only for drawing close to their experiences; they are demarcated from the “vivid experience itself.” Therefore, the women who are giving these testimonies are victims and observers as well as representers. Even in testimony collections there were ardent pains ingrained within their expressions, while there were other experiences they were not able to talk about. Why it is still difficult for them to express certain experiences? For instance, words such as rape, sexual abuse, or systematic rape are able to neither represent their experiences nor capture their feelings. Moreover, even if these experiences fell organically, closely one upon the other, there was no one to listen, no one to empathize, so there was no chance to speak of, and thus, restructure their life experiences. Though that place is the pivot point of their pain, it is a pivot point more than words. How do the victimized survivors thoroughly express their experiences through the testimonies? How can we say that the testimony team fully captures their woods? Pain, courage, silence, and more are implied in the survivors’ testimonies.

In this regard, it would be difficult to limit the meaning of this collection of testimonies as corroborative evidence submitted to the ‘2000 Women’s Tribunal.’ The 2000 Women’s Tribunal, as a citizen’s tribunal and women’s court, paid a great deal of attention to the survivors’ testimonies. North and South Korean prosecutors’ teams
presented survivors' testimonies in their common indictment, and submitted sixty-seven testimonies as relevant evidence to the Tribunal. The Judges of the Tribunal acknowledged the value of the testimonies and cited survivors' testimonies in various ways in the final judgment. Nevertheless, as mentioned earlier, the truth in the testimonies sometimes agrees with legal truth and sometimes does not. If the pursuit of legal truth allows no option but to corroborate and confirm relevant facts, truth in these testimonies is the truth of the emotions and experiences of living subjects, "an intersubjective truth" with which others can empathize. However, since legal truth also exists in a human world that exchanges meaning and shares common horizons, I ask the question, whether legal truth differs in essence from testimony truth. Since the suffering and pain that the victims have undergone has become an important standard by which to measure the weight of immoral conduct and crime, the intersubjective truth in human society has to be the truth that should be accepted by the legal court. When the court embraces more of such intersubjective truth, we will be capable of drawing closer to the purpose of the enforcement of law—to restore the truth and find justice. How is it possible to compensate for the suffering that the victims have undergone throughout their entire lives? What kind of attitude should we demand from the perpetrators for the sake of "restorative justice?" On which perspective are the current legal system for reparation and compensation based? The victims' testimonies are talking about all these questions, to which the law has to pay attention. In this way, we can say that the 2000 Women's Tribunal was a court in which law and testimonies, history writing and women
shared dialogues.

Meanwhile, the testimony team faced the challenges of the methodologies to deal with the text of oral statement as well as with representational philosophy and theory. If we call the testimony a represented language instead of the victims’ vivid language, how would it be different from the artificially selected “arbitrary language”? We considered it very important to differentiate them. If we cannot do so, we may easily fall prey to the academic attitude of positivism that denies the constructed-ness of testimonies and insists on objectivity. As we all know, until recently, research on ‘comfort woman’ victim survivors’ testimonies often focused on judging testimonies according to criteria of factuality or falsehood. Even though sometimes it is required to confirm at a court or in policy making whether one is a real comfort woman victim or not, it would be a tragedy if we confine the significance of the testimony within this framework. This is because a victim’s testimony based on factuality can only reaffirm the pre-established narrative. However, it will not bring out new perspectives and insights into the victim’s voice. Our testimony team distinguishes itself from the attitude that deals with testimonies from a place of positivist data, and also distances itself from the relativistic perspective of the truth, i.e., all truths are made according to a given perspective. The truth the testimony research sought is an inter-subjective truth that communicates with the members of society who live in the horizon of accumulated truth. The testimonies of military ‘comfort women’ were not a confirmation of known facts, but rather a journey to find new truths in the production and acceptance of “unknown” facts. How
can we limit this truth to positivist facts? If we do not have the theory to interpret the voices of the subaltern people, as above mentioned on postcolonialism, we would have to carry out testimony research to find it.

The methodology of “from asking to listening,” which is now commonly accepted in the studies of oral history and testimony, could have come from our testimony team because of the fact that there had been no such theory. Does this mean that listening is only true to the survivor’s words? Is that the attitude of “sanctifying” the language of the survivor? We think about in which space “listening” is taking place. Listening here is done not in the space of no-thought but in the context of the intersubjective meaning of the aforementioned horizon of collective truth. Therefore, we concluded that the completion of the listening is ultimately done by communicating with readers of this book rather than with the testimony team. When readers “are able to hear” the voice of the survivors, dialogue can take place around the testimony, and the truth of the testimony can be accepted and resonate in the collective truth in the society. This testimony project was an effort to find a yet-to-come truth that was difficult to establish according to a positivist standard and an exploration to preserve the collective experience of who we are. The survivors’ testimony research stood at the intersection between the truth finding at courts and the life history and between individual life histories and history writing in Asia.

In addition, in order to save the oral text, we searched for various ways to work with information that was often insufficient. We also attempted to convey
subjective and contextual meanings and communicate the feeling of oral language. This is not because vivid feeling and subjectivity alone are of primary importance, but because we believe that when these aspects are not missed, we can better transmit, and the reader can empathize more deeply with the truth of the women’s stories as told by their true selves. The rhythm in their language elicited music and poetry submerged in it. We considered it a manifestation of sublimation in pain, of enlightenment in tears. For example, the following is from the testimony of Choi Kapsoon (Ch’oe Kap-sun).

“When I think about how I lived my life, I can’t sleep, so even in the day, I lie just like this…”

“Won’t one person come? Can’t one person come?” And when nobody comes, sleep comes creeping in, I sleep for a breath and wake up, and now at night, when sleep no longer comes and I’m left like this, those things all come to my thoughts.”

“I think about how I saved myself from my mom, what I suffered from the Japanese, how I sold tofu trying to get out of Manchuria, I just bought and sold whatever I could, trying to make money, I nearly drowned in the Tumen River—at once the thoughts come, and not a bit of sleep comes ‘til the morning.”

Such testimony can become a rich material not only for social justice and truth but also for imaginative and artistic inspiration in human life. Moreover, the collaboration is also one of the significant aspects of this project. Our collection of testimonies, *Forsibly Taken Korean Military ‘Comfort Women’ volume 4 - Rewritten through Memories* was a collaboration between the testifiers and the researchers, between the researchers, and between the researchers and the (virtual) reader. As we mentioned in the introduction of the first edition, we continued our testimony meeting while we were
meeting with the witnesses. We created an overview of the testifiers’ subjectivity and a structured framework map of their memory and of ours. We read the transcripts and the edited texts that were rearranged five times and tried to "feel" the existence of the survivors whom many of us did not meet. It was a process of establishing inter-subjectivity of the survivor woman within the testimony team, and accepting the subjectivities in our team as peers. As we passed along this long and difficult journey, we also became witnesses and dispatchers of the testimonies. In this regard, it is not surprising that many of the testimony team members have grown into testimony researchers.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the readers who loved the testimonies and to the members of the team who shared the testimonies that came forth with such difficulty. I would also like to thank Je Miran (Che Mi-ran), who undertook the work of producing the cover art without recompense, and Bak Yeongsook (Pak Yong-sook), who visited the victims and worked on the photographs. Furthermore, I am grateful to the many researchers in the Preparation Team for 2000 Women's Tribunal set up at the Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Japanese Military Sexual Slavery, and especially to Gang Jeongsook (Kang Chöng-suk), the director of Truth Commission and to Yeo Soonju (Yō Sun-ju), co-director of the testimony team. Since this testimony has been out of print the last few years, the publication of this revision was late. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all those at the press, Palbit, involved with the book's publication, and for their agreement as to the
importance of this testimony and to put out this revised edition. Coming back to the
testimonies after some years have passed, I think we could have been a bit bolder. It is
hard to erase the feeling that the published content is somewhat less than the amount of
actual transcripts and our reflections because we cut out a great deal in our editing
process. We were cautious in going down a road which we had never been before. The
resulting inhibition became a force that restrained us from being even bolder. It might
also testifies that this collection of testimonies is an experimental result. In the future, I
hope that more researchers will be interested in this kind of work and will refine the
testimony methodology and the theory of Korean history in more sophisticated and just
ways.

In the meantime, many survivors have passed away. In the ‘2000 Women’s
International Tribunal,’ various recommendations were made to the Japanese
government, but these were not realized and “ten years of waiting” have passed. Six of
the nine survivors who gave testimonies in this book have passed away. In this revised
edition, on the first page of each testimony is the biography of the survivor, written as
of February 2011. However, the main texts of the testimonies are as they were in the
first edition of 2001 with small revisions, such as the correction of word spacing. It is
painful that many survivors are no longer survivors but remain as victims. I express my
sincere condolences to the victim testifiers who have passed away, including An
Beobsooon (An Pöp-sun), who took her own life. Even after their deaths, by conveying
the language and sentiments of the survivors, I hope that this book will speak to those
who have forgotten this present time and who we are. Believing that the testimonies of
the survivors will ring and return as an echo, I send the following words to them.¹

By looking at your pain
We insist that we should give you kind care.
By acknowledging that your youth was deprived of
We claim that you have the right to enjoy the innocence of a child.
By understanding that you were a slave
We advocate complete extermination of slavery.
By reminding of the pain of your whole life,
We advocate peace.
By witnessing your courage to break the silence,
We discover our voices.

August 2011

On behalf of the testimony team, Hyunah Yang

¹ Patricia Sellers presented this at the symposium, “Ten Years After the 2000 Women’s Tribunal,” held in Tokyo in December 2010
How to Read this Collection of Testimonies?

I. Leading up to Publication of the Collection of Testimonies:

From “Asking” to “Listening”

The testimony team who put together this collection first met on April 2, 1999. The original intention of this meeting was to be part of the truth-finding activity for the “The Women's International War Crimes Tribunal 2000 for the Trial of Japanese Military Sexual Slavery (hereafter, ‘2000 Women’s International Tribunal’).” The number of the registered former ‘comfort women’ (at time of original publication) living in Korea is 155, but the number of testimonies recorded thus far was only from about 60 survivors. Therefore, the testimony team was organized to take testimonies from the voices unheard as of yet, the main purpose of the team being to record testimony material for the “2000 Women’s International Tribunal.”

Our team consisted of graduate students from various disciplines at several universities in Seoul. We had a month-long orientation session to familiarize ourselves with the issues of the Japanese military sexual slavery system and of the representations of the testimonies. In addition, we formulated “Interview
Guidelines” and “questionnaires” based on previously published testimonies collections by others. These rules formulated by the testimony team were intended to include questions regarding the survivors’ whole life trajectory rather than the period of being ‘comfort women’. In addition, we attempted to explore not just the experience itself but remain particularly attentive to what kinds of meanings the testifiers(survivors) invest there. In particular, our research was able to move beyond the threshold of asking to the realm of listening, because the primary authority was given to the speaking survivor-witnesses, rather than to the interviewer. The task was to find the ‘cue’ in the witness’s words and trigger her memory; as you will see below, this required a cooperative effort of disentangling a complex web of knots and then unravelling the meanings within.

We, in groups of two, started off by interviewing a survivor who had been conscripted into the military, and then began our meetings with the ‘comfort women’ survivors. Each group met with the witness (survivor) an average of three times over a period of months to a full year, depending on the group. But not all of the survivors were ‘survivors of memory.’ While some possessed an abundance of memories, there were some who were reluctant to talk, in situations that made it difficult to testify (family circumstances, etc.), experiencing severe memory lapses due to dementia, in poor health, and so on. From the very beginning of our work, we encountered such hurdles resulting from the chaotic conditions of survival. At this point, we realized that we had begun a battle not only with time, weighed down
by the 60-year history of the ‘comfort women’ issue, but also with the barrier of silence that such a long period had produced.

During the subsequent year and a half, the testimony team met with about twenty-five ‘comfort women’ survivors, while the number of interviewers grew to about thirty. While meetings with the survivors were going on, we held group discussions. After our meetings with the surviving women began, these group discussions became a venue for our ‘voice’ to burst out. We discovered that our original idea of making testimony transcriptions from the raw recorded interviews was no easy task. We also felt naive in thinking that we could simply ‘transcribe according to what we hear.’ How do we parse the witnesses’ sentences? How do we transcribe their pronunciation into writing? An uncountable number of questions poured out. We finally realized that oral testimonies had to be transcribed using a ‘different’ language system from written language. Even though oral language shares similarities with written language in terms of the rules of pronunciation, grammar, expressions, etcetera, it still belongs to a different structure. Thus we faced an issue with bridging the gap between the two, because we had to express orality through writing. We eventually learned that to transcribe recorded narratives into written words involved a process of choice and representation, as well as of writing. Through this process we could elaborate a set of rules to interpret the testimonies based on each of our experiences. For this, the interviewer’s ‘memory’ becomes equally important; the reason is that when interpreting the testimonies, recalling
circumstances from the context of the telling, such as the survivor’s facial
expressions and gestures, became necessary to understand situations such as why a
particular anecdote was told at a certain time, or why the survivor avoided talking
about a particular subject, for example. The interviewer also had to remember the
silence of the survivor. The interviewer had to understand and store all of the signs
that were not recorded on the recorder. Some interviewers even stayed up all night
after meeting with a witness to transcribe the testimony before details were forgotten.
Members of the same group would often stay up and argue their way through the
‘heard’ testimonies in an effort to share thoughts and confirm comprehension. In
actuality, the process of interpretation had less to do with the interviewer simply
remembering and then providing playback, and more to do with the interviewer’s
‘comprehension’ of events, such as a moment of silence by the witness. In this
process of listening, memorizing and interpreting the testimony, we found that inter-
subjectivity between the witnesses and the interviewer was constructed and
expressed. Producing transcription of the oral language that is both detailed and
politically sensitive required further technical and scholarly inquiry. Through such
undertakings, we the interviewers also became ‘witnesses.’

This process has made it clear to us that the significance of the testimony
transcripts compiled during this work is not just limited to a legal evidential
framework, but also holds meaning as historical documents. Despite the limitations
of written language, the complexities of each survivor’s personal experiences, as well
as the historical significance of their observations of events were documented in written transcripts that will remain in posterity. Not only this, but the abominable events of that turbulent era are laid out due to the testifier’s work of finding meaning, which lives on in their oral expressions.

We began meetings to prepare for publishing the collection of testimonies in January 2000. Around 9 to 10 members from the testimony team participated in these meetings, working together until the last phase of the editing. From that point on, we took detailed notes during all meetings. These notes became a sort of communal memory and later on served as a manual for setting up editorial procedures and other rules. This introduction is also indebted to those notes. While collecting and reading various domestic and international testimony compilations, we began reading and discussing each team’s transcripts as a group. We began this work without established principles, perspectives or theories regarding the editing the collected transcripts, and instead purposely chose to defer those theoretical frameworks, aiming instead to enhance our ‘sensibility.’ Although this period was very productive in terms of strengthening our sensibilities for representing and editing testimonies, it was also extremely energy consuming because we had to endure a state of uncertainty.

By reading the transcripts together, we began a process of understanding the particularities of the life, experiences, memories, and personality of each witness.
What a complicated memory map the transcripts were! How should we decipher them? And how should we represent them? Many questions were raised. As you will read below, our transcript readings introduced us to each witness-grandmother’s *esprit*.

At this point we selected the witnesses whose testimonies would be included in the compilation. Without taking into consideration the particularities of a witness or her testimony, we established the guideline of including all testimonies collected over a minimum of three times of relatively uninterrupted interviews as well as archived a certain degree of remembrance. Even with such ‘generous’ guidelines, this compilation contains testimonies from only nine witnesses. As mentioned before, this was due to the fact that many witnesses were unable to complete their interviews.

We began the official editing meetings in June 2000. The testimonies of each witness were edited between 5 to 10 times. The process of reading the transcripts together allowed the editing team to share our understandings of the grandmother victims to the point that each of us felt as if we had met all of the grandmothers in person. This was also how nicknames for each grandmother came about: Jung Yoonhong (Chŏng Yun-hong), the Titanic; Yoon Soonman (Yun Sun-man), the black cow; Kim Hwaseon (Kim Hwa-sŏn), with the problematic house lease; Choi Kapsoon (Ch’oe Kap-sun), the chatterbox; pretty Kim Bokdong (Kim Pok-tong);
An Beobsoon (An Pŏp-sun), with the mustang (shearling) fur coat; etcetera. By reading the transcripts many times, painstakingly editing them, and writing about our own interview experiences, we were able to participate in each other’s editing as if we had interviewed all of the grandmothers ourselves. In this process, we had grown to trust each other’s understanding and feelings towards the grandmothers.

The trust became our source of strength during periods of uncertainty or fear when we attempting to sculpt the image of a grandmother whose portrayal remained out of our grasp. This process was very important because it provided a foundation for us to intervene in the editing done by a person who may not have met the witness face-to-face.

From September, we began final checkups related to technical issues, such as the use of grammar, symbols, notes, parentheses, and etcetera. We also did our final reviews of each statement in the testimonies and the meanings they would carry. Then the edited testimonies went through the process of proofreading by outside readers.

The year and a half of participation in this project was a journey through memory into the minds of the 70-80-year-old witnesses as well as one into an era of Korean history. It was a difficult and exciting journey that revealed how the process of translating the women’s memories into invaluable data for historiography can also reveal the women survivors as primary agents of history.
II. Issues with Representation and Editing Testimony Transcripts:

Open Answers

If the task of interpreting the recorded testimonies occurs in the space occupied by the witness and the interviewer, the testimony compilation creates a space for witnesses, and the individuals who are unable to encounter the witnesses in person, to meet. In other words, the process of compiling the testimonies is a task that allows the witnesses’ voices to resonate to the reader. Our compilation, produced from a year of agonies and experiments, contains new forms and contents. The final results, completed after many trials and errors along with heated internal debates, is presented as open answers to the many questions posed during the process. The method of representation used in this book is only one version of editing, or versions of editing (because even in this book, the particularities of each witness called for flexibility in editing techniques).

So what was our perspective on the testimonies? And what problems did we encounter in the process of editing the transcripts and transforming them into text? It is our intention to introduce here the issues that arise when dealing with topics of unfinished research.
1. Who are the witnesses?

The contents of the testimonies in this book are not confined to the topic of being mobilized as ‘comfort women’ or to their experiences in the ‘comfort stations.’ Although there is a slight variation for each individual, the witnesses speak of their ‘comfort women’ experiences through the telling of their life stories. One witness remembers her experiences of fear and hunger during the Korean War as more terrifying than her time as a ‘comfort woman,’ and another witness focuses on her struggles at the time of the interview after being swindled out of money with her housing lease. This was further enhanced by guidelines for the witness to address her life as a whole, including her present circumstances, and by giving each witness initiative and authority during the interviews. In that case, are such life stories unrelated to the ‘experiences of a comfort woman’? Furthermore, according to the testimonies we collected, the stories that did delve into the experiences of the ‘comfort women’ displayed similar issues. One witness recalls her memory of the ‘American bombing’ while she was at the ‘comfort station’ as more terrifying than her experiences of rape, while another witness speaks about the shipwreck and

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2 As some readers may have already realized, the witnesses featured in this book are called by many. They are called survivors, witnesses, interviewees, former ‘comfort women’, et cetera, and within each interviewer’s participation essay, they are referred to by their names, sometimes grandmother (balmony), or often times ‘she.’ This is due not only to the fact that the testimony team could not come to a consensus of naming, but also because we felt the witnesses should be presented through multiple identities depending on the context. In any case, the term ‘grandmother’ was not considered universal or standard.
threats to her life during her journey across the South Pacific, on her way to the
‘comfort station’, with greater intensity.

Through these memories, we are able to contemplate issues regarding not
only the ‘comfort woman’ experience, but also the lasting extent of the damage and
wounds as well as their relation to other societal factors. The testimonies present the
fact that the ‘comfort woman’ experience is not limited to the encounters with a
soldier at a ‘comfort station’, but threatens and permeates each and every facet of
human life. The effects are continuous and present, as they impose on social,
economic, and cultural aspects of life, including family, marriage, poverty, anxiety,
and so forth.

From this point of view, we understand that the testimony encapsulates the
speaker’s life as a whole. Therefore, both the present conditions of the survivors and
the processes that have led to these conditions are part of the testimony. This book
is a result of a process of contemplation focused on how to convey our
understanding of testimony to the readers. Our concern regarding these issues was
how to open a space where the reader can feel. In certain cases, this space was
created through the observation notes, and in other situations, it was expressed
through the testimony texts. Among the survivors’ memories and their oral
testimonies, it is dangerous and problematic to choose and reproduce only the ones
that fit the stereotypical image of a ‘comfort women.’ Indeed, the answer to the