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NATIONALISM, FEMINISM, AND BEYOND: A NOTE ON THE COMFORT WOMEN MOVEMENT¹

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Abstract

The primary purpose of this paper is to focus on discourses of “nationalism” and “feminism” that the Korean Council has developed in the comfort women movement and present that the essentialist understanding of “nationalism” and “feminism” by the Korean Council has generated some tension. I argue that the “nationalism” discourse of the Korean Council has generated tension with the feminist consideration of the comfort women issue, while the “feminism” discourse has engendered tension with the nationalist consideration of the issue. I examine the sources of the tension by analyzing two activities of the Korean Council—its opposition to the Asian Women’s Fund and its establishment of the Women’s International War Crimes Tribunal for the Trial of Japan’s Military Sexual Slavery. If the comfort women issue is considered as a part of national and gender oppression, and the comfort women movement aims to identify and challenge the injustice of oppressive systems of nation and gender, I suggest that nationalist and feminist concerns can be accommodated in the activism on the comfort women issue with less tension.

Keywords: nationalism, feminism, Korean Council, comfort women, Japan’s military sexual slavery, Asian women’s fund, women’s international war crimes tribunal

I. Introduction

Since January 8, 1992, the Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan (the Korean Council, hereafter) has held a weekly Wednesday Demonstration in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul, South Korea, protesting Japan’s irresponsibility in addressing the comfort women issue.² The Wednesday Demonstration has been replicated around the world as a global campaign. On August 10, 2005, the Wednesday Demonstration was held in various places in the world, including Berlin, Frankfurt (Germany); Basel, Bern (Switzerland); the Netherlands; New York, Washington, D.C. (USA); Taiwan; the Philippines; Tokyo, Osaka, and Nagoya (Japan), to criticize the war crimes of Japan and demand the Japanese government live up to

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2 All translations from Korean texts are by the author.

its legal responsibilities.³ Euphemistically, the term “comfort women” refers to young females who were forced to offer sexual services to the Japanese Imperial Army during World War II. Approximately 200,000 women were abducted and deceived into sexual slavery by the Japanese military. The national and ethnic backgrounds of these women were diverse, but the majority of them were Koreans.

The comfort women movement is an advocacy movement calling for justice for the comfort women. The Korean Council, founded in 1990 as an association of 37 women’s groups in South Korea, is the most representative and influential organization for the comfort women movement. The goal of the Korean Council is to demand an official apology and legal compensation from the Japanese government regarding the comfort women issue.⁴ The issue is a nationalist issue for Korea grounded in its particular colonial history and, at the same time, a feminist issue grounded in the general premise of gender equality. The primary purpose of this paper is to focus on discourses of “nationalism” and “feminism” that the Korean Council has developed in the comfort women movement and present that the essentialist understanding of “nationalism” and “feminism” by the Korean Council has generated some tension. I argue that the “nationalism” discourse of the Korean Council has generated tension with the feminist concern, while the “feminism” discourse has engendered tension with the nationalist interest. My argument is that nationalist and feminist elements are inevitably inherent in the comfort women movement; however, the feminist and nationalist purposes of the comfort women issue have given rise to some tension.⁵

There are many studies on the comfort women issue (Hicks 1994; Tanaka 2002; Schmidt 2000) and the relevant activities of the Korean Council (Shin 1997; Lee 1997; Soh 1996, 2003). Few of them, however, are concerned about the dual (nationalist and feminist) considerations of the comfort women movement. Although some scholars are

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- 3 The campaign was named “The Global V-Day Campaign for Justice to ‘Comfort Women.’” More information on the campaign is available online at <http://newsite.vday.org/node/1407> (accessed January 17, 2012).
- 4 The followings are seven goals that the Korean Council proposes to achieve. The Korean Council demands: 1) that the Japanese government admit the crime of the compulsory drafting of Korean women as “comfort women”; 2) that all the barbarities be fully investigated; 3) that an official apology be made through a resolution of the Japanese Diet; 4) that legal compensations be made for the survivors and their bereaved families; 5) that all the facts and truth about the military sexual slavery by Japan be recorded in the Japanese history textbooks; 6) that a memorial and a museum be built; and 7) that those responsible for the crime be punished. The goals of the Korean Council are available online at http://www.womenandwar.net/english/menu_01.php (accessed January 10, 2012).
- 5 I use quotation marks around the terms “nationalism” and “feminism” when I refer to the Korean Council’s discourses. As for the Korean Council’s activities and discourses, throughout the paper I primarily refer to the official website of the Korean Council, the circulated brochure, public statements, resolutions, pamphlets, newsletters by the Korean Council, and reports by international organizations on the comfort women issue. In particular, *Endless Cry* (Korean Council 2004) contains the collections of comfort women materials including public statements at Wednesday Demonstrations and various resolutions by the Korean Council.

right to point out the different discourses that the Korean Council has used in its comfort women advocacy, they often fail to identify tensions arising from these discourses (Kim 2004; Soh 2003, 212, 215-16; Min 2003). In this paper, I will specify the tension by analyzing two activities of the Korean Council—its opposition to the Asian Women’s Fund (AWF, hereafter) and its establishment of the Women’s International War Crimes Tribunal for the Trial of Japan’s Military Sexual Slavery (the Tribunal, hereafter).

While the impetus of this paper comes from the Korean Council’s comfort women movement, the analysis has broad implications beyond the Korean Council. My discussion of the Korean Council contributes to recent scholarship reinterpreting the relationship between nationalism and feminism. In most current postcolonial Third World scholarship, nationalism has been generally considered as antithetical to feminism, and vice versa (e.g., Chatterjee 1993; Enloe 2000; Heng 1997). In their view, the feminist quest should go beyond the nationalist cause because many women have been oppressed and marginalized under the rubric of nationalism. However, some recent studies challenge this common understanding of the antithetical relationship between nationalism and feminism and attempt to find compatibility between the two (Jayawardena 1986; West 1997; Herr 2003; Kim 2009). My paper concurs with these recent studies. I do not think that nationalism and feminism are intrinsically in tension. Rather, I view the essentialist ways of defining nationalism and feminism as generating tension between them. In this paper, I will characterize such tension by examining the discourses of the Korean Council. In so doing, I expect that this paper will contribute to providing a positive insight into the direction of the comfort women movement that will help to harmonize the movement’s nationalist and feminist interests.

The overall structure of the paper is as follows. In section II, I will briefly introduce the Korean Council’s comfort women movement. In section III, I will explore the Korean Council’s opposition to the AWF and its discourse of “nationalism.” In section IV, I will examine the council’s establishment of the Tribunal and its discourse of “feminism.” In section V, I will characterize “nationalism” and “feminism” discourses and tension arising from them with the feminist and nationalist concerns in the dispute over the AWF and in the Tribunal’s deliberations, respectively. In section VI, I will suggest some implications for a possible way of lessening the tension in the comfort women movement, while accommodating both nationalist and feminist causes.

II. Korean Council’s Comfort Women Movement: A Brief Overview

Since its foundation in 1990, the Korean Council has advanced various activities in support of “comfort women” at the domestic and international levels. In South Korea, the Korean Council started to publicize the comfort women issue from the early 1990s. It helped the comfort women testify about the brutality of the Japanese military and file lawsuits against the Japanese government. Since Hak-Sun Kim’s public testimony in 1991, there have been many other comfort women who have provided testimony. The council urged the South Korean government to set up a special committee in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to register comfort women. In 1993, the Korean National Assembly enacted a law that provided the comfort women with aid, a lifelong leased

apartment, and free medical and counseling services. In 2003, the council recommended that the South Korean government enact a new law that includes an official memorial project along with the welfare programs (*brochure* 2005, 39 & 57). Since 1992, the Korean Council has organized the weekly Wednesday Demonstrations, one of their most well-known activities, in order to broaden public awareness of the issue and build solidarity among domestic organizations. The Wednesday Demonstrations are currently the world's longest running demonstration (*brochure* 2005, 42).

In the meanwhile, the Korean Council has tried to internationalize the comfort women issue, raising the issue in various international organizations. The issue was first presented by the Korean Council to the United Nations (UN) Commission on Human Rights in the early 1990s. Since then, the International Court of Justice and the UN have released a series of reports on the comfort women issue with recommended actions for Japan. Working cooperatively with comfort women activists in other Asian countries, the Korean Council organized the Asian Solidarity Conference, a nongovernmental organization (NGO) coalition made up of various women's organizations from South and North Korea, Japan, the Philippines, Taiwan, Indonesia, China, and East Timor, as well as from the Netherlands (*brochure* 2005, 43-44; Chai 1993). Since the first conference was held in Seoul in 1992, the Asian Solidarity Conference has been held annually or biennially in an Asian country. The council also participates in the global NGO women's movement that challenges violence against women and demands legal punishment for sexual violence offenders (*brochure* 2005, 52).

In the following two sections, I will focus on two activities of the Korean Council—its opposition to the AWF and its establishment of the Tribunal—and delineate “nationalism” and “feminism” discourses employed in these activities, respectively.

III. The AWF and the “Nationalism” Discourse

In 1995, the AWF was established in Japan as a project related to the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II. At a press conference, then Japanese Prime Minister Tomiichi proposed “An Appeal for Donations for the Asian Women's Fund,” stating that the purpose of the fund was to offer atonement for the comfort women in Asian countries. The fund was raised through donations from the Japanese people. The Japanese government also contributed funds to the welfare and medical care of the comfort women. From 1996 to 2007, the atonement project helped the comfort women in South Korea, the Philippines, Taiwan, Indonesia, and the Netherlands. Two million yen per person were disbursed to the comfort women, along with Japanese governmental support for their medical care and welfare.⁶ According to the AWF, its atonement activities were “joint efforts of the government and the people...to tackle the problems of honor and dignity

6 General information on the AWF is available at <http://www.awf.or.jp> (accessed January 10, 2012). See also Soh (2000, 2003).

of women in a contemporary world” (quoted in the official website of the AWF).⁷ From its initiation, the AWF generated considerable controversy in Japan, as well as in other Asian countries (Soh 2003). My intention is not to examine in detail the AWF, but to examine the Korean Council’s response to it.

From its inception, the Korean Council strongly opposed the AWF. In a formal letter sent to the then Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro in conjunction with the 200th Wednesday Demonstration on Japanese 24, 1996, the Korean Council accused the AWF of ignoring and defaming the comfort women (public statement at the 200th Wednesday Demonstration, January 24, 1994, recited from Kim 2004, 125). When the AWF officers tried to visit South Korea to meet with the comfort women, the Korean Council not only asked the Korean government to deny their entry into South Korea, but also requested the comfort women not accept the funds.

According to the Korean Council, the AWF could never be a solution for the comfort women issue for two main reasons. First, the AWF did not state that the Japanese government was the primary body behind the atonement project. For the Korean Council, given the reluctance of the Japanese government to take actions demanded by international groups, the AWF served only as a “superfluous show-off” to evade the Japanese government’s legal responsibility (*brochure* 2005, 54). The AWF was nothing but a “vague apology which did not specify the victims [comfort women] or the responsibilities” and satisfied “the Japanese government’s hope to avoid the stigma by using the victims’ difficult present conditions” (*brochure* 2005, 55). Second, the AWF was not providing “compensation” from the Japanese government but “remuneration” from a private organization. The Korean Council has always demanded a formal apology from the Japanese government for the comfort women system and for the government to take legal responsibility. The AWF, however, came up far short of satisfying those demands. For the Korean Council, the AWF was not legal compensation for the comfort women because of Japanese wrongdoing, but humanitarian charity to the poor and unlucky victims. The Korean Council called the AWF “private console money” or “pity money” that deepened the scars on the reputation and dignity of the comfort women (public statement at the 188th Wednesday Demonstration, October 25, 1995, quoted in *Endless Cry*, 129).

The “nationalism” discourse deserves attention in the Korean Council’s opposition to the AWF. The discourse assumes a national confrontation between Korea as the home of the comfort women and Japan as the offender. Given this assumption, Japan is conceived as a national enemy, and the comfort women are to be protected as members of the Korean nation (Kim 2004, 129-131). The following public statements made during the council’s campaign against the AWF represent its “nationalism” position.

7 <http://www.awf.or.jp/e-preface.htm> (accessed January 15, 2012). Soh (2003, 210 & 221) characterize the AWF “as a hybrid national public organization or an ‘NPO.’” As I will discuss later, however, the Korean Council strongly opposed the AWF and considered it to be purely “private money” lacking a commitment by the Japanese “state” to take “legal” responsibility.

The comfort women issue is one that concerns restoration of *national pride*, national existence in a struggle against wars, and recovery of *the victims' [comfort women's] honor*.... Taking the AWF means giving a remission to the Japanese government that has failed to admit its crimes (public statement at the 137th Wednesday Demonstration, October 5, 1994, quoted in *Endless Cry*, 99, *Italic mine*).

The Japanese government tried to avoid the legal responsibility of its crimes by proposing private money. This is simply *trifling* not only with *the victims [comfort women]* but also with *Korean national pride with money* (public statement at the 114th Wednesday Demonstration, April 13, 1994, quoted in *Endless Cry*, 79, *Italic mine*).

In the statements, the comfort women issue is one that concerns “national pride” and “victims’ honor”; the AWF is characterized as Japanese “trifling” money that disgraced the victims and the “Korean national pride.”

In response to the AWF, the council undertook a domestic fund-raising campaign to help financially the comfort women in 1997. The campaign was named “Protecting the Comfort Women Victims” and had two purposes: “to rebuild national spirit by blocking the AWF” and “to take care of the victims with national love” (*newsletter*, vol. 11, March 1997). The reason for the domestic fund-raising campaign was to “protect” victims of Korea as well as the nation of Korea. Also, the Korean Council recommended that the Korean government raise the monthly welfare stipend for the comfort women. In fact, the Korean government accepted the recommendation by the Korean Council and raised the governmental welfare stipends for the comfort women. Although the Korean Council is a NGO, a separate institution from the government, the governmental policy of Korea not only concurred with the council’s opinion but also was greatly influenced by it. It seems that this was because the Korean Council approached the comfort women issue as an agenda of the nation, so that the state of Korea could not easily dismiss the voice of the council. The governmental welfare stipends were distributed to the comfort women on condition that they signed a pledge not to accept the AWF money. One the fact that the comfort women had accepted AWF money was revealed, the government demanded the return of the welfare stipend (Soh 2000, 125; Kim 2004, 129-134).⁸

Nonetheless, there were a few Korean comfort women who received money from the AWF.⁹ How those women were depicted can be deduced from another public statement of the Korean Council:

8 The content of the pledge is as follows: “I would receive the welfare stipend of 43,000,000 won provided by the Korean government on condition that 1) I would not receive the AWF money from now on, 2) contrary to 1) if I received the AWF money, I would return that money to Japan through the Korean Council” (Kim 2004, 133).

9 As of January 1997, seven Korean comfort women had accepted the AWF money, which ignited the anger of the Korean Council and divided victims into two opposite camps. One, agreeing with the Korean Council, criticized those who received the AWF money for betraying their nation. The other, disagreeing with the Korean Council, was sympathetic to the deprived economic situation that caused them to accept the AWF money (Soh 2003, 228).

The project [of the AWF] is contrary to redeeming *honor of the victims*. Literally it treats the comfort women as the *real comfort women*, which is another insult to them. That is, the AWF insults them twice, as well as the Korean people in general (public statement at the 114th Wednesday Demonstration, April 13, 1994, quoted in *Endless Cry*, 79, *Italic mine*).

The statement says that once the comfort women received money from Japan, they became “real” comfort women. This implies that, earlier, Korean women were forced to be insulted as comfort women; but now, if they accept Japanese money, they would be insulted again by being treated like prostitutes. Based on the council’s interpretation, distributing the AWF money to the comfort women was considered as being equivalent to treating them as prostitutes, “real” comfort women. And their act of accepting Japanese money disgraced not only the national pride of Korea but also the honor of the Korean comfort women.

In fact, responses to the AWF from the countries with the comfort women were divergent. Even within a particular country, the government, feminist organizations, and the comfort women displayed conflicting perspectives on the AWF. Concurring with the Korean Council, Taiwanese women’s organizations opposed the AWF and demanded their comfort women not accept its money. They demanded that the Taiwanese government request Japan to withdraw the AWF. They raised funds for their comfort women and urged the Taiwanese government to provide welfare stipends (Soh 2003, 227-228 & 230). In comparison to South Korea and Taiwan, women’s organizations in other countries with comfort women took different positions in response to the AWF. In the case of the Philippines, the country in which the comfort women first accepted AWF money, women’s groups were split into two fractions—one supporting the AWF, the other rejecting it. Yet, individual comfort women in the Philippines were relatively free to make their own decisions about whether to accept or reject the AWF money (Soh 2003, 227-228; 2000, 127). The Indonesian government precluded any NGO activists from demanding Japan admit state responsibility since, it claimed, the compensation issues were already settled bilaterally. It permitted the AWF to provide funds on condition that the AWF money be used to establish facilities for needy elderly in Japanese-occupied areas (Soh 2003, 227).

The Korean Council strongly urged the feminist coalition of Asian countries to oppose the AWF and support publication of a common resolution against the AWF at the Asian Solidarity Conference (common resolution at the 5th Asian Solidarity Conference, April 17, 1998, quoted in *Endless Cry*, 492-93). In the end, unlike the Korean Council’s expectation, the feminist coalition of Asian countries was dissolved. The Korean Council attributed the reason for dissolution to some Filipino comfort women who received the AWF money and some Filipino NGOs which endorsed those Filipino comfort women’s actions, quite different from the Korean Council’s position.

IV. The Tribunal and the “Feminism” Discourse

The Korean Council has continued to demand legal punishment of those responsible for the Japanese comfort women system. In order to establish a legal basis for the prosecution of Japan, Asian women activists proposed to hold a war crimes tribunal

at the 5th Asian Solidarity Conference in 1998. The Korean Council inaugurated the Korean Committee for the preparation of the Tribunal with the cooperative support of other Asian women's organizations, such as VAWW-Net (Violence Against Women in War-Network) Japan and the ASCENT (Asian Center for Women's Human Rights) Philippines. The Tribunal was held in December 2000 in Tokyo, Japan, and the final ruling was revealed in the Hague, the Netherlands, a year later.¹⁰ It was not an official court of law but was a people's court without legal force, making recommendations on the basis of legal findings but with no official power to enforce its judgment. At the Tribunal, prosecutors from 10 countries—South and North Korea, China, Japan, the Philippines, Indonesia, Taiwan, Malaysia, East Timor, and the Netherlands—accused Japanese Emperor Hirohito, 10 Japanese officials including Tojo Hideki, and the government of Japan of committing war crimes by developing and operating the comfort women system during World War II. The Tribunal found Hirohito guilty of ordering the establishment of the comfort women system. Also, 10 government officials and the government of Japan were found guilty (*brochure* 2005, 51-52).

The Korean Council considers the Tribunal one of its most successful accomplishments. This is because, first, the Tribunal was a collective prosecution of the comfort women issue. It showcased the development of a global NGO comfort women movement transcending national and cultural boundaries; it was a triumph of building feminist solidarity in the international community (Kim 2004, 168). It was also the first judicial decision, although nongovernmental in character, that declared the responsibility of the Japanese government on the comfort women issue and demanded the Japanese government pay legal and formal compensations to the comfort women. In fact, it refuted the claims of some legal scholars that the plaintiffs would not likely win comfort women litigation because of substantive and procedural obstacles (Boling 1995, 576). The Tribunal thus invalidated the official position of the Japanese government on the comfort women issue that was reiterated in the AWF project—that the Japanese government would not take legal responsibility toward the comfort women because the 1965 agreement between South Korea and Japan settled all legal and formal reparation questions.

Two attributes of the “feminism” discourse in the Tribunal are notable. First, the Tribunal related the Japanese comfort women system to sexual violence against women, such as rape and sexual slavery committed in wartime. The Tribunal reviewed previous sexual violence cases in wartime, including the most recent ones in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda (Judgment 2002, 116-138). The decision of the court indicated:

As in the wars in the former Yugoslavia and genocide in Rwanda to name but a few recent and horrific examples, sexual violence has been used as a weapon to destroy women and the “enemy” group with which they are

¹⁰ The final version of the Judgment was published in 2002. For details on the Tribunal, see <http://www1.jca.apc.org/vaww-net-japan/english/womenstribunal2000/whatstribunal.html>. The Judgment is available at <http://www1.jca.apc.org/vaww-net-japan/english/womenstribunal2000/Judgement.pdf> (accessed January 10, 2011)

associated, by causing physical, mental, sexual, and reproductive harm to the women...by stigmatizing the women as contaminated and casting men as powerless defenders (Judgment 2002, 136-137).

The Tribunal paid special attention to the testimonies of sexual war victims who experienced the horror and cruelty of sexual violence (Judgment 2002, 137). It held an additional full day of public hearings, titled "Crimes against Women in Recent Wars and Conflicts." At the hearings, the NGOs from different countries, such as Kosovo and Colombia, participated in accusing Japan of war crimes. The victims of sexual violence in 15 different countries in Asia, Africa, and the Americas testified about their brutal experiences. Most violence occurred during wars between nations and armed conflicts between a regular army and a rebel army within a nation. By emphasizing the affinity between the comfort women system and these other sexual violence cases, the Tribunal awakened the international community to the seriousness of the issue, as well as the urgency of dealing with it (Kim 2004, 170; Chung 2004, 330).

Second, the Tribunal characterized sexual violence against women in wartime as a women's human rights violation (Keck and Sikkink 1998, chap. 5; Friedman 1995). Sexual violence is a "crime against humanity" that violates human rights, the Tribunal said. Importantly, this application of human rights language to the comfort women issue was related to the Korean Council's activities after the Tribunal. Following the conclusion of the Tribunal, the Korean Council launched the Center for War and Women's Human Rights. As the name of the center indicates, the discourse of women's human rights and war provides an insight into the direction and strategy of the activities of the Korean Council. At the 6th Asian Solidarity Conference in 2003, Chong-ok Yoon, a Korean feminist, stated in the opening address that women's human rights violations in war were "closely related to and even identical with" the Japanese comfort women system (recited from Kim 2004, 175). Under the theme of women's human rights and war, the comfort women issue became a contemporary international issue of women.

V. Characterizing the Tension

It needs to be emphasized that the Korean Council's opposition to the AWF and its effort to establish the Tribunal are to a significant degree consistent. From the beginning, the Korean Council has demanded that the Japanese government acknowledge its predecessor's crime of mobilizing Korean and other Asian women for military sexual slavery and compensate the victims with a sincere apology. It has also demanded that the high political and military members of the Japanese government responsible for establishment and operation of the comfort women system be punished by an international court. It opposed the Japanese government's use of the AWF to compensate the former comfort women mainly because by doing so the Japanese government tried to avoid its predecessor's responsibility for organizing and operating the comfort women system. The Korean Council pushed to establish the Tribunal so that key members of the Japanese government during World War II were legally prosecuted and punished for committing the crime of military sexual slavery. To be sure, neither the Korean Council's opposition to the AWF nor its effort to establish the

Tribunal solely represents the expression of nationalism or feminism. Rather, what I want to highlight is that essentialist understanding of the council's "nationalism" and "feminism" has created some tension.

The "Nationalism" Discourse and Its Tension with a Feminist Concern

The Korean Council opposed the AWF using the "nationalism" discourse with the following characteristics. First, the comfort women phenomenon is symbolic of national hardship during the colonial period. The Japanese comfort women system is considered as the harshest and cruelest oppression that Japan inflicted on Korea (*brochure* 2005, 8-32). Thus, the comfort women system is not only the agony of individuals but the nation as a whole. The discourse expresses the nation's shame, anger, regret, and humiliation at the hands of Japan, and also an aspiration to restore the wounded pride of the nation. Second, the "nationalism" discourse is part of the "consensus on Japanese antagonism" (Kim 1994, 38). It treats Korea as the victim while regarding Japan as the offender. It is "steeped in a strong antipathy toward Japan," and Japanese hostility played a vital role in initiating and maintaining the comfort women movement (Soh 2003, 214). Here, the feminist struggle to help the comfort women seems to parallel the national struggle against Japan (Jung 2003, 162; Kim 1994, 37).

In the AWF case, the tension arose when the comfort women issue becomes the issue of the nation under the "nationalism" discourse. When the Korean Council emphasized the shared experience of national hardship and national animosity toward Japan, the question of gender was minimized. The actual voices and demands of women were neglected by treating the comfort women as a national shame. In particular, when the Korean Council tried to emphasize the compulsory nature of the comfort women system, it relies on the dichotomy of virgin (forced comfort women) and whore (voluntary prostitutes). Virgin represents chaste and innocent women who keep their virginity, whereas whore represents unchaste and dirty women who voluntarily sell sex for money. This dichotomy of virgin and whore, however, is patriarchal since it reflects duality of gender norm structured from the male perspective. Thus by highlighting compulsoriness of the comfort women system grounded on the dichotomy of virgin and whore, the androcentric or phallogocentric aspect of "nationalism" by the Korean Council became distinctive (Kim and Choi 1998, 3; Park 2005, 174). Concerning this, some scholars have persuasively pointed out that the discourse of "nationalism" tends not only to subsume but also to negate feminism (Ueno 2004, 64-94; Yang 1998; Kim 1994).¹¹

In the end, the patriarchal nature of the "nationalism" discourse has resulted in hindering the feminist solidarity among the Asian countries on the comfort women issue. Although the council asked for support from the Asian women's coalition in opposing the AWF, the "nationalism" discourse failed to provide a solid medium to unite common

11 While criticizing the "gendered" nature of Korean nationalism, Choi (1998, 28) observes that the "often uncompromising tension between feminism and the discourse of nationalism developed in the postcolonial situation." Given the gendered nature of nationalism, the nationalist discourse in the comfort women movement is particularly interesting because, unlike many nationalism discourses employed by male-dominated governments, the Korean Council's discourse of "nationalism" is led by feminist groups themselves.

opinion against the AWF among Asian countries. Indeed, the source of dissolution of the feminist solidarity among former comfort women and women's organizations in Asia came not so much from the Filipino comfort women's acceptance of the AWF money as from the patriarchal nature of the "nationalism" discourse that the Korean Council employed to criticize the AWF and those comfort women who accepted the funds. Some women's organizations expressed their hostility and distrust of the Korean Council's "nationalism" discourse. For example, some Japanese organizations that were sympathetic to the comfort women movement severely criticized the Korean Council's "nationalism" challenge to the AWF (Kim 2004, 116-117). They were critical of the patriarchal dichotomy of forced comfort women and voluntary prostitutes on which the council's "nationalism" discourse relied. Even in South Korea, the "nationalism" discourse, which blamed the Korean comfort women who accepted the AWF money for being national "turncoats," was criticized by other women's organizations (Kim 2004, 151-156; Soh 2000, 125).

The "Feminism" Discourse and Its Tension with a Nationalist Concern

The Korean Council supported the Tribunal using the "feminism" discourse, which highlighted women's shared experience of sexual violence in wartime and the international recognition of the universal human rights violations. The discourse of "feminism" locates the comfort women issue within the general framework of violence against women. Violence against women is considered as sex-based violence; women, regardless of their racial, class, cultural, or ethnic differences, are and can be the vulnerable subject of sexual violence. The discourse assumes that violence against women provides a "common cause" to unite all the women in the world, who share a universal and common experience as women (Fraser 2002, 57).

In the Tribunal case, the tension arose when the "feminism" discourse overlooked the situation of Korean comfort women in the context of Korean history in relation to Japan (Chung 2004, 317-335; Jung 2003, 168-174). As some scholars have pointed out, while treating the comfort women issue as a universal women's issue in wartime under the "feminism" discourse, the Tribunal overlooked the colonial history of Korea in which the comfort women issue is located (Kim 2004, 171; Shim 2001; Chung 2004, chap. 11; Kim 2012). In fact, differences in the testimony of the comfort women during the Tribunal were notably detected. For example, the Korean survivors described their experience in terms of colonial memory, while the Dutch survivors were concerned with Christianity and the rule of law (Sakamoto 2001, 57). Some also raised the issue of whether mass rapes in a genocidal war, such as in Bosnia and Kosovo, and Japan's comfort women system in World War II were in fact similar (Chung 2004, 318; Kim 2012, 197-200). Concerning this, some critics have claimed that the Korean Council's use of "feminism" not only downplays differences among women in diverse nations and cultures, but also opens up the comfort women issue to cultural imperialism imposed by Western feminism (Jung 2003, 14).

When the prosecution team in the Tribunal began using the term "forcible occupation" rather than "colony," some Korean feminists were critical because, they argued, the use of "forcible occupation" attenuated the contextual differences of the comfort women system (Jang 2001; Kim 2004, 163). Although the question

of colonization was raised by the Korean Committee in the preparation stage of the Tribunal, it was decided that the issue would not be brought up in the main court in order to maintain the global feminist coalition (Chung 2004, 197, 205, & 211; Shim 2001). The “feminism” discourse in the Tribunal expected to contribute to providing a legal basis for the prosecution of the comfort women system and facilitating global feminist solidarity on the issue beyond the boundaries of nation and culture. The categorization of the comfort women issue as a case of sexual violence against women in wartime, however, created the problem of disregarding the historical context of Korea’s colonization (Chung 2004, 317-335).

VI. Tension and Beyond

It is noteworthy that the AWF and the Tribunal case are not exceptional in the characterization of the “nationalism” and “feminism” discourses in the Korean Council’s comfort women movement and show the tension arising from them. The discourse of “nationalism” prevailed when the Korean Council began to publicize the comfort women issue and draw public support and attention for its domestic campaign. The comfort women issue had been around for almost 50 years before it was revealed in public. Since it was treated as a private and individual matter, most comfort women internalized their suffering, being ashamed of losing “purity” and “chastity” (Kim 1997; Yang 1998; Park 2005).¹² The comfort women were even represented as “damaged, disgraceful, and unchaste female bodies that lack the ‘feminine essence’” by Korean government and its elites (Kim 1997, 92-93; Yang 1998). However, the “nationalism” discourse contributed to transforming the issue’s character from private and individual to public and national. According to Yang, the discourse of “nationalism” has been “powerful enough to mobilize the feeling of unity as Korea[n]s” (Yang 1998, 128).

“Nationalism” in the council’s discourse is close to ethnic nationalism that emphasizes the sense of national unity and pride of Koreans who share a common history, language, culture, and bloodline. That is, it is “nationalism” based on the shared experience of “Korean-ness.” Gi-Wook Shin (2006, chap. 2) points out that this discourse of “nationalism” has particularly to do with the colonial history of Korea. During its colonial rule over Korea (1910-1945), Japan undertook a strong assimilation policy with repressive agencies like the military and police in order to facilitate mobilization throughout colonial Korea. During its occupation, Japan attempted to justify its colonial rule and legitimate its assimilation policy by using colonial ethnic discrimination, saying that Koreans were an inferior race in need of the supervisory guidance of the superior Japanese race. Such Japanese endeavors to subjugate Korea have significantly influenced the development of ethnic nationalism of Korea.

12 Kim (1997), Yang (1998), and Park (2005) emphasize the patriarchal and paternalist element behind comfort women’s silence. According to Park (2005, 181), the patriarchal culture, combined with U.S. and Japanese hegemony, subjected the comfort women to silence, which calls “silencing structure.”

In fact, the Korean Council's coalition with other NGOs in South Korea in against Japan's colonial occupation has also been formed on the basis of "nationalism." For example, the Association for the Pacific War Victims that has dealt with the Korean victims of the Japanese conscription system in World War II participated in the comfort women movement with the Korean Council. The Lawyers for a Democratic Society joined the UN activities of the Korean Council. In 2001, the Korean Council took part in the Japanese history textbook controversy under its "nationalism" discourse. When the Japanese government approved the middle school history textbook that omitted the Japanese comfort women system, the Korean Council worked together with other NGOs to lodge a strong protest against the Japanese government (Chung 2004, 114-116; Soh 2003, 214).

On the other hand, the discourse of "feminism" has been predominant in the international campaign of the Korean Council. The "feminism" discourse makes the comfort women problem a universal women's issue of contemporary and international importance. "Feminism" in the council's discourse is similar to (so-called) universal feminism proposed by the First World feminists in the 1970s and 1980s on the grounds of universal sisterhood. That is, it is "feminism" based on the shared experience of "women-ness." In *Sisterhood Is Global*, for example, Robin Morgan (1984, 1 & 8) claims that women are a homogeneous group who share suffering and a common position in challenging universal patriarchy. According to Morgan, the universal commonality of women facilitates communication and consolidates solidarity among women from various backgrounds.

Indeed, "feminism" of a universal womanhood united to fight violence against women helps to emphasize the seriousness of the comfort women issue and facilitate global cooperation among women in international society. Given the prevailing women's human rights discourse among international women activists, the Korean Council sought to work with other feminist activists and international organizations on violence against women in order to expand their collaborative support and international networking on the comfort women issue. For example, the Korean Council performed various global campaigns with international feminists concerning violence against women to resolve the comfort women issue in different parts of the world. One of campaigns includes "The Global V-Day Campaign for Justice to 'Comfort Women'" introduced in the beginning of this paper. Currently 100 million signatures campaign for the resolution of Japanese Military Sexual Slavery by the council is under way. In 1996, the report by UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women Coomaraswamy submitted to the UN Commission on Human Rights identified the comfort women system of Japan as a case of violence against women "during times of armed conflict"; comfort women suffered "grave violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms" (Coomaraswamy 1996, para. 137). In 1998, the report by Special Rapporteur McDougall submitted to the Sub-Commission on Human Rights associates the comfort women issue with "systematic rape, sexual slavery and slavery-like practices during armed conflict" (McDougall 1998).

One might argue that the discourses of "nationalism" and "feminism" are strategic choices of the Korean Council in developing its activism. So the claim that the Korean Council has been ineffective because it failed to deal with tension arising from those

discourses is not justified. I do agree with this claim. However, my interest in this paper is not whether the Korean Council's comfort women movement is practically effective in adopting those discourses, but whether the comfort women movement is theoretically consistent in employing those discourses. As I observed above, the cases of the AWF and the Tribunal show theoretical tension in the movement by adopting "nationalism" and "feminism" discourses. Such tension is not limited to the cases of the AWF and the Tribunal. Consider a recent episode of the Korean Council. In 2007, the Korean Council tried to build the War and Women's Human Rights Museum in a public park, a historically meaningful place for the national independence of Korea, to educate the next generation about the injustice of the comfort women issue. Yet the council's endeavor to construct the museum faced strong opposition from former Korean national independence movement activists who fought against Japan's colonialism and their defenders. In presenting their opposition, the nationalist activists refused to be categorized in the same group as the sexually victimized comfort women, although they agreed to criticize Japan for committing historical injustices, including the comfort women system. This is because the nationalist groups did not want to be associated with the comfort women who allegedly lost women's virtue on the basis of patriarchal ideology of chastity (Chung 2004, 116). This episode shows an aspect of the tension arising from "nationalism" and "feminism" in the Korean Council's comfort women movement.

It is not clear how the Korean Council themselves understand the tension arising from their discourses. As mentioned earlier, in the 1990s the council succeeded in drawing public attention on the comfort women issue by utilizing the "nationalism" discourse. Yet, as getting criticisms from feminist scholars on the patriarchal aspect of nationalism (Yang 1998), it tended to change its strategic focus from "nationalism" to "feminism." From the 2000s, in fact, the comfort women movement by the Korean council got further internationalized under the rubric of sexual violence against women and women's international human rights. Thus it might be wrong to say that the Korean Council has been unaware of or has simply underestimated the tension. However, given the recognition of the inevitability of the logical tension, the council would want to focus on the pragmatic strategy in achieving its goal.

How then can the tension in the comfort women movement be lessened, while pursuing both nationalist and feminist interests? Here I do not intend to provide a concrete resolution to reconcile the tension. Instead, I suggest some implications for a possible way of lessening the tension based on the above-mentioned identification with and description of "nationalism" and "feminism" and the tension arising from them, which would be expected to provide a meaningful direction for the future comfort women activism of the council and further research. First and foremost, the Korean Council should attempt to abandon the essentialist understanding of "nationalism" and "feminism" in their discourses. As discussed earlier, the "nationalism" discourse focusing on the shared experience of "Korean-ness" seems to evade patriarchal oppression over comfort women; the "feminism" emphasis on the shared experience of "women-ness" seems to disregard colonial oppression occurred in the particular Korean history. In fact, the comfort women issue is adequately explained neither with the national agony of Korea on the basis of shared "Korean-ness" nor with violence against women on the basis of shared "women-ness."

Second, the Korean Council should take the systems of oppression by gender and nation seriously. The Japan's comfort women system was the systematic exploitation of women's sexuality and sexual labor; it, at the same time, was the systemic domination of colonial power. Thus, in order to understand Japan's comfort women system properly, it needs to address men's domination over women, as well as Japan's colonial domination over Korea.

Lastly, the Korean Council should further recognize the intersectionality of the comfort women issue: the comfort women issue is an area where gender and nation intersect (cf. Min 2003).¹³ The analysis of the comfort women issue requires addressing the intersection of gender oppression and national oppression: how women's oppression is systematically intertwined with national oppression.¹⁴ Namely, the position of comfort women derives from the intersection of an asymmetrical relation between the unequal power of women and men and between the colonized nation of Korea and colonizing nation of Japan. The experiences of comfort women can only be fully addressed when the inseparable interaction of gender hierarchy and colonial power is examined.

In short, the Korean Council needs to approach the comfort women issue as the part of a system of oppression on the basis of nation and gender. In so doing, nationalism and feminism are considered not as sets of shared identity (or experience) grounded in "Korean-ness" or "women-ness" but as movements to end national and gender oppression.¹⁵ From this view, the Korean Council's comfort women movement would expect to challenge the injustice of "comfort women" generated from the oppressive systems of nation and gender.

Consider the AWF case. Earlier I examined that the patriarchal nature of "nationalism" discourse hindered the feminist solidarity among the Asian countries with comfort women. In opposing the AWF from the nationalist perspective, however, the Korean Council would need to question critically the injustice of Japan's

13 Here I adopt the concept of intersectionality to address the comfort women issue, which I will not discuss in detail in this paper. The concept of intersectionality delineates "the interaction between systems of oppression" (Weldon 2008, 193). It was initially introduced by black (women of color) feminists to address the unique situation of black women (Crenshaw 1991; Collins 1998). Not limited to the case of black women, however, the idea of intersectionality has broad implications to various gender issues where they intersect with other forms of oppression. The idea of intersectionality entails two important characteristics. First, intersectionality is concerned with the systems of oppression. It considers gender, race, class, nation, sexuality, disability, and the like, as categories of hierarchal social relations not as sets of shared identities. Second, intersectionality takes the intersection of the systems of oppression seriously. For more fruitful explanation on intersectionality, see Weldon (2008).

14 The idea of intersectionality leaves open to discussion various categories included in the systems of oppression and their intersections. I find that in the comfort women issue, nation and gender are salient categories of the systems of oppression in question.

15 Relevant to this point, it is worth mentioning bell hooks's classical definition of feminism; hooks defines feminism "as a movement to end sexist oppression." This is why her saying "I advocate feminism" does not make sense, but her saying "I am a feminist" does not (hooks 2003, pp. 54-56).

colonialism, rather than emphasizing the shared experience of national hardship and national animosity toward Japan grounded in patriarchal ideology. Korean and Taiwanese comfort women would then agree with Filipino and Indonesian comfort women in that they all intended to confront the injustice of the comfort women system constructed by Japan's colonial (or semi-colonial) domination. Therefore, the source of a feminist coalition for gender equality among Asian countries would come from the vulnerability of women's sexual exploitation in the context of Japan's colonialism, that is, from the vulnerability of women under the unequal power structure between the nations. The council would then take a more flexible position toward those who received the AWF money, while continuing to demand formal compensation from the Japanese government in accord with its nationalist agenda reflected in a particular colonial history.

Consider also the Tribunal case. Earlier I observed that by universalizing the experience of sexual violence against women, the "feminism" discoursed failed to identify the situation of Korean comfort women and Japan's comfort women system. In demanding the punishment of those responsible for Japan's comfort women system from a feminist perspective, however, the Korean Council would need to question seriously the injustice of patriarchal structure where sexual violence against comfort women actually occurred, rather than highlighting women's shared experience of sexual violence in wartime. In fact, the pain and suffering of the comfort women through rape and sexual slavery are significantly influenced by the injustice of patriarchal structure under a specific colonial domination rather than the common physical and mental suffering of sexual violence itself (Kim 2012, 189-192). The source of the transnational women's coalition on the comfort women issue would then come not so much from the shared experience of women as a "common denominator" as from the collective feminist resistance to the oppressive system of gender (Alarcon 2003, 406). Although former comfort women's experiences are diverse and their situations are particularized (and historicized) from the nationalist perspective, emphasizing their diversity and particularity does not hamper the global feminist challenge against patriarchal structure. In so doing, the feminist cause could further include a discussion of former Korean comfort women's suffering from the patriarchal cultural environment after their return to Korea for which not only the Japanese government but also Korean society is responsible.

VII. Conclusion

Below are accounts by the Korean Council of its efforts on behalf of "comfort women." One is excerpted from the public statement in the early campaign; the other comes from its currently circulating pamphlet.

We feel keenly historical responsibility of revealing the truth of comfort women in order to rebuild *the pride of nation and women* and to console the spirit of resentfully scarified victims (public statement, May 18, 1990, Italic mine, recited from Kim 2004, 79).

The Korean Council...with its goal to resolve the issue of the military sexual slavery by Japan and thereby recover the human rights and dignity of the victims, seeks to *stop the revival of the Japanese militarism, prevent sexual violence against women* in armed conflicts, and contribute to the world peace (*pamphlet* 2008, *Italic mine*).

Although almost a 20-year time gap exists between these two accounts, they make it clear that nationalist and feminist concerns are two persistent themes running through the Korean Council's history of the comfort women movement.

The comfort women issue is the nationalist issue of Korea as well as the feminist issue of women. The crux of the comfort women movement is to address both nationalist and feminist concerns. The discourses of "nationalism" and "feminism" are two persistent themes running through the Korean Council's history of the comfort women movement. These discourses are, however, problematic in that they generate tensions with feminist and nationalist concerns for the comfort women issue, respectively. If the comfort women issue is considered as a part of national and gender-based oppression systems, and the comfort women movement aims to identify and challenge the injustice of these systems, I suggest that nationalist and feminist concerns can be accommodated in comfort women activism with less tension.

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