

# “Comfort Women” – New Research from Japan, Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia

Kevin Blackburn, Katharine McGregor, and Sachiyo Tsukamoto

**Abstract:** In this transcription of a webinar from October 2023, speakers Kevin Blackburn (Nanyang Technological University, Singapore), Katharine McGregor (University of Melbourne, Australia), and Sachiyo Tsukamoto (University of Newcastle, Australia) talk about their new books on the “comfort women.”

**Keywords:** comfort women, memory, activism, gender, sexual violence

This is an edited version of the transcription of a webinar titled “*Comfort Women*” – *New Research from Japan, Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia*, part of the [Historical Dialogues, Justice, and Memory Network Seminar Series](#), which took place on October 11, 2023. It was moderated by Mary M. McCarthy (Drake University and APJFJ Coeditor). The featured speakers were Kevin Blackburn (Nanyang Technological University, Singapore), Katharine (Kate) McGregor (University of Melbourne, Australia), and Sachiyo (Sachi) Tsukamoto (University of Newcastle, Australia). Editing of this transcript was done by Mary M. McCarthy.

**Mary** – Today we are here for an exploration of three really momentous, excellent new books on the “comfort women”<sup>1</sup>:

- Kevin Blackburn’s *The Comfort Women of Singapore in History and Memory* (The University of Chicago Press, 2022)
- Katharine McGregor’s *Systemic Silencing: Activism, Memory, and Sexual Violence in Indone-*

*sia* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2023)

- Sachiyo Tsukamoto’s *The Politics of Trauma and Integrity: Stories of Japanese “Comfort Women”* (Routledge, 2022)

All of these books exhibit some of the best in new research on the comfort women.

I want to begin by drawing out some of the common themes that bring these three books into implicit dialogue with each other. We will then engage in discussion across the four of us to delve more deeply into what each of these books brings to the scholarship in the field.

Reading through these three books, one of the common themes that jumped out at me is the notion of *silence*.

There are multifaceted ways in which silence comes to bear in both the issue area of the comfort women and scholarship on the comfort women. I’m just going to touch on a few of them here, focusing on the way in which silence is really manifested in these three works of scholarship.

First, we have the silence of the women themselves after the war. Next, the silence and silencing by their communities, whether the communities were the local communities, the nation, or the state. There was also the choice of certain women to remain silent. This was often because of the social and political context in which they found themselves after the end of the war. And there is the silence of the academic community. Each of these books covers areas of scholarship that we have not seen extensively covered, even as there has been a growing transnation-

<sup>1</sup> In this transcript, we put quotation marks around the term “comfort women” the first time it is mentioned to acknowledge it as a euphemism and controversial term.

al movement for historical justice for the comfort women and increasing scholarship on the comfort women.

Each of these authors presents new information about the comfort stations themselves and shares the lived realities of the women in the comfort stations. They uncover new stories and help us to more deeply understand the way in which the comfort system existed, the way in which the existence of these women was shaped by this system that was very much entrenched in gendered infrastructures, and the way in which these women existed in their social and political environments after the end of the war. This is not a small achievement that these authors accomplish, especially in the current age when we see right-wing forces throughout the world denying these historical facts.

The importance of these books is multifaceted. Not only do we see an uncovering of these historical facts and sharing of the lived experiences of these women, through the war and into the postwar period, each author then delves into the reasons for silence. We see the influences, the gendered infrastructures, and the social and political contexts. But also the *choices* that women made and why they made these choices to be silent at times.

Kevin Blackburn reveals the diversity of women who were caught up in this system and how that diversity, both during the war and after the war, led to their unique experiences with the transnational movement and with the decisions they made to speak up or not speak up. Katharine McGregor highlights the struggles that women went through, choosing whether or not to speak; when they were supported by social and political structures and actors and when they were not. Sachiyo Tsukamoto delves into the personal life stories of two women, in particular, and how they experienced their personal histories of trauma, in the context of gendered structures, and a social and political environment that wanted them to stay silent.

And now I'd like to turn to our authors and invite

them to explore what they are bringing to the historiography of this area of scholarship and what is new in their findings.

**Kevin** – I'll just start off by providing some context for the comfort women of Singapore. So, for the book, I decided that I wanted to do two things. One was to prove the existence of local comfort women in Singapore.

Singapore appears in the list of comfort *stations* but when lists of comfort *women* are generated, actually Singapore women never appear. Singapore is one of a handful of countries where the local comfort women never came forward at all. So, the idea was to prove local women from Singapore (Chinese women, Eurasian women, Malay women, and a few Indian women, as well as captured European women) were sexually enslaved. To document these local comfort women, I looked at the archives in the National Library of Singapore, but also sources from Japan, Korea, the UK, the US, and Australia.

And what my research uncovered in both Malaysia and Singapore, because I've done comparative work as well, is the great deal of diversity within these comfort stations, where you have Chinese women, who are local women, working side by side with Korean and Japanese women. First-hand accounts and Japanese veterans' memoirs demonstrate this, but it is not often recounted in the scholarly literature.

And then my second goal was to explain why these local women didn't come forward; to explore this silence. After the war, the Korean women, the Japanese women go home, but the local women don't go home. Many of them continue in sex work. They become streetwalkers. The younger ones are rounded up by a colonial government that's indifferent to their fate and a community that really doesn't want them.

So basically, to try and explain this silence was part of the process of writing the book. You see a patriarchal response to these local women. There was very little sympathy at all. And the perception was that these were simply women who would volunteer,

despite abundant evidence that many of the women were actually abducted from their villages and taken to the comfort stations. Other women were coerced. There were many women who were in sex work, actually, who were coerced into the comfort women system by the Japanese military.

So, what emerges out of the war is a very, very unfavorable environment for many of these women who were sexually enslaved.

**Kate** – My book contributes to several fields of historiography. It has both an empirical dimension but also a focus on memory. And, as an historian, I hope that my work adds to feminist historiography. In my book, I take a structural approach to understanding the sexual violence carried out by the Japanese military and the conditions that made that possible in the context of the colony governed by the Dutch at that time. I situate the experiences of the so-called comfort women in the context of much longer histories of sexual exploitation and inequality.

When the Japanese entered Indonesia in 1942, I argue that there was already a colonial patriarchal gender order at work, according to which Indonesian women were treated as sexually available to Dutch men for exploitation. These patriarchal structures of power contributed to the exploitation of girls and women. There were also local cultures of patriarchy that contributed to this. For example, local chiefs tried to convince women and girls to go with the Japanese, sometimes with false promises of other work.

So, the first half of my book sets up this kind of historical context and the conditions of the occupation—what it was like potentially for women in these conditions. Therefore, from the empirical side, my book contributes to what we know about the system through detailed attention to the context in which the sexual violence occurred, as well as significant reflection on the fear and coercion that Indonesians faced during military occupation.

The second half of the book, encompassing the second major contribution, focuses on the devel-

opment of activism across Asia from the 1980s to the 2000s. I pay attention to which factors shaped and facilitated activism, particularly in Japan and Korea, and then the impact of the famous survivor, Kim Hak-sun, and her 1991 testimony, in activating a select number of women to speak out on behalf of the silent majority who chose not to speak, as Mary mentioned before.

So, I tried to analyze the movement with some comparative transnational reflections on why Indonesian activism was slower to develop. Although there's been quite significant scholarship on Korean as well as Japanese activism,<sup>2</sup> there has been far less analysis of Indonesian activism and also on the very interesting connections between Indonesian and Japanese activists and also the relationship here to Dutch activism. I examine the crucial role that Japanese activists played in assisting Indonesian activists, particularly Japanese lawyers and feminist activists, and how they tried to support and encourage Indonesian survivors.

What my study adds there, I hope, is new insights for scholars, but also for activists not only from Indonesia but also outside of Indonesia, about the challenges and barriers that survivor activists and other activists have to negotiate, particularly in relation to sexual violence and in the context of working across borders.

In addition to that, from the perspective of Indonesian historiography, my book is one of the first studies to offer a history of human rights activism, so I hope that it has some important lessons there.

And finally, my book also contributes, I would say, to what we might describe as histories from below in Indonesia, which is, I hope, the direction that Indonesian history will continue to go. Through looking at this issue, it made me so aware that the history of working-class Indonesian women, in particular, is

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Chunghee Sarah Soh. "The Korean 'Comfort Women': Movement for Redress." *Asian Survey*, 36:12 (1996): 1226–1240; Mary M. McCarthy. "The Creation and Utilization of Opportunity Structures for Transnational Activism on WWII Sexual Slavery in Asia." In *Agency in Transnational Memory Politics*, edited by Jenny Wüstenberg and Aline Sierp, 113–134. Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2020.

really not that well represented in the scholarship. So, I hope my work also contributes to this opening up to the histories of subaltern women and how we, as historians, can access these quite difficult histories where there are fewer written records. We need to work with activist archives and also testimonies.

**Sachi** – My research is about the silenced history of Japan’s sexual enslavement system, revealing the constantly traumatized voices of Japanese victims of their own state’s violence against its female citizens. Japanese women were the initial victims of Japan’s comfort women system.<sup>3</sup>

Most of the victims were debt slaves of the state licensed prostitution system, which was another sexual slavery system in Japan, and laid the foundation for the institutionalization of human trafficking in the comfort women system.

My book uncovers the exploitative relationship between the patriarchal state and women, as a tool to control men in peacetime and soldiers in wartime through two sexual slavery systems. The class-based sexual contract, with the Emperor on the top of the patriarchal hierarchy as father of the nation and his male citizen soldiers, perpetuated male sex rights to access female bodies through the two-layered comfort women system provided to officers and enlisted soldiers, respectively.

My interdisciplinary study of the politics of gendered memory and trauma in identity construction also sheds new light on the sufferings of victims of sexual violence by uncovering the internal voices of two Japanese silence breakers, Kikumarū<sup>4</sup> and Suzuko Shirota.<sup>5</sup> Kikumarū was allocated only to a few officers, whereas Shirota was provided to numerous enlisted soldiers in the same way as many non-Jap-

<sup>3</sup> See Caroline Norma (2016) *The Japanese comfort women and sexual slavery during the China and Pacific wars*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic; and VAWWRAC (ed.) (2015) *Nihonjin ‘ianfu’: Aikokushin to jinshin baibai to* [Japanese ‘comfort women’: Nationalism and trafficking]. Tokyo: Gendai Shokan.

<sup>4</sup> Hirota K (2009) *Shōgen kiroku jūgun ianfu/kangofu: Senjo ni ikita onna no dokoku* [Testimonial records of military comfort women/nurses: Lamentations of the women who lived at the front]. Tokyo: Shinjinbutsuōraisha.

<sup>5</sup> Shirota Suzuko (1971) *Maria no sankā* [Maria’s song of praise]. Tokyo, Japan: Kanita Shuppanbu.

anese victims. Their stories of postwar hell tell us about the similar endless psychological trauma all victims of sexual enslavement, regardless of nationality, suffered in life. Listening to the voices and sharing the sufferings of lifelong trauma victims is critical to restoring their justice and dignity.

My research also analyzes the complex relationships between comfort women and soldiers as represented by citizen soldier masculinity<sup>6</sup> and homosocial bonds<sup>7</sup> among soldiers.

I hope my book will be a complementary reading with Kevin’s book and Kate’s book for a better understanding about the silence of victims, voices of trauma, as well as the use of statecraft in controlling people.

**Mary** – One of the other themes that threads through these three pieces of scholarship and is quite evident, I think, in what we just heard from each of our three authors is transnationalism. Transnationalism in terms of the system itself, in the 1930 and 1940s or even prior to that, and also the transnationalism of the movement after the war. So, I wanted to ask each of the authors to consider, given this context of transnationalism, why has the transnational movement for redress not had as much impact in these countries or for these particular women whom you study?

**Kate** – In my book I tried to take a comparative approach to look at the most well-known case of activism, which is probably Korean activism, considering the context in which that activism evolved, but also to look at Japan, where this issue has also been very important.

So, I looked at the case of Korea and the enabling conditions, which you could say made it more possible for some women at least to speak out. And I argued that that included a democratization movement in which there was greater attention to wom-

<sup>6</sup> Peter Guardino (2014) Gender, soldiering, and citizenship in the Mexican-American War of 1846–1848. *American Historical Review*, 119(1), 23–46.

<sup>7</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (2015) *Between men: English literature and male homosocial desire*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

en's rights, but also new attention to sexual violence, particularly in the context of violence committed by the police in Korea, and also the importance of the creation of women's studies programs, which led to new attention to gender and history. I think all those factors were critically important in Korea.

In Japan, I found some of the most interesting factors related to new attention to people's histories, histories from below, which made it possible to see new historical subjects. In addition, the development of feminism, but also critical thinking about Japan's past imperialism, and critical interrogation by women of their own complicity in this past.

So, when I turn back to Indonesia in the book, I consider what was not there and how the context was different. Of course, Indonesia was still an authoritarian regime at the time this movement began, and Indonesia was also a military-dominated regime. So in that context it was very difficult for any activism, particularly human rights activism, of course. But in addition to that, I think that there were other factors that affected the recognition of women as victims of violence. There was a repression of the women's movement in general. Very interestingly, Indonesian women on the political left had shown interest in this issue very early in the postwar period. But because the women's movement was repressed through the 1965 repression,<sup>8</sup> I feel that the women's movement took a step backwards and no longer looked at the critical intersection between gender and militarism.

In addition, as I mentioned, I think that the lack of this trend of writing history from below also meant that these women weren't immediately visible as historical subjects. And there was a lack of development of women's studies at this stage.

**Sachi** – The success of the transnational redress movement in the 1990s was facilitated by the boomerang effect of transnational advocacy networks,

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Katharine McGregor. "Cold War scripts: Comparing remembrance of the Malayan Emergency and the 1965 violence in Indonesia." *South East Asia Research*, 24:2 (2016): 242–260; Saskia Eleonora Wieringa. "Sexual Slander and the 1965/66 Mass Killings in Indonesia: Political and Methodological Consideration." *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 41:4 (2011): 544–565.

conceptualized by Keck and Sikkink<sup>9</sup> in 1998. The boomerang effect may occur in historical areas where the state needs the public to forget and rejects any challenges from domestic NGOs that promote the incorporation of alternative memories into official memory. Transnational advocacy networks bring marginalized domestic NGOs new channels to pressure the state through international organizations and other states in collaboration with international NGOs.

However, the victory of the boomerang effect, illustrated in things such as the Kono statement and the inclusion of the comfort women issue in Japanese school textbooks in the 1990s, seriously aroused right-wing politicians, intellectuals, and activists. A fierce backlash from the state and comfort women denialists emerged. The symbiotic interaction between the state and denialist NGOs is illustrated by the counter boomerang effect of transnational revisionist activism.<sup>10</sup> This cooperation, from above and below, encompassed conservative individuals and groups in politics, business, religion, education, and the media. For example, the leading grassroots organization, Nippon Kaigi,<sup>11</sup> penetrated every layer of society. This powerful cooperation has put domestic redress movements into marginalized positions in the domestic mnemonic sphere.

More importantly, this comfort women denialist activism has taken advantage of the patriarchal dichotomy of virgin versus prostitutes, Japanese survivors' silence, and the fragmented stories of some Japanese victims to evade state responsibility. Consequently, Japanese comfort women survivors have never been allowed to be part of Japan's postwar victim identity.

<sup>9</sup> Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn A. Sikkink. *Activists Beyond Borders*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998.

<sup>10</sup> See Sachiyo Tsukamoto. "The counter-boomerang effect of transnational revisionist activism on the memory of 'comfort women'." *Memory Studies*, 15:6 (2022): 1346–1359.

<sup>11</sup> Tomomi Yamaguchi (2020) The "History Wars" and the "Comfort Woman" Issue: The Significance of Nippon Kaigi in the Revisionist Movement in Contemporary Japan. In: Pyong Gap Min, Thomas R. Chung and Sejung Sage Yim (eds) *The Transnational Redress Movement for the Victims of Japanese Military Sexual Slavery: The Transnational Redress Movement for the Victims*. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, pp. 233–260. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110643480-013>

**Kevin** – I’d like to look at both Malaysia and Singapore in answering this question about the failure of the redress movement in both countries.

There are a couple of crucial things. First, we have the transnational aspect. There are Japanese feminists and historians who come to Singapore and Malaysia. Feminist activist and scholar Michiko Nakahara was crucial in making sure that the comfort women of Malaysia came forward and participated in the 2000 [civil society-led] trial of by-then-deceased Emperor Hirohito over the comfort women issue.<sup>12</sup> The historian Hayashi Hirofumi also is instrumental as he publishes on and reveals the comfort women of Singapore and Malaysia.

But what’s perhaps the key factor in the redress movement is actually the local response. You have activists in political parties, UMNO Youth in Malaysia, and the MCA [Malaysian Chinese Association]; people like Mustafa Yakub in the UMNO Youth and Michael Chong in the MCA. As the controversy emerges in 1991 and it becomes an international issue, they start to search for local comfort women.

Their efforts are stymied in both countries. The Malaysian government, at the urging of the Japanese embassy, simply squashes this attempt to begin the redress movement in Malaysia. In Singapore, the same result occurs, but it’s a different cause. The Japanese embassy is not involved. The government itself had basically neutered civil society. Civil society in Singapore didn’t flourish until the 21st century. The government is not interested at all in this issue. And the local comfort women themselves prefer to remain silent in a patriarchal society. Emerging feminist movements moved quite carefully. So, what happens is that the local women accept this condition that is forced upon them by the society that had treated them so badly after the war. And they return to live in society but remain silent.

Then in the 1990s, you have a situation where even the founding prime minister of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew, actually says that it was the Korean women

that saved the chastity of local Singapore women from becoming comfort women. This suggests that there weren’t local comfort women. So, the research done by Hirofumi Hayashi<sup>13</sup> is quite crucial here. But the redress movement just doesn’t make any traction because the government controls civil society so much.

So, this contrasts a bit with Malaysia. But the end result is the same in that the women are silenced in Singapore. Even as late as 2013, when the Korean Council decides to set up a second comfort women statue in Singapore, the government quickly stymies that as well. It’s not at the behest of the Japanese embassy; the Singapore government took this action mainly to control civil society and not let a very contentious issue into civil society.

So, although causes differ, the end result has been the same, the lack of traction of the redress movement in these two countries.

**Mary** – I want to turn it over to our panelists who have a few questions for each other.

**Kate** – My question is for Kevin. One of your arguments in the fantastic book that you’ve written, congratulations, is that Singapore survivors of the system were repeatedly silenced by large societal forces, including masculinist narratives, that erased their experience or that cast all women as “fallen women” in need of rehabilitation, as well as negative societal responses when a former sex worker, Ho Kwai Min, actually speaks out.

So, I just wanted to ask you to reflect a little bit on the consequences of this silencing or women’s choices to remain silent, perhaps in terms of broader discussions or an absence of discussions about sexual violence in Singapore.

**Kevin** – The redress movement was ignited in 1991 by the brave Korean women taking the Japanese government to court and it became a controversial issue. In Singapore at that time, you still have a strong patriarchal society. Even in the eighties, Lee

12 This refers to the Women’s International War Crimes Tribunal on Japan’s Military Sexual Slavery.

13 See, for example, Hirofumi Hayashi. “Japanese comfort women in Southeast Asia.” *Japan Forum*. 10:2 (1998): 211–219.

Kuan Yew ran a very patriarchal agenda. For example, as women were moving into the workforce and fertility was declining, he promoted the idea that you need to bring women back into the home. And Lee Kuan Yew, although no longer prime minister after 1990, was still quite influential in the 1990s.

In response, you have the emergence of local women's organizations, particularly AWARE [Association of Women for Action and Research]. But Singapore feminist organizations have so much on their plate that controversial historical issues like this one, just get lost among other priorities like domestic violence. Sexual violence and sex work itself were still topics that even Singapore women's organizations shied away from completely, actually. You get some discussion, but it's mainly in academic circles.

I think the other reason is because it is transnational. It has transnational implications. It involves Koreans up against Japanese. It is something that the government probably doesn't want, so they need to tread lightly.

I have a question for Sachi. In your work you describe the life of the Japanese comfort woman, Kikumaru, who in the 1970s tried to gain recognition for her war service after experiencing years of stigmatization. She had responded to presumably an advertisement by a Pacific War research group and had her story told in a men's magazine.<sup>14</sup> But by publicly coming forward, the very act of publicly coming forward, she felt even more ostracized.

She wrote a suicide note when she ended her life, sadly, on the 26th of April, 1972. The suicide note was to the male editor of the magazine that had published her story. She wrote comparing herself to the women who remained silent. The vast majority of comfort women from Japan have remained silent, even though there were so many of them. She penned these words about the women who had remained silent. She said, "Other women were clever. They were not as stupid as I was."

So, I'd like to ask two questions from this. What do you think Kikumaru meant when she penned those words? And the second question relates to the silence of the Japanese comfort women. Is her experience a possible explanation as to why so many Japanese comfort women have remained silent, although their presence in the comfort stations rivaled that of the Koreans at times?

**Sachi** – Thank you very much for such an important question, Kevin.

That is the core point of my book. I need to explain a little bit about Kikumaru's life. Kikumaru was sold to a geisha house by her poor family at the age of ten, turning her into a social stigma within her community. When Kikumaru was aged 17, she drew upon the war propaganda expression *okuni no tame* (for the country) to convince her parents to allow her to become a comfort woman because it was her only chance to escape brutal indentured prostitution in her life. Her sense of pride as a self-sacrificial, dutiful daughter and a loyal national subject rejected the social stigmatization that being a comfort woman had placed on her and she broke her silence to be publicly recognized as a human being with integrity and dignity. But her trust was betrayed by the society she trusted.

Kikumaru concluded in her suicide note that in this inhumane society, remaining silent would be smarter. So Kikumaru's narrative of trauma tells two stories: the story of the unbearable nature of prostitution and the story of the unbearable nature of postwar survival.

The oscillating nature of trauma between life and death is signified by Kikumaru's voice and silence in the struggle to connect with society, which permanently silenced her voice. Society had silenced comfort women survivors, whether they were "good" women or "bad" women, by forcing them to internalize the perpetrator's shame and guilt. At fault are not only the state and denialists, but also us and our communities.

<sup>14</sup> See Sachiyo Tsukamoto. "A More Miserable Life than Living in the Jungle: A Japanese 'Comfort Woman' Story." *Gender & History*, 35:1 (2023): 305–322.

Silent survivors have not been visible. However, we can imagine their voices by listening to courageous silence breakers such as Kikumaru and Shirota, who told us the unspeakable stories of trauma. It is our turn to listen to their testimonies to recognize the suffering of all comfort women survivors.

This is my turn to ask Kate a question. Kate, in your book, you introduce two Indonesian silence breakers: Mardiyem and Tuminah. The stories of these comfort women survivors seem parallel to the contrast between Korean survivors as rape victims and Japanese survivors as professional prostitutes. To what extent has Tuminah's experience, including the 2013 film centered on her life,<sup>15</sup> changed the public memory and history of comfort women in Indonesia?

**Kate** – First, it is important to acknowledge that Indonesian activism continued long after my book's coverage, which only runs through 2000.

In the book, I open and end with some reflections on the life of Tuminah, who is very important for so many reasons. She was the first Indonesian woman to speak publicly about her experiences in 1992. She, like many other women around the world, was inspired by Kim Hak-sun, but also encouraged, interestingly, through her links with a very empathetic Japanese pastor, Koichi Kimura, who lived in Indonesia at that time. Her story is also quite different from that of most survivors who spoke out because she disclosed that she was a sex worker before being forcibly recruited by the Japanese military. And she offered through an interview with Kimura, a very rare first-person account of the conditions of sex work in the late colonial period, as well as her experiences of being rounded up and forced into a comfort station once the Japanese arrived. She lamented, in particular, that she could no longer feed her family once she was caught in this system. In the book, I tried to reflect quite critically on how and why after she spoke out in 1992, Tuminah seemed to fade from the spotlight. Was it just a question of timing because Indonesian activism had not begun in

<sup>15</sup> Tuminah's life story was the subject of a film by Indonesian filmmaker and activist Fanny Chotimah called *TUM* (2013).

earnest yet, or was there something else at play?

And so I researched the contrasting story of Mardiyem, who was a 14 year old girl who was duped into the system and taken far from her home in Java to an outer island of Borneo and also subjected to not only forced rape, but also a forced abortion. She came forward after Japanese lawyers visited Indonesia and a call was put out for survivors to come forward. Once the lawyer leading the case heard her story, it seemed that a very strategic choice was made to make Mardiyem the face of the Indonesian movement because of the fact that her story was seen as more likely to draw sympathy. That strategic choice seemed to some extent necessitated by the backlash that you mentioned before Sachi, which occurred across the world, and began almost as soon as the movement for redress did.

So, there is this replication of an idea that you mentioned, Sachi, of who is a “worthy” victim, which you say in your argument is why these women were also not recognized as survivors. But that activist focus, I argue, has the consequence of discounting the forced recruitment and brutal treatment of women who were formerly sex workers. And it made it less likely that they would come forward for fear of not being seen as worthy victims. Even the women who were not formally sex workers experienced social stigmatization when they came forward. Tuminah continued to receive attention from a small group of activists through a grave renovation project and also the film that you mention.

**Mary** – I want to express great thanks to all our authors who shared their insights with us today.

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**Sachiyo Tsukamoto** *is an honorary associate lecturer at the University of Newcastle in Australia. She specializes in gender, war memory, history and trauma, and sexual violence in Asia. Her most recent publication entitled The Politics of Trauma and Integrity: Stories of Japanese “Comfort Women” (Routledge 2022) is a joint winner of the 2023 Carole Pateman Gender and Politics Book Prize awarded by the Australian Political Studies Association.*