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Korean and Romanian women: victims of foreign and native violence

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War and political rebellions turn people into beasts, and while men bring about most of these dreadful events, it is women and children who have to suffer their consequences.
The aim of my paper is to bring to light the common fate of women in two spatially distant and culturally different societies (Korean and Romanian), showing that in the past century they were victims of both foreign and native violence. During WWII, Japanese soldiers have sexually exploited Korean women, whereas their Romanian sisters fell prey to the Russian soldiers withdrawing from war. Later on, during the communist regime in Romania and in the aftermath of the Gwangju Uprising in Korea in 1980, the Romanian and Korean women became the victims of their own compatriots. To illustrate this sad fate, I have employed fragments excerpted from various Romanian and Korean novels, as well as secondary data.
The framework I made use of is the social theory according to which "agency /action and social structure are recognized as major dimensions of social reality" (Sibeon 2004, 117) and are in strong connection with power and interests. This theory claims that it is humans in the world that do things, but very often these things are performed by individual actors that have power or are empowered by institutions. Irrespective of whether the men who were the agents/actors of women's abuse had physical or political power over their victims, what happened to the Romanian and Korean women (and most probably to women in other parts of the world) is unpardonable.

Key-words: *WWII, violation of human rights, Romanian and Korean women, Japanese soldiers, Russian soldiers*

1. Introduction

Two novels, one Korean (Helie Lee's *Still Life with Rice*) and the other Romanian (Paul Goma's *Justa*), though written 40 years apart, both contain a line that conveys the same message, namely that men bring about wars and uprisings and women suffer their consequences.

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> Why do you, men, fight each other and we, women, get the blows? And what blows?!
>
> (Goma 2009, 80)

> War is a man's game, but the women and children seemed to suffer the most.
>
> (Lee 1997, 211)

This seems to be true not only for the Korean and the Romanian women, the subjects of my investigation, but for all women in countries at war. They are left behind to look after their children, their parents, and parents-in-law; they are the ones to lend a helping hand in the field hospitals, tending to the wounded soldiers; they are also the ones who help(ed) in the war industry, and, sadly, they are frequently abused physically. In other words, they are the victims of the actions performed by more powerful actors in specific social contexts, actions that destroy(ed) their lives (or even put an end to their lives) and that seldom get punished.

The interest in this topic emerged from my encounter with the Statue of Peace in Seoul, in 2015, which represents a girl, sitting on a chair. I thought it was just a piece of art, but the inscription 'comfort women' on the plaque next to it stirred my curiosity and I started reading articles about the history of Korea. Then, I came across some novels authored by Korean or American-Korean writers who tackled this episode (the sexual enslavement of Korean women by the Imperial Japanese Army) in the turbulent history of the country. When reading these novels, I remembered stories told by my grandmothers related to the abusive conduct of the Russians on their way home, after the end of WWII and I realized the Korean and Romanian women shared a common fate. I started searching for similar sources of information about the Russian soldiers' behaviour towards women in Romania.

The literary works I read also revealed another similarity regarding the Romanian and Korean women, namely that in the second half of the previous century they became the victims of their own compatriots, in different political circumstances. So, literature could be a means of knowing our own history, as well as that of other countries.

The paper's roadmap is the following: section 2 offers an overview of the theoretical framework within which the fate of the women in both countries mentioned before will be discussed in details. Section 3 provides the historical backdrop of the events that led to the victimization of women, while in the analytical part of the paper (section 4), the fragments excerpted from four novels (two Romanian and two Korean) will be discussed from the vantage point of the social theory. The conclusions are drawn in section 5.

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2. Basic concepts in the *social theory*

Agency and action have been the focus of interest in a number of sciences, such as the philosophy of action, linguistics, or sociology, to mention just a few. In the preface to the book *Agency and Action* (2004), co-edited by John Hyman and Helen Steward, it is pointed out that "the philosophy of action is principally concerned with human action. Its main aims are to explain the distinction between activity and passivity in human life and to describe the circumstances in which an action by a human being is correctly described as voluntary, intentional, or culpable" (2004, v). Linguists, on the other hand, are concerned with the "linguistic features that affect agentivity at the level of verbs, subjects, and objects" and the way in which these features are combined in order to render different levels of agentivity (Pizarro Pedraza and De Cock 2018, 113). According to Weber (1922) (quoted in Little 2016, 30), "[s]ociology (…) is a science which attempts the interpretive understanding of social action in order thereby to arrive at a causal explanation of its course and effects. In "action" is included all human behaviour (…)." Since Aristotle, the definition of *action* has been related to "intentionality" (Yamamoto 2006). Intentionality is defined by Kockleman (2013, 137) as people's capacity to make "sense of their behaviour by reference to some underlying mental state – their belief, desire or intention."

From among the multitude of theories of action, I have chosen the *social theory* as outlined by Giddens (1979) and Sibeon (2004), due to the fact that it proves to be of great help in understanding the social and political events presented in the Romanian and Korean novels I will subject to investigation. This theory states that "agency /action and social structure are recognized as major dimensions of social reality" (Sibeon 2004, 117) and are in strong connection with power and interests. The social theory makes use of certain basic concepts that are related to action, such as *actor* (agent), *agency*, *social structure,* and *power*, which will be defined in what follows, in order to provide a backdrop against which the historical events and their effects on women could be interpreted in a more refined manner.

A key concept is *agency*, defined in slightly different ways by various scholars. Duranti (2004) provides a very encompassing definition of the term. According to him:

> agency is (…) understood as the property of those entities (i) that have some degree of control over their own behaviour, (ii) whose actions in the world affect other entities' [actions] (and sometimes their own), and (iii) whose

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> actions are the object of evaluation (e.g. in terms of their given responsibility for a given outcome. (2004, 453).

For Sibeon (2004, 118) agency is "a conditioned though not structurally determined capacity to formulate and carry out intentional acts", while for Ahearn the term "refers to the socioculturally mediated capacity to act" (2010, 29). According to these last two definitions, the capacity to act is conditioned or mediated by the socio-cultural context in which people live. This is known as the *social structure* which stands for "temporally and very often spatially extensive social conditions that to a greater or lesser extent influence actors' forms of thought, decisions and actions" (Sibeon 2004, 124). Social structure includes the actors and their actions, as well as routinized practices, distribution of power, and social networks established between actors. People's actions are usually constrained by certain cultural rules, values or norms, but it may happen that these values and norms change with the changing historical circumstances (social structures), which means that people's conduct differs from one period of time to another.

Actor, another important concept that emerged in connection with social structure, is defined by Hindess (1986a, 115) (quoted in Sibeon 2004, 110) as "a locus of decision and action where the action is in some sense a consequence of the actor's decisions". What this definition emphasizes is the actor's capacity to make decisions and to act on them, irrespective of whether these decisions are good or bad. Sibeon (2004), in agreement with Hindess (1986a), considers that there are two types of actors: **individual** and **social** (such as organizations in the state, political parties, central government departments, local or national authorities, etc.), each of these two types of actors exhibiting a different form of agency. Irrespective of whether the actors are individual or social, they are responsible for the actions they perform or for the outcomes of these acts.

A last key element in the social theory, which Giddens (1979) accords centrality, is *power*, a characteristic of both agents and social structures. Power is defined by Giddens (1979, 69) as a *capability*, namely "the capability of an actor to achieve his or her will, even at the expense of that of others who might resist him". At the same time, the scholar considers that power is also a "property of the collectivity" (Giddens 1979, 69).

In the analytical part of the paper we shall see how these terms could be put to use in explaining the outcomes of men's acts against women. But let us now have a look at some of the most important historical events (or *social structures* in terms of the afore-detailed social theory) that occurred in Romania and Korea in the previous century and that, to a certain extent, made male agents feel entitled to exert their power over women in an condemnable manner.

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3. A brief look into the historical events that impacted the Korean and Romanian societies in the 20th century

The 20th century was a period of turmoil in most parts of the world. The two World Wars, which started out from Europe, came to involve almost all continents. WWI, triggered in 1914 by the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary by Serbian nationalists, made European countries fight against each other (Austria-Hungary against Serbia, Germany against Russia, France against Belgium) or form alliances (Russia and Serbia, Germany and Austria-Hungary, and Japan and Britain, to mention just a few). In the following years USA, Australia, and New Zealand also got involved in the war. The real causes of the war, which set the European countries against one another, were the tensions and frictions caused by industrialization and imperialism. As far as Romania is concerned, it joined the war almost two years after its outbreak by declaring war to the Austro-Hungarian Empire from which it claimed a long-disputed territory, Transylvania, inhabited by Romanian population, but belonging to Hungary. The war ended in January 1919, when the representatives of the allied forces gathered in Paris to sign the Treaty of Versailles, which redrew Europe's borders (Transylvania came under the control of Romania) and which officially put the blame on Germany for damaging the lives of so many people of the allied forces (Article 231 of the Treaty, known as the "War Guilt Clause"). This came as a powerful blow for the Germans, who, apart from losing territories, also had to pay heavy reparations to the allied forces.

Some historians (Michael Ray, no year, https://www.britannica.com/list/timeline-of-world-war-i) think that this embarrassing situation gave the Germans a reason to re-group and propel Adolf Hitler to power in 1933; others (Neiberg 2017) consider that the Treaty of Versailles was not enough to set the stage for WWII. Neiberg is of the opinion that some other, more critical factors, such as the political instability in the newly created states and the Depression Germany went through after the end of the war contributed to setting the stage for another international conflict – WWII, which would involve more countries, take more lives, destroy more land and, in the long run, prove more devastating than the Great War. WWII started on the 1st of September 1939, with Hitler's invasion of Poland. Soon afterwards, France and Britain declared war to Germany. Though neutral at the outbreak of the war, Romania soon joined Germany, which it provided with oil, weapons, cereals, and troops. After almost 5 years, on the 23rd of August 1944, King Michael of Romania declares war on Germany, its former ally. This event also paved the way to the Soviet influence on Romania. When WWII ended, the Russian soldiers who had fought in central European countries withdrew, crossing our country and behaving in a disrespectful way to the Romanian people. Also in the

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aftermath of WWII, the Soviet occupation (1948-1958) imposed communism on the Romanian people. A totalitarian regime, with its own repressive mechanisms – among which the *Securitate* (Political Police) – dominated the political arena until 1989. The *Securitate* was set up in 1948 and it aimed initially those people who were perceived as enemies of the working class (i.e. manufacturers, bankers, land-owners, as well as members of the former historical parties). Later on, the focus expanded, including intellectuals who assumedly were connected to people whom the *Securitate* wanted to suppress. Despite knowing that fighting against the communist regime may result in being tortured, many of the Romanian intellectuals of the 1950s would not accept to be manipulated.

Korea, though not directly involved in WWII, also suffered its consequences. In Asia, WWII began a little earlier than in Europe, more exactly in 1937, when Japan launched the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945) against China. Korea, which at that time was a Japanese protectorate, had to reorganize its economy onto a war footing. According to Savada and Shaw (1992, 21), "[t]he [Japanese] government also began to enlist Korean youths in the Japanese army as volunteers in 1938 and as conscripts in 1943", while many Korean young women were turned into so-called 'comfort women' for the Japanese soldiers. When Japan surrendered to the Allied Forces in 1945 - a signal for the end of WWII, Korea became the fighting ground of rival forces: Russia and America. Thus, the country was divided into two parts by the 38th parallel, the Soviets supporting the North, and the Americans the South. In 1948, the southern part became the Republic of Korea, while the northern one turned into the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the two countries being involved in the Korean War (1951-1953). Three decades after the war, South Korea went through a period of political turmoil caused by its first president, Syngman Rhee's repressive actions against his political opponents and the Korean citizens, as well as by the dictatorship of the country's second president, Park Chung-Hee, who limited the personal freedom of the country's citizens, controlled the press and the universities. In the late 1970s, students from various university centres (Teagu, Seoul) staged rallies and demonstrations, and in October 1979,

> students in Pusan poured into the streets and clashed with the police, leading the government to declare martial law in that city. In late October, students in Masan launched a demonstration; the government placed the city under 'garrison decree'. The army took over the responsibility for public order (Savada and Shaw 1992, 42).

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The students were very much against corruption, the military rule in the country, and the suppression of academic freedom. All the turmoil culminated with the Gwangju Uprising (May 18-27, 1980), when students were joined by civilians in their fight for democracy. The soldiers who were sent by the government to calm down the spirits brutally beat the demonstrators, which made more people join the uprising. Unfortunately, the uprising was crushed by the military forces, leaving about 2,000 people (students and civilian demonstrators) dead and many more suffering from physical and psychological traumas.

4. Korean and Romanian women: victims of the historical events that impacted their homelands

In this section of the paper, I intend to unveil how Romanian and Korean women fell victims to violence inflicted on them by both foreign and native agents. The primary data come from Romanian and Korean novels, covering the events in two important periods of time in the history of both countries: WWII and its aftermath, on the one hand, and the communist regime in Romania, and the Gwangju Uprising in 1980 in Korea, on the other hand: Cristian Teodorescu (2012): *Medgidia, orașul de apoi* ('Medgidia, the city of forever'), Paul Goma (1985), *Justa*, Moon Young-Sook (2019), *Trampled Blossoms,* and Han Kang (2016) *Human Acts*. Secondary data have also been employed to confirm the information encountered in the above-mentioned literary pieces. My strong desire and hope is that by bringing to light the hideous crimes committed by men against women, we could prevent other similar acts from happening.

In my endeavour, I started out from the hypothesis that war (which I equate with social structure in terms of the social theory) and power (a characteristic of a group of agents or of a collectivity, in Giddens's terms) change people's conduct (action) in unexpected ways. Derived from this, the following research questions were formulated.

a) Which of the agents (individual or social) are more to be blamed for the actions that caused the suffering of the Romanian and Korean women?
b) Despite the common, tragic fate of Romanian and Korean women, is there any difference between their attitudes to the events/agents that affected their lives?
c) Has power shifted from the agents (foreign soldiers/native torturers) to the patients (i.e. the female victims)? Have the victims gained power over their torturers, in other words, have they themselves become actors (agents)?

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In drawing a parallel between the female victims in two distinct geographical locations, I shall start by presenting how they were sexually abused by foreign agents during and after WWII.

4.1. Foreign violence on Korean and Romanian women

As mentioned in section 3, after the end of WWII the Russian army withdrew from the European countries in which it had fought, passing on its way back to Russia through Romania. Along their return journey, the soldiers plundered houses and raped women[2]. This behaviour of the Russians is only hinted at in a couple of Romanian novels, but secondary evidence came to light only after the fall of communism.

A fragment in Cristian Teodorescu's *Medgidia, orașul de apoi* ('Medgidia, the city of forever') describes some of the Russians' habits, among which was rape.

(1) In the cities, the Russians would abstain, but in the countryside, where no one saw them, they were said to be wreaking havoc. When they got drunk, they would rape even the cows in the stables. (…) Not even the old women, forgotten by God on Earth, were spared. (p. 145) (my translation)

A few lines in Mihail Sebastian's *Jurnal 1935-1944: Anii fasciști* ('Diary 1935-1944: The Fascist Years') provide additional evidence for the way in which many Russian soldiers treated the women in the countries they passed through on their way back home from war:

(2) Savagery, fear, distrust. The Russian soldiers rape women (as Dina Cocea told me yesterday). (p. 549) (my translation)

Many Romanian families living along the route taken by the Russians would hide their daughters for fear of falling prey to the Russian soldiers. But not all of them were fortunate. A newspaper article written by Daniel Guță and published in 2016 in the online version of *Adevărul* newspaper (see the link in References) brings further evidence for the horrors endured by those women who tried to oppose their attackers. The following fragment was excerpted from a document in the Archives of Hundeoara County and was presented in the afore-mentioned article.

[2] In a documentary entitled "Hitler's World: The Post-War Plan", broadcast on Viasat History in May 2020, it was mentioned that German women had also been raped by the Russians, many of them becoming pregnant and choosing to abort the children.

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(3) The woman, Tamas Evuta, being short of water, sent her niece/granddaughter[3], Persida, to the river. The Soviet soldier followed her and laid hand on her with the intention of having intercourse with her. The victim would fight back against the soldier, but the latter, realizing that he would not reach his goal, fired four pistol shots, one in the girl's heart. (my translation)

On the other side of the planet, in Korea, women had an even more tragic fate. When the Sino-Japanese War broke, Korea was a protectorate of Japan. Japan's economy had to focus on supporting the war, and consequently 'work force' was looked for in Korea. Young women and girls were promised jobs in Japan, especially in the textile industry or in restaurants. They were also lured with false advertisements for nursing jobs at outposts or Japanese bases. In the worst scenario, girls would be abducted by the Japanese soldiers from their own villages, in many cases the abductors being helped by Koreans who sympathized with Japan[4]. Once these young women and girls were recruited, they would be transported to various places in Korea or in neighbouring countries, and would be placed into so-called 'comfort stations', being turned into sex-slaves for the Japanese soldiers. On the train-journey to the comfort stations, many of the girls would be picked randomly by the soldiers who guarded them and forced to satisfy their sexual needs/desires. Because many of the female 'recruits' were extremely young and abused continuously by a number of soldiers, they would not even make it to the destination, but bleed to death (Bracht, 2018).

One can imagine the shock endured by a 13-year-old girl (Heo Chun-ja / Haruko / Number 1[5]), the heroine of Moon's novel *Trampled Blossoms*, who had no knowledge concerning sex whatsoever, as in the Korean society this is a somewhat taboo topic. So, when confronted with the first 'customer', the girl tried to run away, being afraid first and foremost by the sight of an enemy soldier and then by that of the private parts of a male's body. The punishment is quick to come, as the heroine confesses in the following fragment:

[3] In Romanian there is no line distinction in the word 'nepoată': the term may refer both to someone's nice (indirect line) or to someone's granddaughter (direct line). The context could provide a clue, but in our example the contextual information is not relevant/rich enough.

[4] Like in Romania, many Korean families who had daughters, tried to hide them in caves, to save them from being sexually abused by the Japanese soldiers.

[5] On entering the comfort stations, the Korean teenagers were given Japanese names or were referred to metonymically, by the number of the room in which they lived and 'worked'.

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(4) (…) his heavy hand struck me in the back and knocked me to the floor. (…) he picked up the rifle and brought the stock crashing down on my head. After an instant of terrible pain, I blanked out. (Moon 2019, 68)

Due to the fact that these girls had to 'work hard' (serving between 15 to 40 soldiers a day) on very little food and in poor sanitary conditions, the most courageous of them tried to escape the comfort stations, but unfortunately, very few succeeded. The punishment received by the ones that were caught and brought back to the camps was extremely brutal, i.e. searing.

(5) I ran once. When they caught me, they seared me here [on the chest] with a red-hot iron. (Moon 2019, 128)

Considering the girls' frail constitution, the long working hours, and the poor living conditions, it comes as no wonder that many of them fell ill. Rather than providing the necessary medical support for the comfort women, "the Japanese would stop feeding them or just leave them to die" (Moon 2019, 132).

At the end of WWII, when the Japanese surrendered, they wanted to erase all the traces of their misconduct, and one of the solutions[6] they found was to murder the comfort women, whom they would derogatorily call 'female ammunition' or 'public toilets'.

(6) They killed all the comfort women, too. Then they stacked up their corpses, poured kerosene on them, and set them on fire. (Moon 2019, 126)

A person completely ignorant of the Japanese culture and history might wonder why the Japanese military forces behaved like beasts to the young comfort women, when they could have simply abused them and thank them for the service. The reason emerges in one of the novels that deal with the plight of these unfortunate souls:

(7) The Japanese believe it [i.e. rape] will aid them in battle. Help them be victorious in the war. They think it is their right to release their energy and receive pleasure, even when they are so far away from home, because they risk their lives for the emperor on the front line. They believe this so much

[6] Some comfort women stationed in Singapore were 'invited' by the Japanese military to work as nurses after the war ended, as the Japanese hoped they "could cover up the existence of comfort stations" (confession of Kim Bok-Dong, surviving comfort women interviewed at age 93 in 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qsT97ax_Xb0&vl=en&ab_channel=AsianBoss).

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> that they take our girls and ship them all over the world for this purpose. (Bracht 2018, 34)

One would assume that the end of the war would bring peace and safety for the Korean women, but this was not so. In the summer of 1945, American troops arrived in Seoul, the capital city of the country. The Americans were perceived as friendly and helpful. Afterwards the Russians came, who did the things they remained famous four:

(8) When the Soviets arrived, the world suddenly became dangerous (…). Apparently, foreigners can not tell exactly the age of Korean women, so that the Soviet soldiers went so far as to rape even elderly women. Rumour goes that they confiscated any watch they laid eyes on, some of them exhibiting no more than 10 watches on one arm. (Park 2015, 160-161) (my translation)

What the fragments in this sub-section show is that the social structure of WWII provided the individual actors, i.e. the Russian and Japanese soldiers the context in which to behave differently from the way they did in everyday, ordinary life, when they had to comply with the values and norms of conduct imposed by their own culture. During war time, these two groups of agents turned into beasts, making use of their power both as men and as soldiers in order to get what they considered they were entitled to in exchange of their sacrifice for their homeland, for the emperor (in case of the Japanese soldiers), or for the cause of the war, namely raping women, despite the resistance opposed by their victims. But while for the Russians this was a form of 'physical entertainment' (they were led only by instincts and desires), for the Japanese it was a scheme organized by the military (organizational/ social agent) to ensure soldiers had constant sexual access to women, so as to fight bravely. At this point we might ask ourselves whether the Japanese soldiers, unlike the Russian ones, did not act under compulsion. As the comfort stations were specifically set up for them, they might have considered raping Korean teens as part of their military service.

The horrors endured by the Korean and Romanian women who were sexually abused by foreign soldiers became public a long time after they had been committed. For the Romanian side, the reason could be the fact that as the country was under Russian occupation, the communist regime imposed by the Russians produced politicians that fraternized with the Russians and anything that would stain the image of our neighbours would be severely punished. This is why, I assume, all the stories related to Russian soldiers' rape of Romanian women spread by word of mouth, rather than by printed documents. The documents incriminating the Russians who

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murdered the women that tried to protect their honour had to be produced, as they were part of the criminal investigations, but they were kept secret until recently, when Romania became less 'attached' to Russia. As for the Korean side, the late unveiling of the horrors committed by the Japanese soldiers on Korean women was due to the stigma attached to women who lost their virginity before marriage. In Confucian cultures like Korea, women have to defend their virginity with their own life. Consequently, loss of virginity before marriage requires suicide. Since the comfort women who survived the Japanese stations chose to live, they tried to hide their sad fate by burying the past for a long time, for fear of being treated as pariahs, and, more importantly, for fear of having their family members lose face. But when Moon's heroine approaches the end of her life, she finds the strength to come forward with her story of sorrow, turning into a discourse agent, whose action is motivated by her desire that the Japanese government would eventually acknowledge the existence of comfort stations and, implicitly, of comfort women and that the victims' dignity would be fully restored.

(9) The way to cure my disease and find relief from the bitterness festering inside was to tell the world about the awful things I'd endured. But I was afraid that my precious daughter and grand-daughter would learn the truth about me. (…) I'm afraid that the people I love will be somehow tainted by the unhealed wounds inflicted by the Japanese soldiers who assaulted me. (Moon 2019, 228-229).

Interesting to mention is that most of the books that cover this sad period in the Korean history were written by female writers who are descendants/ relatives of the comfort women and who do not reside in Korea, but in America (Bracht 2018; Keller 1997; Lee 1997). Being encouraged by the American open attitude in dealing with any kind of events, these female writers felt it was their task to pay tribute to their ancestors who were forced into military sexual slavery losing their childhood, their families, their health and dignity because of the Japanese enslavement and to bring to light the horrors of war.

Also, worth pointing out is the fact that once one such comfort woman came to speak openly about the barbarous acts perpetrated by the Japanese soldiers, many more joined her. A movement known as the 'Wednesday demonstration', which takes place every Wednesday, at noon (since January 1992) in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul, brings together relatives of the former comfort women and ordinary people, all demanding that the Japanese government should present the victims with official, sincere apologies. Moreover, in the memory of all these teenagers who had been forced into sexual slavery by the Japanese army, on the

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1000th Wednesday demonstration (in 2011), the Statue of Peace ("Pyeonghwaui Sonyeosang" in Korean) was inaugurated. The statue represents a young girl, sitting on a chair, next to it being another, empty chair which invites people to sit on it and imagine what these girls must have gone through. The bird sitting on her left shoulder symbolizes freedom and liberation.



Figure 1. The Statue of Peace (retrieved from the Internet, public space)

4.2. Native violence on women

Unfortunately, local historical events in the second part of the previous century also took their toll on Romanian and Korean women. After the end of WWII, when Romania came under Soviet domination, the so-called Political Police (Securitate) was set up with the main goal of suppressing the opponents of the Communist Party. Apart from that, the Securitate (through its sub-branches) was also involved in various activities, such as prosecutions, arrests and even murders. A bit later, the Securitate also started censoring the mail, intercepting telephone calls, and keeping track of family events and background. The staff of the political police was made up mainly by workers, with a low degree of education, the intellectuals representing only 2% of the organizational chart (cf. Catalan and Stănescu 2013). The members of the working force, who reached high leading positions within the Securitate, would be encouraged to continue their education by attending evening or reduced-frequency courses. In the beginning, the Securitate members would focus their attention on high-ranking officials of the Old Regime, on the members of the former historical political Parties (The National Peasants' Party and The National Liberal Party), on the members of the Legionary Movement, but also on the staff of the Greek-Catholic church. Later, every civilian (students included) who was suspected of being against the regime would fall prey to the coercive means employed by Securitate, ranging from intimidation, torture, rape, confinement in psychiatric hospitals, and even murder.

A form of opposing the communist regime was dissidence. The first Romanian dissident was the writer Paul Goma, who unveiled the violations of the human rights by the communists in the letters he sent to the Western countries

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starting with the early 1970s. After having been arrested, tortured, and drugged, he and his family were denied Romanian citizenship and were forced into exile. His novel *Justa*, which was written in 1985 and which describes his life as a student of the Faculty of Letters in Bucharest, contains passages depicting the over-arching power of the Securitate in the 1950s. In short, the story is the following. During his student life, Paul Goma is accused of plotting against the communist regime. On the basis of a summary of the questions the students had raised during the Marxism course and which only Goma signed, he is perceived as an enemy of communism, convicted, judged, and eventually imprisoned. His friend and group mate, Toria (nicknamed *Justa* 'The Just' on grounds of always trying to side with the truth), tries to help Paul get out of prison by asking the other group mates, the professors, and famous writers in Bucharest to sign a memoir she had written in his defence. Her insistence in getting Goma out of prison draws the attention of the Securitate members, who interrogate and torture her in order to find out the connection between her and the culprit. The interrogation turns into a daily routine, until the Security decides to change the tactics. The fragment below, a dialogue between Toria (the victim) and her room-mate and friend, Diana illustrates the brutal treatment the former was subjected to:

(10) « What happened to you, did they beat you? » I ask her. «I don't think this is the ap-pro-pri-ate term, but I would kindly ask you to help me undress... » It was then that I saw her hand – you know what beautiful hands she's got – they were swelled, red and bruised; here, on the forearm, the skin was cracked and there was blood... ... «They slapped your palms! » I say. «I didn't know the lesson» she says and starts laughing. «They punished me like in primary school, they slapped my palms with a ruler». I take off her trench coat and pull her sweater over her head. «Now I would like you to help me lie on my stomach, as it seems the most comfortable position», she says. «They hit your buttocks! », I exclaim. «No, not my buttocks, my arse. The arse. They hit my arse with the baton – ba-ton – now I know what it's called: baton. » (Goma 2009, 77, my translation)

As such a 'treatment' had not yielded the desired outcomes, some of the inquisitors would make recourse to rape, as this is the ultimate way in which men can have an upper hand on women, of exerting their power, if only physical. As mentioned previously, the Securitate members had a low degree of education, but were empowered by the Communist Party to defend the political leaders by any means. The girls/ young women they humiliated and raped were often

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intellectuals, people the Securitate members hated because they could never reach this status. Diana, Tora's room-mate, whose boyfriend had also been imprisoned, had her own share of 'virile treatment' when interrogated by the Securitate.

(11) (…) I was saying the same thing, I was shouting the same thing when they fucked me, filled my body with water through a hose – but then even more, I cried out with some kind of joy, I screamed from the bottom of my heart. It was pure pain, it was crystal-clear humiliation – pain and rape and ripping up of the womb. (Goma 2009, 79, my translation)

My feeling is that with the Securitate members, the dominant actors (i.e. the heads of the organization) were able to influence the final actors' actions (torturing, humiliating, raping) in such a way that they let them believe that this kind of conduct was required on their behalf. The final actors (the rapists and torturers), in part because they were brainwashed by the power elite, in part because they were simpletons, failed to understand what their real job was (to defend the communists).

Just like in Romania, Korean students would side with the truth, with democracy and would fight against corruption. According to Savada and Shaw (1992, 34), in the spring of 1960 the students rebelled against the fraudulent re-election of Syngman Rhee – he was re-elected by default, as his opponent had died shortly before the elections. This stirred the fury of the students, who started a revolution that was crushed by the police. It is said that about 140 students died in the confrontations. But this was only the beginning of the firm attitude taken by young intellectuals, who would not let themselves be manipulated or fooled by the political leaders. As mentioned in section 3 of the paper, the students continued to be vocal at the end of the 1970s, too, their distrust in the political leaders culminating with the Kwangju Uprising in 1980. This event, which is a landmark in South Korea's fight for democracy, was given full coverage by the famous Korean female writer Han Kang in her book titled *Human Acts*. The government covered up the precise details and statistics of this event until the late 1990s. The casualties' figures are still a contentious issue today. Reports say that about 1,700 rioters were arrested, of whom approximately 700 were detained for investigation. One of the persons in the latter group is a factory girl, Seong-ju Lim, a character whose accounts of the Kwangju events are captured in Chapter 5 of the above-mentioned novel. At the time of the events, she used to work in a textile factory and was a member of the trade union that fought for equal rights for men and female workers. The strike organized by the female union members is crushed by the police; she is wounded and has to spend some time in hospital. After her release, she becomes part of the young demonstrators in Kwangju. It is only 22 years after the event that she is

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finally persuaded to tell the story of what happened in 1980. She feels as if a 'psychological autopsy' is performed on her, when all she wanted was to forget the horrors she had witnessed in Kwangju. Together with another girl and a boy, they took on the task of dealing with the corpses: cleaning them, identifying and labelling them, dressing them properly, putting them in coffins and identifying the family members. When the uprising was quenched by the military, Seong-ju was one of the 700 who were imprisoned and interrogated and the fragment below provides an account of the way she was treated during the interrogatory:

(12) Is it possible to bear witness to the fact that of a thirty-centimetre wooden ruler being repeatedly thrust into my vagina, all the way up to the back of my uterus? To a rifle butt bludgeoning my cervix? To the fact that, when the bleeding would not stop and I had gone into shock, they had to take me to the hospital for a blood transfusion? (…) Is it possible to bear witness to the fact that I ended up being unable to bear children? (…) Is it possible to bear witness to the fact that I ended up despising my own body, the very physical stuff of my self? (Kang 2016, 174)

This whole experience left her dehumanized and her only desire was to be as invisible as possible: her husband of barely one year had divorced her (both because of the stigma attached to her as a former inmate, but more plausibly because of her incapacity to bear children[7]), she had a boring job (transcribing records of informal gatherings), and she felt guilty for the death of the boy (Dong-ho) who had helped with the corpses. It is his spirit that urges her not to die, maybe only to provide account of the horrors during the Kwangju Uprising, after which she could forget all the pain in death.

Another fragment excerpted from the same novel is an illustration of how one of the female rioters was killed. The victim's corpse is one of the many that Seong-ju had to prepare for burial.

(13) When you first saw her, she was still recognizably a smallish woman in her late teens or early twenties (…). Stab wounds slash down from her forehead to her left eye, her cheekbone to her jaw, her left breast to her armpit, gaping gashes where the raw flash shows through. The right side of her skull was completely caved in, seemingly the work of a club, and the meat of her brain is visible. (Kang 2016, 11-12).

[7] In the Korean culture, a wife's main task is to give birth to a son, daughters being less preferred.

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As compared to the first action structure (WWII), the one that sets the scene for the events described in this sub-section is slightly different: it includes native social institutions (the Romanian *Securitate* and the Korean military force), recurrent practices (intimidation, humiliation, rape, imprisonment, murder), as well as distribution of power: the heads of the organizations leave the 'dirty work' in the hands of their subordinates, who are to be blamed for all the aggressive acts against women (and not only). But unfortunately, neither the Romanian Securitate members, nor the Korean military/police force were punished for their deeds. And a possible reason for that is provided by one of the characters in *Justa*, Diana, who in a discussion with Paul Goma (the student of letters), after they had both been released from jail, wondered:

(14) Listen, mister, everybody cries out «Let us not forget, we should not forget the Nazi crimes! We should not forget that the Nazis had gassed and burnt millions of Jews, of gypsies, of Ukrainians, of.... ». Fine, let us not forget! But do you know what I have **not** heard, not even in passing? I have not heard of female Jews, of female gypsies, of female Ukrainians; and let me tell you that the 'female element' represented half of the victims. Agreed: absolute horror! Agreed: crime against humanity***! But not even by accident have I heard someone mentioning the crimes against women! Why? Because the judges, the prosecutors, the historians, the journalists are mainly males.*** (Goma 2009, 79-80, my translation; my emphasis).

This shows that the Romanian women could not turn into agents who tried to act on behalf of other women. Until the early 1990s, the Romanian society was still a man-ruled one, in which women's voices were hardly heard. Nowadays things have changed in that women activists and lawyers from all over the world condemn all forms of violence against women. In 1993 the *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women* was signed, which should help all women enjoy all kinds of liberty.

In keeping with Little (2016, 32), I do not think that "individuals are born deviant or criminal", but become criminal due to a change of the social structure. In other words, all women's abusers, whether foreign or native, might not have behaved like that in times of peace. On the other hand, it would be wrong to generalize from the specific situations described above and to make claims about all the Russian and Japanese soldiers and to entertain a hostile attitude towards these peoples. Let bygones be bygones and let us try to prevent such things from happening again.

5. Conclusions

The similarity in the treatment received by Romanian and Korean women from both foreign and native military/police forces may lead to the assumption that

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brutality is imprinted in the genetic code of men and that it surfaces whenever the social context involves a show of power.

The analysis revealed that for Romania, the agents that should be blamed for the actions that caused the suffering women were the Russian soldiers (individual agents) in the first social structure considered (i.e. WWII), whereas for Korea, during the same period of time, we have both organizational agents (the Japanese emperor and the military), as well as individual agents, the soldiers who sexually aggressed the Korean teenaged females. As far as the second social structure is concerned (the political regime in the 1950s in Romania and 1980 in Korea), the agents that should be held responsible for their acts and for the outcomes of these acts are both social (the Securitate authority in Romania and the military in Korea) and individual: the organizational agents operated via the actions carried out by individual members of these organizations.

With respect to the second research question concerning the attitude of the female victims towards the events that affected their lives and towards the actors that aggressed them, one can notice a certain difference. Romanian women chose to forget these events, to draw a thick, opaque curtain over them, as they were afraid that even the memories of such dreadful acts targeted at them could put them in danger. They were passive actors/agents, who chose oblivion, as expressed by Diana, a secondary character in Goma's novel:

(15) If I could take revenge on them, I would supress their names, I would punish them by oblivion. (Goma 2002, 81)

Korean women, on the other hand, chose to tell the world their stories, even if this happened almost 45 years after the end of WWII. Their testimonies are the victims' will that people should not be deprived of their human rights.

As far as the last research question is concerned, i.e. whether the female victims in Romania and Korea gained power over their torturers, or, in other words, have become themselves actors/agents, the answer is different for the two groups of women. We have seen that the Romanian women chose not to disclose either the sexual abuses by the Russian soldiers or the atrocities of the Securitate members for a number of reasons: the Russians were considered the Romanians' 'brothers' and their image could not be spoiled by such accounts, whereas the communist Securitate was almighty and could not be held responsible for any crime. For the Korean women, on the other hand, ***social chance,*** defined as "certain categories of unforeseen happenings" (Sibeon 2004, 126) accounts for a reversal of roles and of power. Seventy-five years ago, the Imperial Japanese Army would not have thought that one day it would be held responsible for the deeds of its soldiers. But the courage of the first comfort woman (Kim Hak-sun) to come forward publicly in 1991 and tell her story set the ball rolling, encouraging other women to do the same. In the new social context,

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they became agents who intentionally acted to change the conditions of existence of other women, not their own, as most of the female victims were already dead and the few that are still alive are too old. Their action stirred the rage of younger women in contemporary Korea, who become activists against abuses (agency). These women have now the power to describe the horrors endured by their grandmothers in novels and they have the determination to keep the Statue of Peace in front of the Japanese embassy in Seoul as a constant reminder that they will not give up the fight for official pardons from the Japanese government, even if these will come too late for the comfort women.

Apart from history books that keep track of the most important events, novels are also a means of passing down wartime memories from one generation to another. Very often, they contain a more detailed image of the historical events. As far as the literary pieces that served as primary data in this small-scale study, I think they could serve as an educational cornerstone for women's rights and dignity. As Bracht nicely puts it,

> it is our duty to educate future generations of the real and terrible truths committed during war, not to hide them or pretend they never happened. We must remember them so that the mistakes of the past are not repeated. History books, songs, novels, plays, films and memorials are essential to help us never to forget, while also helping us to move forward in peace. (2018, 302)

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