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Sexual Violence, Political Apology and Competing Victimhoods

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This article utilizes feminist literature on victimhood and rape mythology to suggest a new theoretical lens by which to view victims of sexual violence and the politics of state recognition through apology. The campaigns of two South Korean victim groups, the comfort women and camptown women, are examined to demonstrate that the process in which they must battle to obtain state redress through apology implies the existence of a discursive, gender-normative regime of victimhood. In this context, this article suggests that although the delivery of an apology for sexual violence might provide some form of gendered justice, this process may produce additional effects which work to discipline the related identities of gender and victimhood, and which have forced the comfort women and camptown women to compete for recognition by the South Korean state. The results of this struggle are ambivalent when it comes to victim agency and, in the cases examined in this article, the politics of apology has resulted in a somewhat impoverished form of redress for sexual violence.

KEYWORDS: sexual violence, political apology, victimhood, rape myths, South Korea

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This article connects political apology, considered here as a form of recognition and redress for state violence, with feminist interventions on victimhood and rape myths within the South Korean context of two related cases of militarized sexual violence, the victims of which are referred to as the comfort women and the camptown women¹. A growing body of academic literature has labelled this the “age of apology” to reflect the somewhat unprecedented rate at which state representatives have issued political statements of regret since the 1990s (Brooks, 1999; Gibney et al., 2008; Nobles, 2008; Bentley, 2016; Dudden, 2008; Thompson, 2012). This body of literature has often characterized apology as a means by which the state can communicate its commitment to norms of human rights (e.g. Barkan and Karn, 2006). In contrast, the cases in examined in this article suggest that South Korean state recognition is dependent upon socially constructed notions of ideal victimhood of rape, a category which I argue is inherently tied to ideal femininity. Whilst literature on victimhood has suggested that the social context has the power to label some individuals as more deserving of pity than others (see Smyth, 2007; Borer, 2003; Brewer, 2010), this article uses political apology as a tool to consider how the state uses its official capacity to carry out this work. Therefore, I ask how rape mythology is implicated in the politics of apology for the comfort women and the camptown women and examine some effects of this upon their campaign efforts.

First, the article connects the politics of victimhood to scholarly literature on the rape mythologies which work to order discourse on sexual violence. The relevance of rape mythologies is then discussed with reference to nationalist ideologies and within the South Korean cultural context. The following section suggests that political apology can be perceived as a means by which the state can legitimize and validate particular accounts of victimhood and, as a consequence, leave others unrecognized. The categorizations of legitimate and illegitimate victimhood proposed in this article are dealt with firstly in terms of the national interests of the South Korean state itself and secondly through social and cultural notions of ‘good’ femininity.

Victimhood is thus observed in this article as a social construction mediated by both geopolitical interests of political actors as well as dominant gender roles. Two victim groups and their appeals to the South Korean government are analysed to elucidate this thesis. The first is the Japanese imperial comfort women, taken from South Korea during Japanese colonisation prior to and during WWII. They were recognized as victims of Japanese colonialism by the South Korean state in the early 1990s, and since that time the South Korean authorities have made it a matter of policy to pursue an apology on their behalf from Japan. After numerous apologies from the Japanese state, in December 2015 a statement was delivered by both governments which was purported to have solved the comfort women issue “finally and irreversibly” (MOFAJ, 2015)ⁱⁱ. The primary organisation which campaigns on behalf of the comfort women is the Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan (hereafter the Korean Council). The second case study is that of camptown women who have, since the end of WWII, provided sexual services to US soldiers around military bases throughout South Korea (Lee, 2017; Moon, 1997; Enloe, 2000). Though these women have generally been considered “willing prostitutes” by the South Korean public (Lee, 2007; Moon, 1997), there is mounting evidence of South Korean and American governmental involvement in the running of these military brothels (Vine, 2015a; Kim, 2018; Eigenraam, 2018). The camptown women have thus been campaigning for an apology from the South Korean state for encouraging prostitution and, although they have recently won court cases which ordered the state to issue damages, they have not been given verbal recognition (Eigenraam, 2018; Hyun, 2017). The camptown women are supported primarily by Durebang, a civic organisation which is part of a coalition of campaign groups operating under the umbrella of National Campaign for Eradication of Crimes by U.S. Troops in Korea. Durebang (or My Sister’s Place in English) is an outreach centre operated by the Korean Presbyterian Church and provides educational, counselling and child care services for camptown women (Kirk and Okazawa-Rey, 2001: 160) as well as legal representation against the South Korean state (Vine, 2015a). These cases are examined together to for three central reasons. Firstly, both are cases which involve military-

related sexual violence against womenⁱⁱⁱ. Secondly, this article contends that the South Korean state continues to hold a key role in the official recognition of victimhood in both cases. Finally, these campaigns had set out in cooperation for state recognition of military-related sexual violence before later changing their strategies (Moon, 1999: 311). They therefore make for a particularly useful analysis of the competition thesis. Competition between these two distinct self-defined women's rights groups is analysed, and it is suggested that, in response to the restrictive discourse employed by the South Korean state, they have regulated themselves in a way which reinforces rape mythologies and ideals of femininity as well as serving South Korean political interests.

VICTIMHOOD AND RAPE MYTHOLOGY

Feminist scholarship has noted that not all experiences of victimhood are recognized and considered legitimate, and perhaps this is even more pronounced when women claim to have experienced sexual violence. Victimhood is governed by sexual and gendered scripts, and there remain prominent mythologies which continue to determine how victims of sexual violence are perceived in society (Randall, 2010; Schneider, 1993). Marcus has referred to the gendered scripts which govern acts of rape as “grammars of violence” which attempt to dictate individual action in situations of sexual violence with reference to socially-defined ideals of femininity and masculinity (2002: 392). Centrally, after instances of sexual assault and rape, certain women are more likely to be believed than others (Bumiller, 2008; Lamb, 1999). Feminist scholarship on rape myths in particular has asserted that simplistic and often mistaken narratives of sexual violence continue to hold a lot of power in gendered discourse. Rape myths are defined as: “attitudes and beliefs that are generally false but are widely and persistently held, and that serve to deny and justify male sexual aggression against women” (Lonsway and Fitzgerald, 1994: 134). The salience of the conventional narrative that “real-rape” must take the form of a violent sexual attack perpetrated by a stranger against a woman who is walking home alone at night, for

example, often results in victims dismissing their own experiences as something other than “real-rape” (Petрак, 2002: 6; Ryan, 2011: 776). Recent research has demonstrated that stranger rape accounts for very few instances of sexual assault, rendering the “real-rape” myth to be largely false (Randall, 2010: 418-9); however, this narrative continues to structure social scripts concerning sexual violence (Marcus, 2002: 389). Importantly, widespread misunderstandings of the realities of rape do not allow for structural explanations of sexual violence and normalize women’s everyday experiences of unwelcome sexual attention and even assault (Randall, 2010: 407-8). The equation of “real-rape” (Petрак, 2002: 6) with extreme physical violence is not only inaccurate in many cases, but also serves to disqualify diverse experiences of sexual violence and emphasizes that legitimate victimhood is essentially passive.

Nationalist ideology is often imbued with rape mythologies. Firstly, this discursive link has often resulted in rape being used as a tactic of warfare and has certainly resulted in the intertwining of militarism and expressions of male sexuality. Thus, sexual violence is often perceived as an unfortunate yet inevitable consequence of warfare (Buss, 2009) because male soldiers are seen as naturally virile and sexually voracious. These sexual scripts suggest that fighting and sexual activity are interrelated masculine pursuits (Brownmiller, 1975), an assumption which has resulted in the presence of brothels around military bases all over the world (Enloe, 2000), including those which serviced Japanese Imperial soldiers and the U.S. military camptowns in South Korea today. Secondly, because women are so often considered symbols of national honour, they are tasked with policing and maintaining their sexual purity for the good of their nation (see, for example, Eriksen, 2017; Sjoberg and Peet, 2011b; Yuval-Davis and Helm, 1997; Nagel, 1998 and, specifically in the case of South Korea, Cheng, 2005). That nationalist ideology is so often awash with rhetoric surrounding the purity and innocence of “our” women in contrast with “theirs” has also led to the use of rape as a tactic of nationalist warfare and has resulted in the ostracism of raped or abused women in their societies.

Similarly, in the South Korean sociocultural context, it should be considered that until 1995, the crime of rape was legally perceived as a “Crime against Chastity” (Lee et al., 2010: 1202; Lee et al., 2012: 366). Despite recent changes which have allowed for rape to be legally considered as an interpersonal act of violence, Lee et al. (2010: 1202) argue that South Korean rape laws, penal codes and court decisions have tended to reflect a wider societal view that rape remains primarily a violation of women’s chastity, a notion reflective of the nationalist rhetorics mentioned above. In addition, for rape to be successfully prosecuted under the updated legal system, a requirement of “utmost force/threat” against the victim must be demonstrated (Lee et al., 2012: 366), a condition which mirrors the “real-rape” myth (Ryan, 2011: 776) and which again restricts understandings of legitimate victimhood by associating sexual violence with extreme force. In addition, a direct link has been made in academic literature between the belief in rape mythologies or fear of social prejudice and the lack of reporting of sexual assaults to appropriate authorities in South Korea (Shim, 2001: 139; Lee et al., 2012). Rape mythologies therefore remain salient and structure understandings of sexual violence in the South Korean context.

Finally, to provide additional conceptual clarification regarding victimhood and competition, it is useful to refer to the distinctions made between good and bad victims in transitional justice and reconciliation literature (Madlingozi, 2007; McEvoy and McConnachie, 2012; Smyth, 2007). The attribution of “worthy” suffering is often predicated upon culturally-specific ideas of “justifiability” (McEvoy and McConnachie, 2012: 532), a notion which suggests that active participation in conflict results in justifiable suffering whilst other, passive experiences of violence are perceived as outrageous or unacceptable. Similarly, Meyers draws a distinction between “pure” and “impure” victims and suggests that hegemonic conceptions of victimhood do not generally allow for individuals who are guilty of other crimes to be considered genuine

in their victimhood (2011). Thus, a hierarchy is often established wherein those who took an active part in armed conflict are considered less worthy in their suffering than innocent civilians, particularly children (see Tilly, 2008; Smyth, 2007). Studies of victimology have likewise problematized the socially constructed nature of victimhood. One example of this is the “ideal victim” of crime proposed by Nils Christie (1986). The “ideal victim” is theorized as an individual whose victimization is beyond doubt because they are considered innocent, weak and therefore overwhelmed by the strength of the perpetrator (Christie, 1986: 19). This observation inherently implies that there exist victims not considered close enough to this ideal, and whose suffering is therefore deemed *illegitimate*.

This article builds upon this theoretical foundation by offering a template by which states recognize and thereby legitimize claims to victimhood whilst perceiving other claims as illegitimate. Traditional conceptions of “good” femininity, defined in part by purity and passivity, are reflected in the conditions of legitimate victimhood, as the following sections will demonstrate. In addition, as will subsequently be argued, rape mythologies as related to nationalism and militarism have been implicit in South Korean discourse regarding the comfort women and camptown women, and have partially dictated the stance of the South Korean authorities on these instances of sexual violence as well as having structured the Korean Council’s campaign on behalf of the comfort women.

LEGITIMATE VICTIMHOOD AND THE STATE

The politics of apology is analysed here as an indication that the Japanese and South Korean states find particular victim groups worthy of redress. It is important to highlight that the conception of victimhood applied in this article is inherently political in nature. This is not to imply that there is no objective form of victimhood which is personally experienced and

ascribed, but this article suggests that for victimhood to have political consequences, it must be recognized by a proportion of society at the least. The delivery of a political apology is a particularly interesting form of recognition because it can serve to demonstrate the geopolitical interests of the state. By proclaiming that particular groups have been victimized by the state in the past, the government subsequently makes their victimhood politically real and publicly validates the group's narrative of injustice (Nobles, 2008); however, the political interests of the state certainly impact upon which groups can be considered legitimate victims. Further, I suggest that gender norms are involved in the process of categorisation inherent in recognising legitimate victims, especially but not only when a society is attempting to deal with the occurrence of militarized sexual violence. The comfort and camptown women cases demonstrate that political apologies can have ambivalent and sometimes problematic consequences for those campaigning for recognition of sexual violence.

Hernan and Chomsky have suggested that the recognition of particular individuals as victims is a highly political process which draws centrally upon state interests (1994). This is particularly the case in a political climate which puts emphasis on victims as autonomous actors (McEvoy and McConnachie, 2012; Karstedt, 2010) and, I would suggest, considers them key to the maintenance of security and human rights worldwide. When this notion is applied to the politics of apology, we can determine that states may recognize victims as legitimate when doing so will serve political interests. Of particular importance here is the rhetorical power states can derive from claiming to represent the interests of political victims and thereby demonstrate humanitarian legitimacy and democratic accountability. The discursive power of apology can also be a particularly important communicative means by which a state actor demonstrates its commitment to the upkeep of human rights norms in the future, as was suggested in the introductory section of this paper. That said, governments are unlikely to recognize and deliver

apologies to groups of victims when doing so will present a problem for national values, identity and interests (see, for example, Zarakol, 2010).

This article does not only suggest that states make those worthy victims legitimate in their claims through apology but argues that certain groups are made into victims in a more dynamic sense. This label of victim is bestowed through the public recognition of human rights violations perpetrated by state actors. Following this, however, victim groups must actively maintain their status as victims by fulfilling the expectations of their society. My analysis sees victim identity as complex and contradictory with regards to gendered power structures. It is, to some extent, given by authoritative actors such the Japanese and South Korean governments, but is additionally personally ascribed, cultivated and maintained at the campaign group level. Victimhood is not a static identity but evolves in response to the social interactions of others. The discursive competition between comfort women and camptown women campaigns is, I suggest, one of the ways in which their victim identities are socially shaped and maintained.

LEGITIMATE VICTIMHOOD AND SOUTH KOREAN NATIONAL INTERESTS

The last section suggested that legitimate victimhood is predicated partly upon how victim groups fit within the geopolitical interests of their state. Firstly, it is notable that the comfort women campaign received popular and state support within South Korea against Japan in the early 1990s, almost five decades after the end of WWII and the fall of the Japanese Empire. Prior to this period, the comfort women were not discussed as victims of the Japanese colonialism but were seen by South Korean nationalists either as the shameful secrets of the nation or as lying traitors (Ueno, 2004: 69-70; Lee, 2014: 75). Some have credited the democratisation of South Korean society and increasing recognition of both human rights and women's rights in the 1990s as the political background which allowed for the comfort women

to be considered legitimate in their suffering of sexual violence (Ueno, 2004: 71). However, as Lee (2014: 75-6) has pointed out, alongside the political amnesia and nationalist posturing which was occurring in Japan, South Korea remained mired in traditional patriarchal ideals of honour and shame. This made the comfort women symbolic of Korean powerlessness and facilitated a culture which silenced their experiences of the war and rendered them ashamed to return home to their families (Lee, 2014: 75; Kim, 1997: 93). However, a change in discourse in the 1990s allowed the South Korean authorities to subsume the comfort women as legitimate victims coherently within a narrative of collective victimhood and lost national pride against Japan (Varga, 2009: 292-3; Lee, 2014: 75). The Korean Council, in response, embraced the powerful rhetoric of South Korean nationalism, and consequently welcomed widespread public support for the comfort women. Indeed, in the words of the Korean Council, the symbolic and material fight for justice has been waged against Japan “in order to maintain the honour of the survivors and *the pride of the nation*” (cited in Soh 1998; my emphasis). Rape of the nation rhetoric employed by South Korean nationalists allowed the campaign to galvanize anti-Japanese sentiment through the notion that sexual violence perpetrated against them was an allegory of the submission of South Korea to the Japanese empire as a whole. This narrative pointedly left no space for the domestic patriarchal conditions in Korea prior to annexation by Japan and Korean complicity in the comfort system to be questioned or analysed (Enloe, 2000: 86; Soh, 2008) and, implicitly, served to reinforce nationalist rape mythologies. Thus, the South Korean state has supported the comfort women’s case against Japan in a way which allows for the masculinity of war and traditional gender norms to go unchallenged and which ultimately serves the geopolitical interests of the South Korean state.

The camptown women have not enjoyed such success in their attempts to gain recognition through state apology; rather, their narrative of victimhood has generally been perceived as illegitimate by the South Korean state. The camptown women have largely not appealed to

nationalist rhetoric in order to gain the support of South Korean authorities and public, despite the fact that they too consider themselves to have been exploited by a foreign military force (Vine, 2015b). South Korean politics regarding US bases is strikingly different to that regarding Japan's colonisation of Korea in the 1930s. The South Korean state and South Korean nationalists consider US military bases to be beneficial and even necessary for the nation's security (Lee, 2007; Moon, 1997; Kim, 2018). For the camptown women, however, such security arrangements have also implicitly involved the sexual servicing of US soldiers. Indeed, Katherine Moon has argued that the South Korean and American states have even explicitly referred to the camptown women as a key part of their military arrangements (1997: 27) and they have even been referred to as "patriotic prostitutes" (Eigenraam, 2018) due to their central role in maintaining South Korean security. Certainly, it can be argued that the South Korean state would benefit from the silence of these women concerning their experiences of rape and abuse at the hands of US soldiers, because a withdrawal of American bases from South Korea would have wide-ranging security implications for the nation. Violence committed against camptown women is therefore at least tacitly sanctioned by their government as a means to encourage US military presence.

LEGITIMATE VICTIMHOOD AND GOOD KOREAN FEMININITY

Five decades after the war, the comfort women were absolved of responsibility for their suffering, and instead emphasis was placed on their role as passive victims who were too young to consent or were forcefully taken from their homes (see Howard, 1995; Korean Council, 1994). Thus, their campaign was legitimized, and the state threw its support behind petitioning for full apology and reparations for the women from Japan. In the process of becoming legitimate victims, however, the comfort women were also absolved of their political agency. Instead of being represented by their state as multifaceted individuals, the comfort women had become mute symbols through which the South Korean state could satisfy its need to rebuild

nationalist identity after colonisation and galvanize anti-Japanese sentiment domestically (Varga, 2009), as was suggested above. As a state-recognized victim group, the comfort women campaign stressed the innocence and passivity of the victims at the time of their capture, often adhering to simplistic narratives of sexual slavery which denied the victims any demonstration of agency in their testimony (Park, 2000: 204-5). Common accounts which adhere to dominant conceptions of sexual slavery involve the victims emphasising their sexual virginity before being forcibly coerced by Japanese troops (often involving physical violence) into comfort stations. In the introduction to a set of testimonials published by the Korean Council, for example, it is explicitly stated that when Korean women were drafted, under aged girls were preferred by the Japanese authorities; most were unmarried; and it is stressed that “none came from brothels” (Chung, 1995: 18). The narrative of sexual slavery espoused by the comfort women campaign has focused on these particular aspects of the crime. This is not to suggest that many comfort women did not experience sexual violence in this way; however, such archetypal narratives fall within a rape discourse in which women are problematically required to demonstrate their passivity and innocence both at the time of the offence (Randall, 2010: 407-8) and whilst testifying (Lamb, 1999). Additionally, such accounts empower myths which claim that rape is always physically violent and that individuals who challenge gender norms such as prostitutes are not credible rape victims. In this process, the comfort women have additionally been appropriated by the South Korean state as “good” South Korean women. Moral decency and ideal femininity have often been demonstrated by patriarchal societies through women’s central roles in their community such as childbearing, the protection as far as possible of their sexual virginity, and cooperation with their nation in times of war, despite often suffering in the process (Sjoberg and Gentry, 2007: 4). The comfort women have cooperated with a narrative which casts them primarily as mothers and grandmothers (and therefore “good women”) and which has suggested that their sacrifice can be considered an allegory for what happened to South Korea as a whole under Japanese rule (Varga, 2009; Choi, 1998). Yong See Lee, for

example, exclaimed: “I am a proper lady and a daughter of Korea” as justification for her victimhood in an interview about her experience and her search for redress (Constable, 2015).

Contrary to the comfort women’s perceived passivity, dominant narratives surrounding camptown women suggest that they willingly entered into prostitution. In contrast to the innocent children taken from their homes as “sex slaves” to service the Japanese, camptown women are perceived as opportunistic individuals who have profited from the presence of American troops in South Korea and are thus viewed with contempt (Zimelis, 2009: 65). Of course, feminists have, however, long problematized such simplistic constructions of coercion and consent. Further, the Seoul High Court recently ruled in the women’s favour and suggested that the South Korean state was directly involved in the maintenance of prostitution at US military bases:

“According to official Ministry of Health and Welfare documents, [the state] actively encouraged the women in the military camp towns engage in prostitution to allow foreign troops to ‘relax’ and ‘enjoy sexual services’ with them,” ...“In the process, [the state] operated and managed the military camp towns with the intention or purpose of contributing to maintenance of a military alliance essential for national security by ‘promoting and boosting morale’ among foreign troops while mobilizing prostitutes for economic goals such as acquisition of foreign currency” (Seoul High Court in Kim, 2018).

The South Korean state, it was concluded by the Court, violated the women’s human rights by operating the camptowns, actively encouraging prostitution through “patriotic education” (Kim, 2018) and holding the women illegally in order to treat them for sexually transmitted diseases (Eigenraam, 2018). Indeed, in order to work in camptown businesses at all, women must obtain permits which are granted by the Korea Special Tourist Association, an arm of the

Korean Ministry of Transportation (Moon, 1999: 316). The state-run screening of women for sexually transmitted diseases which seems to have taken place in order to protect the health of American troops can certainly be compared to the systems of health-checking which were implemented on a mass-scale in the Japanese Empire (Hyun, 2017; Hein, 1999).

However, the narrative which surrounds the “patriotic prostitutes” (Eigenraam, 2018) suggests that they are “tolerated in order to protect virtuous women from rape” (Cho, 2006: 313). This rationality is also very similar to that which led to the Japanese Imperial comfort stations, created in order to reduce the number of local women arbitrarily raped by Japanese soldiers (Hein, 1999: 338). Indeed, this had famously occurred in Nanjing in 1937 and it caused widespread criticism of the Japanese military at the time (Hein, 1999: 338). In similar logic, the South Korean government had instituted a “hands off Korean women” policy since the end of WWII, a policy from which camptown women were summarily excluded (Vine, 2015b: 164). This is exacerbated by the fact that camptown brothels have become popular hotbeds for human trafficking from other Asian nations. Indeed, estimates show that as few as 10% of camptown prostitutes were South Korean as long ago as 2004 (Lee, 2007: 475). By providing women who are considered readily available for the sexual servicing of American troops, a distinction was created whereby the virtue of “good” South Korean women was secured by sacrificing those who are perceived as impure and undeserving of such state protection (Lee, 2007: 454). Of course, this narrative endorses the assumption that soldiers’ sexual needs and urges are simply an inevitable part of warfare and that some women are unavoidable casualties (Brownmiller, 1975: 24-5), a key and powerful rape myth tied to nationalist and militarist agendas. The camptown women have thus been tasked with taking on this sex work which is perceived as both undesirable and necessary for national security (Yuh, 2002: 25; Moon, 1997). The perception that the camptown women do not meet ideals of femininity requires that they cannot be considered legitimate victims of sexual violence, and are therefore unlikely to receive official

recognition through apology. Further, despite court decisions which have to some extent legitimized the victimhood narratives of the camptown women, these developments have gone largely unreported in South Korea (Eigenraam, 2018).

COMPETING VICTIMHOODS

The hierarchical nature of victimhood discourse in these cases has resulted in the camptown women and comfort women competing to prove themselves against one another in gendered terms of innocence and passivity as well as their place within the South Korean national project. This hierarchical structure suggests not that the South Korean state has worked to directly discipline the camptown women and the comfort women, but points to a more implicit process of competition between the groups vying for state recognition which has occurred in accordance with geopolitical interests and dominant notions of “good” femininity and rape mythologies. Competitive victimhood is a result of various political and social constraints faced by victim groups when seeking official recognition and, in this case, is produced by and reinforces dominant conceptions of gender and sexual violence as well as the authority of the South Korean state.

Suzuki (2011) has argued in the context of Taiwan that domestic political factors along with the existence of other, seemingly more pressing, historical issues, have resulted in the Taiwanese comfort women being largely forgotten, despite their attempts to attain redress. He (Suzuki, 2011: 244) argues that this is in part the result of a political situation which forces the comfort women to compete with other victim groups. A similar form of competition can be observed in South Korea; however, this has been structured not only by domestic political issues, but, more importantly, by gendered conceptions of innocence and blame as well as the continued prevalence of rape mythologies in structuring discourse around sexual violence. As I have

suggested, whilst in dominant South Korean discourse the comfort women are considered passive and innocent in their experiences of sexual violence, camptown women are, in contrast, perceived as prostitutes who entered into their chosen profession for monetary gain despite being fully aware of the risks this would involve. Indeed, they have even been described as damaged women or “Western whores” (Lee, 2011: 36; Moon, 1997: 129; Moon, 1998: 312). By bestowing full agency upon the women of camptown Korea, they are summarily denied legitimate victim status. Not only does this simplistic binary serve to reify an almost unattainable notion of “pure” victimhood (Meyers, 2011), but it reduces understandings of the exploitation of women which so often occurs around military bases to basic misconceptions of coercion and consent. Rather than conceiving of sexual violence as a structurally-determined continuum and problematizing the “militarisation of women’s lives” (Enloe, 2000), the denial of camptown women as legitimate victims re-enforces purity and innocence as essential conditions of “good” Korean womanhood (Choi, 1998: 28) and empowers South Korean nationalism.

Of particular interest to this article is the Korean Council’s cooperation with these problematic hegemonic narratives. The comfort women and camptown women campaigns originally set out in cooperation as part of a larger Asian women’s human rights movement in opposition to sexual violence against women (Moon, 1999: 311). Indeed, feminist campaigns against sexual exploitation of women relating to both military bases and tourism had existed in Korea since the 1970s (Watanabe, 1995: 502). The comfort women campaign, having emerged slightly later, joined this existing movement, and gained public attention at a conference organized by the Korean Church Women United on sex tourism in 1988 (Varga, 2009: 290) which was held “to challenge traditional conceptions of women’s chastity and the socioeconomic conditions that foster the sexual abuse of women’s bodies and labor” (Moon, 1999: 311-12). However, as the Korean Council began to receive wider attention both domestically and internationally than that of groups such as Durebang, these organisations separated their campaigns (Moon, 1998: 167).

The Korean Council began to embrace patriarchal notions of purity and innocence (Varga, 2009; Park, 2000) and compared the comfort women to the camptown women in agency (Moon, 2007: 143). This primarily involved stressing that: “these women were minors and virgins from the rural areas, [and therefore] there is no doubt that they were forced into prostitution against their will” (Korean Council, 1994). The fact that the comfort women have been required to demonstrate their virginity and lack of agency in order to be recognized as legitimate victims of sexual violence reinforces the notion that other women are implicated and at fault for their ordeals (Kimura, 2016: 207). Whilst the competition between campaigns resulted in the recognition of comfort women as legitimate in their victimhood by the South Korean government along with a promise of redress from the Japanese state (see MOFAJ, 2015), this result has failed to challenge the rape myths which so often allow for women to be sexually exploited by military actors. It has additionally failed to highlight the problematic South Korean role in both cases of sexual violence (Soh, 2008; Varga, 2009). Indeed, conditions in Korea prior to colonisation by Japan served to facilitate the establishment of comfort stations because Korean women were so often impoverished and therefore willing to believe the false promises of well-paid jobs in Japan offered by middle men, many of whom were in fact Korean (Kim, 2016; Soh, 2008; Dudden, 2001: 599; Enloe, 2000: 86). In the case of camptown women, the South Korean government has failed to problematize the prostitution and violence which has accompanied US military bases in South Korea as a hangover from Japanese colonialism since the end of WWII (Lee, 2017).

Enloe has argued that feminists are often left to make the difficult choice between engaging in campaigns which criticize the nationalist agenda, and therefore do not gain public sympathy, or aligning with certain factions of the nationalist movement which will garner widespread support (2000: 59). In the cases observed in this paper, the Korean Council, by aligning with the South Korean nationalist agenda, have become entrenched in a politics of competition over

victimhood, a battle which has allowed for the contemporary militarisation and sexualisation of particular women within South Korea to go largely unchallenged. The language with which the comfort women describe their place in South Korean society is therefore often highly gendered and nationalist. This campaign for apology, therefore, has not been used to challenge patriarchal assumptions which require women to protect and guard their sexual virtue as a symbol of the honour of the nation – rather, these assumptions have been reinforced. Similarly, whilst each of these cases of sexual exploitation and violence may have specific implications, rape myths such as the apparently natural sexual needs of male soldiers, the association of rape with extreme physical violence and requirements of innocence and passivity are common to both and remain intact. By aligning with nationalists in Korea, the comfort women issue has also become a symbol with which the South Korean authorities can further its own political agenda against Japan. Finally, the South Korean government has been afforded powerful authority by its action on behalf of the comfort women, which to some extent has been used in order to remain silent with regards to exploitation of women in camptowns.

Although the comfort women have achieved recognition both within South Korea and internationally and have therefore received several apologies from Japan, it might be argued that they have not achieved genuine gendered justice. Apologies, when addressing structural gendered violence, do not have the power to make meaningful changes unless the state actor can be challenged on its most basic assumptions regarding women's place in society. In the examples explored in this paper, however, the comfort women campaign has been used to reinforce rape myths which have structured public discourse on sexual violence and excluded the experiences of some women. This has allowed for the camptown women to be easily dismissed by South Korean authorities, and South Korean society to some extent, as illegitimate victims.

CONCLUDING REMARKS AND IMPLICATIONS

This article has suggested an analytical framework to interrogate the political process of state recognition of victim groups through political apology in the South Korean context. The cases examined in this article suggest that recognition through the politics of apology has been predicated upon the geopolitical interests of the South Korean state. Relatedly and more importantly for this article, however, recognition of the comfort women over the camptown women in South Korea has been mediated by dominant notions of rape mythology. Following these two related instances of sexual violence, this article has suggested that victims have been required to adhere to acceptable norms of femininity and passive suffering which exist alongside prevalent rape mythologies. Thus, the comfort women have received national and international attention partly because the Korean Council has situated the comfort women within hegemonic conceptions of nationalism and colonial domination which have been utilized by the South Korean state to further its geopolitical interests. The camptown women have not been able to receive national recognition through apology from their own state in part because they are seen as agentive in their suffering and therefore illegitimate victims. Implicated in this process is competition between various victim groups as they vie for state recognition. In the South Korean case, this has been particularly pronounced because the comfort women campaign, led primarily by the Korean Council, has actually utilized dominant conceptions of victimhood and gender within the South Korean national context in order to demonstrate that the victims of the comfort system are more passive and innocent, and therefore more deserving of state recognition than others, including the camptown women. The very structuring of the Korean Council's campaign over time through comparison with and distancing from other women's rights organisations such as Durebang is particularly revealing because it suggests that the gendered discourse of victimhood is not only maintained by powerful actors such as the South Korean authorities, but can also be reinforced at the level of victim support organizations. Victimhood, therefore, is a dynamic form of political identity which is continually negotiated

both by powerful institutions through practices such as apology as well as victims themselves and the organisations representing their interests. In addition, the analysis in this article suggests that political apology, as a form of redress for gendered violence, is impoverished in patriarchal societies which continue to function through the reproduction of misconceptions regarding sexual violence and rape. The politics of apology for the camptown women and the comfort women has had ambivalent consequences for their political agency because it offers official recognition of their narratives of injustice whilst simultaneously reinforcing simplistic and regressive victim-agent binaries which are all the more consequential in the wake of sexual violence.

This article has furthered feminist work on victimhood and its impact on gender roles through an analysis of campaigns to receive state apology for sexual violence. Also building upon work on victimhood within political apology and transitional justice, this article argued that gender is deeply implicated in the politics of victimhood and state redress offered to the comfort women and camptown women. More broadly, this analysis speaks crucially to gender and the maintenance of masculine narrative authority and prescribes a previously underappreciated means by which gendered hierarchies are maintained indirectly by powerful political forces as well as by individuals and groups themselves. This furthers the notion that gendered identities are self-reflexive in nature, and are therefore open to contestation, resistance and transformation. There is certainly scope for future scholarship to interrogate the ways in which gender is implicated in claims for state redress which do not involve sexual violence, perhaps in intersection with other structures such as race, class and sexuality.

ⁱ The terms ‘comfort women’ and ‘camptown women’ are inherently problematic for several reasons. First, as demonstrated by Yuh (2002), not all camptown women are prostitutes. In addition, the terminology used to refer to both camptown and comfort women is euphemistic and firstly obscures and sanitizes the realities of sexual violence and secondly, operates to conceal underlying debates around the levels of both agency and force involved. The terminologies themselves are therefore indicative of the very regimes of victimhood and state complicity examined throughout this article. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for this insightful point.

ⁱⁱ Negotiations between Japan and Korea are still ongoing on this matter and the comfort women themselves seem to have largely rejected Japan’s statement of apology, having not been consulted on the terms. The South Korean government has recently committed to re-negotiating with Japan (see Osaki, 2018).

ⁱⁱⁱ It should be noted that male prostitutes certainly exist in camptown Korea, but that it is beyond the scope of this article to enquire further on this. Schober (2014), for instance, provides some much-needed insight on camptowns and masculinity.

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