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Frustrated Peace: Investigatory Activities by the Commission of the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF) in North Korea during the Korean War*

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ABSTRACT

This article attempts a broad study of the achievements and limits of the activities of the Commission of the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF) that investigated war atrocities in North Korea during the Korean War. The contents of the WIDF Korea Report have been regarded (and dismissed) as political propaganda of the Soviet Union and North Korea for a long period of time because they were comprised mainly of criticisms towards the United States. Following the end of the Cold War, however, the report has begun to be reevaluated in nature, along with the recently declassified documents concerning the Korean War and extensive research on the bombing raids conducted by the US Air Force (USAF) and massacres allegedly committed in North Korea by UN forces. These developments make it possible to study the activities of the WIDF Commission from a broader, more nuanced, and more objective perspective. Above all, the individual records of some members of the Commission from Western European countries, who had not been involved in communist activities, show plainly that the WIDF's investigation activities in North Korea were conducted with the goal of tracking down the truth in an efficient manner. In order to assure the objectivity of the arguments of the report, the members of the Commission tried to eliminate political discourse in the process of their investigation and in the preparation of their report, and constantly expressed their suspicions about North Korean claims, doing their utmost to gather irrefutable evidence. These efforts to secure objectivity in their investigation served as the main reason that none of the members of the Commission denied or retracted the arguments of the final report after returning to their home countries. Although suffering ordeals like expulsion from public office, being called traitors, and standing trial after returning home, the women held to their convictions. Moreover, recent historical research and oral data about the massacres of North Korean civilians and the aerial bombing of civilian areas during the Korean War clearly show that many of the claims in the WIDF Korea Report are close to the historical truth.

Keywords: WIDF, women and war, Korean War, massacre, bombing, sexual violence

Introduction

On May 1951, twenty-one women from eighteen countries came to North Korea as the Korean War raged. The delegation of the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF) represented women from the continents of Europe, Africa, North America, South America, and Asia. Although these women faced an extremely dangerous situation with bombs falling all around them, they tried to see and hear as much as possible about events transpiring on the Korean Peninsula for the approximately twelve days of their stay. The women then released the final results of their investigation activities to the world by publishing a report titled *We Accuse*. The report was translated into multiple languages, including English, Korean, Chinese, German, Spanish, and submitted officially to the United Nations (UN) (WICIK 1951).

Shortly after the WIDF report was released, the Danish press commented that “no one in western countries has had an opportunity to hear the voice of the Korean people,” until these women returned to their homelands (*Vi Kvinder* 1951, 6). There had indeed been no opportunity to hear the detailed and vivid voices of Korean civilians before the WIDF report was released. However, the value of the report has been completely disregarded and dismissed until now, just as it was during the Korean War. The politics and culture of the Cold War treated the critical statements of the final report of the WIDF Commission (Women's International Commission for the Investigation of War Atrocities Committed in Korea, the official name of the Commission) entirely as pro-Soviet and pro-communist political propaganda.

The US government did not provide a public statement on the WIDF Korea Report. However, information services of the US State Department widely disseminated a critical document drafted by a coalition of over thirty conservative women's organizations, coordinated by the Women United for United Nations (WUUN), through Radio Free Asia and Radio Free Europe (Mooney 2013, 57; Laville 2002, 137–138). Some members of the WIDF Commission (hereafter, Commission) were even threatened with prosecution for treason or violently arrested and interrogated after returning to their homelands. They were deprived of their former social positions and prestige—privileges that most women in the 1950s were rarely given. Having delegated the members of the Commission, the WIDF also came to lose its consultative status at the United Nations Economic and Social Council (re-approved only in 1967) due to the impact of the Korea report. Even though the WIDF was considered one of the most important global women's organizations after World War II, the organization fell into a critical situation owing to the activities carried out on the Korean Peninsula (Donert 2016, 314).

Researchers have also long disregarded the major claims of the WIDF Korea Report. In spite of the historical importance of the data that directly reflected the voices of common North Korean people, researchers have long refused to recognize its value. However, recent studies re-evaluating the organizational nature of the

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WIDF itself offer an opportunity to assess the value of the WIDF Korea Report from a new perspective. For example, Francisca de Haan has claimed that the WIDF had constant interchanges with women's organizations in western countries, beyond the Iron Curtain of the Cold War, and was active in the UN, emphasizing that the historical evaluation of the WIDF was locked into the Cold War paradigm of western countries (De Haan 2010, 547–573). Mooney has emphasized that the WIDF campaigns ranged from anti-fascist activism and anti-colonial struggles to mobilization for women's suffrage and the defense of women's citizenship. (Mooney 2013, 52–57) And McGregor has revealed the anti-colonial nature of the WIDF through its activities in Vietnam and Algeria from 1945 to 1965 (McGregor 2016, 925–944). All of recent studies empathize with the activities and nature of the WIDF and show that its activities were not restricted to or by Cold War paradigms.

In agreement with the research trend of articles such as these, there have emerged new research articles about the individuals who served as members of the Commission too. Celia Donert has analyzed how the relations between communist internationalism, human rights, and feminism shifted in the Third World during the early Cold War, with her main focus on the activities of Lilly Wächter, the Western German delegate of the Commission (Donert 2016). Fujime Yuki has detailed the influence of the activities of Monica Felton, the British delegate in Korea, on her entire life spent as a woman peace activist (Yuki 2013). Grace Huxford has also examined Felton's case in detail, analyzing the content and nature of the anti-war movement in Britain during the Korean War (Huxford 2018).

These books and articles provide a solid basis upon which to re-evaluate the nature of the WIDF itself during the Cold War, and its Korea Commission activities during the Korean War. However, these studies did not go further to demonstrate the objectivity of the contents of the final report, or the nature of the investigation activities. In other words, these studies do not specifically show how the WIDF Korea Report was prepared or examine the authenticity of the claims of the final report.

Nonetheless, many historical documents concerning the Korean War have been released from the archives of different countries and there has been a drastic rise in the number of relevant studies. Therefore, it is no longer impossible to know how the WIDF Korea report was prepared, or assess the authenticity of the contents of the final report. The main contents of the WIDF report are the damage by air bombings in North Korea, physical torture, mass murder, and the status of female victims of sexual violence. In the past, it was impossible to evaluate the authenticity of these claims of the Commission. However, the release of the documents of the United States Air Force (USAF) since 2000, and the truth ascertainment activities of the Republic of Korea (ROK) government and individual researchers make it possible to attempt to review more objectively the authenticity of the claims about North Korea's war damage in the WIDF Korea Report.

For an objective analysis of the activities of the WIDF Korea Commission, this article specifically investigates the historical background of the dispatch of the Commission, the political and social dispositions of individual members of the Commission, the principles of its local investigation activities, and its

methods of collecting opinions and preparing the report. These general analyses of the Commission can be considered as a process for ascertaining whether the investigation activities by the Commission were directed by the overarching goal of securing political propaganda for the Soviet Union and other communist nations (as Cold War approaches have maintained), or for the pure purpose of discovering the truth.

This article focuses particularly on the private records of Monica Felton (British delegate) and Kate Fleron (Danish delegate) as the primary documents for the study of the principles of local investigation activities and the methodology of writing the final report. All of these personal documents were written during the Korean War. As will be explained in detail in the main text of this article, Felton and Fleron were representative members of the Commission who were consistently critical voices concerning the methods of local investigation activities, in order to secure more objectivity in their investigations. The personal documents of these two delegates show their continuous suspicions about North Koreans' claims of atrocities by US troops in North Korea, the contents of internal debates among members of the Commission, the structure of discussions and agreements among members, and the methods for collecting evidence. These personal records contribute directly to a revised historical evaluation of the value of the final report prepared by the Commission.

The Background and Process of the Formation of the Fact-Finding Commission to Korea by the WIDF

The dispatching of the fact-finding commission to North Korea by the WIDF can be traced back to the time when the Korean Democratic Women's League (KDWL) sent a letter to the WIDF and women worldwide in January 1951. The letter asserted that North Koreans were in agony caused by abusive air bombings and brutal massacres committed by UN forces (*Rodong Sinmun*, January 8, 1951). The KDWL became an official member of the WIDF in October 1946. Thus, the WIDF could not simply disregard such complaints from women of a member nation. The WIDF decided to dispatch a fact-finding team at the WIDF Berlin Conference held February 1–4, 1951, and implemented that decision in May of the same year (Korean Central Press Agency 1952, 294–295; Donert 2016, 321).

The WIDF was the largest women's organization worldwide, and was one of the most influential women's organizations along with the International Council of Women (ICW) and the International Alliance of Women (IAW). Historically, the WIDF was rooted in Europe's anti-fascist activities during World War II. The Union des Femmes Françaises (Union of French Women, UFF), founded by anti-fascist women in the fight against fascism in June 1945 in Paris, held its first congress and organized a steering committee to convene at the International Congress of Women. Afterward, some 850 women from 40 countries invited by the UFF attended the International Congress of Women in Paris from November 26 1945 until December 1 1945. The women formulated a resolution about the foundation of the WIDF under the leadership of Eugénie Cotton, the president of the congress. Thus, the WIDF was officially founded on November 29, 1945 (Korean Central

Press Agency 1952, 293; Mooney 2013, 52–53).

The WIDF was seriously criticized as a pro-communist organization by western countries during the Cold War, but had mainly been classified as an anti-fascist organization before the Cold War began in earnest. A number of founders of the WIDF were involved in the resistance movements against Nazism and fascism in Europe and Asia. Some of the founders survived the concentration camps and prisons of the Nazis. Others were women who had lost their husbands or children during the war (De Haan 2010, 550). The WIDF stipulated five guiding principles: the elimination of fascism, the establishment of permanent peace, joint actions of women for social progress, the increase of women's rights until they were equal to men's rights, and the improvement of children's health (Korean Central Press Agency 1952, 294). Thus, the WIDF started as an anti-fascist and pro-peace organization rather than as a pro-communist organization.

Furthermore, concerning the post-colonial wars in Asia caused by local resistance against imperial countries such as Great Britain and France after World War II, the WIDF expressed support for the women of local countries. The WIDF became a target of antagonism from western countries, including the US, and was eventually stigmatized as a “communist organization” and attacked. In 1951 in particular, the WIDF voiced fierce criticism against France's attack on Vietnam, and waged a campaign to request French mothers not to send their sons to the battlefield. This campaign became the direct reason for the WIDF headquarters' forced transfer from Paris to East Berlin. The French government asked the WIDF to leave Paris (Mooney 2013, 57). From the time the WIDF was transferred to East Berlin, the organization naturally began to strengthen its relations with the Soviet Union. Not surprisingly, the affinity with the Soviet Union became one of the main reasons why the WIDF was subsequently accused of being a communist organization.

Despite fierce criticism from the US and other western countries, the WIDF never stopped carrying out pro-peace and anti-colonial activities in Asia, Africa, and South America. The organization formed organizational linkages with women's organizations in the Third World, such as Latin America or Southeast Asia, and began to dispatch fact-finding commissions in order to investigate the lives of the women in these regions. These local investigation activities in the Third World need to be considered seriously in relation with the investigation activities of North Korea in 1951. In other words, the WIDF's fact-finding commission to Korea was planned not simply for the temporary purpose of creating political propaganda during the Cold War, but as yet another typical pro-peace campaign that the WIDF had been pursuing around the world even before the Korean War.

For example, the WIDF dispatched a fact-finding delegation for the first time to Argentina, Chile, Brazil, and Uruguay in 1946. The activities were performed in order to systematically gather information about the women in areas formerly colonized by European countries, and to reinforce alliances with local anti-colonial women's organizations (WIDF 1946, 7; Armstong 2016, 322). In 1948, local fact-finding commissions of the WIDF were sent to India, Malaysia, and Burma in order to investigate the conditions of women living in countries that had just become

independent (India and Burma) or were still under the colonial rule of Great Britain (Malaysia). Originally, the WIDF was scheduled to dispatch fact-finding commissions to Vietnam and Indonesia too, but France and the Netherlands refused to issue visas to the delegation. During this period, the WIDF made its best efforts to continuously strengthen “active solidarity in their fight for the independence of their countries” with the women of the Third World. (Armstrong 2016, 323–324).

The dispatch of the fact-finding commission to Korea in 1951 was therefore not an unprecedented or one-off political activity that was fundamentally at odds with the history and nature of the WIDF. There had been many examples of fact-finding activities in Asia under the leadership of the WIDF starting in 1946. Considering these past activities of the WIDF, it would have been a natural decision to dispatch a fact-finding commission to North Korea during the Korean War. After the resolution was passed to dispatch the fact-finding team to Korea in February 1951, the Commission was quickly organized and dispatched. Based on the know-how of the investigation activities of the fact-finding teams dispatched earlier to Asia and South America, the Korea Commission was prepared quite rapidly. The Commission was recruited and organized with assistance from women’s organizations in many countries connected with the WIDF (WICIK 1951, 4). The WIDF sent invitation letters to the women recruited by each women’s organization in various countries. Some of the invited women were members of the WIDF, but others were not. The women who received the invitation letters had the right to refuse participation in the Commission to North Korea (Felton 1953, 7).

According to the records left by Felton, she received an invitation letter in the second week of April 1951. Felton had to decide if she would accept the invitation within a week and if she would go to Korea in the absence of information about other members of the Commission (Felton 1953, 12). Most of the other members of the Commission had to go through a similar process.

The eighteen countries represented involved virtually all continents: Europe, Asia, Africa, South America, and North America. In the case of the continent of Europe, eleven countries sent delegates: Denmark, Czechoslovakia, the Netherlands, Great Britain, the USSR, France, Italy, Austria, East Germany, West Germany, and Belgium. In the case of the continents of South America and North America, three countries were delegated: Canada, Cuba, and Argentina. In the case of the continents of Africa and Asia, four countries sent delegates: Tunisia, Algeria, the People’s Republic of China (PRC), and Vietnam. Most countries sent only one member, while the PRC sent three and Denmark two. Eventually, twenty-one members of the fact-finding commission were recruited. The representatives from Europe accounted for twelve members or more than half (57%), and the communist countries (as of 1951) accounted for one-quarter (28%) or six members from four countries: the Soviet Union, the PRC, East Germany, and Czechoslovakia. The Soviet Union, seen as the *de facto* leader or coordinator of the Commission by western countries, dispatched only one member, who had no special status in the Commission (WICIK 1951, 4). According to Kate Fleron, the Danish delegate who participated in the investigation as an “independent observer,” the total

number of Commission members was twenty-seven, including the interpreters and photographers who always accompanied the twenty-one members mentioned above (Fleron 1951a; Fleron 1951c, 6).

The final report of the Commission released in 1951 emphasized that there were significant differences in political, social, and cultural views among the Commission members. The report claims that one common goal of the investigation by these women of “different political views” was to inform the whole world about “the facts as we have seen” (WICIK 1951, 5). Just as the report emphasizes, the Commission was actually composed of members of various ages, nationalities, religions, social backgrounds, and political views. Some of the women could even be classified as liberal or conservative. A representative example was Ida Bachmann, the Danish delegate who had been an officer in the US War Information Office during World War II and was chief librarian¹ in 1951 (*Vi Kvinder* 1951, 6).

The members of the Commission, however, shared important similarities in terms of their careers and socio-political viewpoints. Most of the members had suffered a great deal of agony under either the political oppression of Nazi Germany or colonial rule and were connected with anti-fascist and anti-colonial activities. For example, Monica Felton, the British delegate, was a social democratic politician who belonged to the Labour Party. She was an eminent politician who had been elected as a Labour member of the London County Council (LCC) in 1937 to represent St. Pancras South West. She served as chairman of the Supplies Committee while on the LCC, and worked in the Ministry of Supply between 1941 and 1943. Monica Felton thus became an important female politician, playing an important role in managing British supplies during the anti-fascist war against Nazi Germany (Yuki 2013, 287–289; Huxford 2018, 145). Lilly Wächter, the West German delegate, was born into a Jewish family and had to witness the death of her family members in the Terezin Ghetto, Czechoslovakia, during World War II. She was an ordinary housewife, a Social Democrat rather than a Communist, and a survivor of Nazi persecution. Trees Sunito Heylingers, the Dutch delegate, was a lawyer married to an activist who led the Indonesian national movement in the Netherlands. Eva Priester, the Austrian delegate, spent her life in exile in London during the war. Hilde Cahn, the Eastern German delegate, was imprisoned in Ravensbrück Concentration Camp by the Nazis during the war (Donert 2016, 321–328). Kate Fleron, the Danish delegate, experienced life in prison and in a concentration camp, while running underground newspapers during the period of Germany’s occupation. Ida Bachmann, another Danish delegate, worked in the US War Information Office, while living as an exile during the war (Felton 1953, 27). Thus, like a number of leaders of the WIDF, most of the members of the Commission were closely connected with anti-fascist and anti-colonial activities.

The group of twenty-one women formed the Commission, travelling around Prague, Czechoslovakia, Moscow, Russia, and Mukden, China. The Commission members from these cities were integrated into the team. Candelaria Rodriguez, a

¹ The document does not name the institution and I have been unable to locate additional historical documents concerning the personal life history of Ida Bachmann.

Cuban lawyer, although residing in the region located furthest from Prague, was the member who arrived earliest (Felton 1953, 17–18). The following day, Felton from the UK was followed by Ida Bachmann and Kate Fleron from Denmark. Bachmann, who spent her life as an exile in the US during the war, showed an idealized image of the smart American woman. Fleron introduced herself as an editor of the newspaper *Free Denmark* (Felton 1953, 26–27).

As will be explained in detail later, the early meeting and interchanges with Felton and Fleron were significant in orienting the direction of the activities of the Commission. These two women were representative members who demanded a conservative and objective approach concerning the method of preparing the report, thus instigating continuous internal debates throughout the period of the investigation activities. Fleron was the only member who participated in the investigation activities as an “independent observer.” As for the position of Fleron, Felton defined her as an “independent observer without any political attachments” (Felton 1953, 36). Thus, a British woman and two Danish women met earlier than the other members, and came to develop a close friendship with one another. They shared in common the English language, which had an important effect on them (Felton 1953, 31, 41–42).

When the three returned to Prague after a short trip to Lidice, they found that the delegates from Canada, France, East Germany, West Germany, Algeria, and Tunisia had arrived. Nora Rodd, who would be appointed as Chairman of the Commission later, was a Canadian communist and the eldest among the delegates. She was a woman with blue eyes and silvery hair, who seemed to listen carefully to what other people were saying. Wächter and Cahn were described as “stout and kindly and unmistakably German.” Gilette Ziegler, the French delegate, was a “tall and slender” novelist and journalist (Felton 1953, 35). Abassia Fodil, the Algerian delegate, was a political and labor union activist. She was one of a small number of Muslims who belonged to the Union of Algerian Women (Cherifati-Merabtime 1994, 45). The rest of the members, excluding the Soviet, Chinese, and Vietnamese representatives who joined the Commission in Moscow and China, gathered first in Prague. Other members joined up in Moscow and Mukden on the way to the Far East.

The Commission flew from Prague to Moscow. In Moscow, Maria Dmitrievna Ovsyannikova, the Soviet delegate, was awaiting the team. On behalf of the Soviet Women’s Anti-Fascist Committee, she joined the journey to Korea. She had suffered as a member of the Red Army in Stalingrad during World War II, was editor-in-chief of the journal *Soviet Women*, and by 1951 was also a distinguished economist (Felton 1953, 40). As the only Soviet member on the delegation, Ovsyannikova could have shown her intention to lead the Commission according to her own will, representing the USSR’s political line. This claim was in fact made within American political circles and from some voices within the UN. However, as I will show in the next section, she neither tried to force through Soviet political views nor exerted a strong voice while undertaking the local investigation activities in North Korea (Felton 1953, 131, 163).

The Commission then flew from Moscow to Mukden, China via Siberia.

In Mukden, three Chinese representatives and one Vietnamese representative were awaiting the delegation. Of the three Chinese representatives, Li Kang ran a training school for nursery teachers, Liu Chin-yang was the president of the Democratic Federation under the wing of the Culture Consultation Commission, and Bai Lang was a writer (Felton 1953, 67–68; Fleron 1951a). We can assume that all four of these Asian women were under the strong control of the Communist Party of their own nations.

Once all of its members had gathered in Mukden, the Commission needed to appoint a chairman. The chairman, however, had already been elected at the convention in Prague, where the Soviet, Chinese, and Vietnamese representatives had not been present. At the Prague meeting, a few delegates, Felton included, objected to appointing the chairman so early in Prague because they thought they were still comparative strangers to one another. However, the objection was overruled and eventually Nora Rodd, the Canadian delegate who was the eldest among the members, was appointed Chairman by a majority vote (Felton 1953, 35). The decision-making process for appointing the chairman, executed before the Soviet and Chinese representatives joined, shows how the Commission's organizational routines were being established. Contrary to the claims of the US, the Commission's first order of business was decided in the absence of the Soviet delegate.

Those who would assume the positions of vice-chairman, secretary, and assistant-secretary, were elected at the meeting in China. Two members, Liu Chin-yang from China and Ida Bachmann from Denmark, were elected vice-chairmen. Miluse Svatosova from Czechoslovakia was elected as secretary and Trees Soenito-Heylingers from the Netherlands was elected assistant secretary (WICIK 1951, 4). The positions must have been determined through internal discussions and a vote, as in the appointment of the Chairman.

The women who arrived in China could feel that war was approaching. They spent their last night in Dandong, China, near the border with North Korea. Even in this Chinese city, they could hear the air raid sirens (Felton 1953, 77). They came to understand that they could even lose their lives in this strange land. However, all twenty-one members crossed the Yalu River and traveled deep into North Korea, accompanied by the sound of aerial bombardment by the USAF.

Investigatory Principles and the Process of Formulating the Report

Attempts to Eliminate Political Elements in the Course of the Investigation

When the contents of the report of the Commission were publicized, information services of the US State Department disseminated a critical document drafted by a coalition of over thirty conservative women's organizations, coordinated by the Women United for United Nations (WUUN), through Radio Free Asia and Radio Free Europe. The US officials regarded the WIDF campaign as propaganda for communist nations (Mooney 2013, 57; Laville 2002, 137–138). Meanwhile, the Commission kept claiming that the contents of the report were based thoroughly on "the facts as we have seen" (WICIK 1951, 5). They insisted they had done their best to inform the public of what they had seen and heard, without distortion and in a conscientious manner. Furthermore, all members of the Commission remained

unshaken in their beliefs, even though they were subsequently deprived of their social positions and prestige, and suffered a great deal because of the legal cases launched against them after returning home. Felton was expelled from the public position of chairman of the Stevenage Development Corporation, amid criticism that she was a fervent communist (Yuki 2013, 308–312). Wächter was arrested after speaking in Heidelberg and Ludwigsburg in August 1951 on the grounds that her claims about American atrocities in Korea constituted a violation of Allied Control Council Law No. 14: “protecting the interests of the occupation in Germany” (Donert 2016, 326). Candelaria Rodriguez, the Cuban delegate, was also arrested on her way home in New York where she was made to board a plane to pre-Castro Cuba, and upon arrival in Havana, was escorted to the Military Intelligence Service and the Bureau of Investigation of Communist Activities. She was repeatedly imprisoned for denouncing the crimes she had witnessed in Korea (Rodriguez 1994). Elisabetta Gallo, the Italian delegate, gave repeated speeches describing what she had seen and heard in North Korea to people all across the nation (Pojmann 2013, 82). Rodd did not change her views of the final report of the Commission even during an interview in the 1980s (Melady 2011, 82).

The Commission members’ firm convictions about the reliability of the report is probably closely related with the Commission’s horizontal decision-making methods, efforts at eliminating political elements in all processes, free local investigations, collecting of the maximum amount of evidence possible, and process of writing the final report through constant discussion and debate. Most such principles and methods in the investigations had been established during the meetings in Czechoslovakia and China through intense but democratic debates among the members of the Commission (Felton 1951, 35–37, 65–72).

Given the fact that there were several intense debates among the members of the Commission, it can be concluded that the decision-making structure involved a horizontal and democratic procedure. A typical example was the two debates that broke out in Prague, and Mukden. The first debate was about the necessity of preparing “an agreed report” concerning the objects of investigation in North Korea. The second debate was raised over the “political nature” of the speech that Chairman Rodd delivered in China. It is intriguing that both of these debates were initiated by Felton and Fleron. As explained earlier, these two were representative members who placed the greatest emphasis on assuring the objectivity of the report throughout the investigations.

In Prague, the first debate erupted shortly after the chairman was elected. As described above, there was some argument about the problem of electing the chairman before all the delegates were gathered. Nonetheless, this was resolved by a majority vote without a bitter dispute. However, when people began to talk about “the importance of preparing an agreed report about the things we should see in Korea,” (Felton 1951, 35) a heated debate arose again. Felton fiercely argued that she could not commit herself to “any agreement in advance” (Felton 1951, 35). She added that “I was prepared to sign anything with which I agreed, but that I could not guarantee agreement with anybody about anything” (Felton 1951, 36). Some members agreed with Felton. Fleron, the Danish delegate, went a step further to

emphasize that her position as a politically liberal “independent observer” should not be compromised by any pre-approved agreements. As a result of this debate, the members came to share the conviction that no agreement in advance should be determined before entering North Korea (Felton 1953, 35–36).

The second debate in Mukden directly concerned a “political issue.” The day the fact-finding commission arrived in Mukden, the local government of North China² held a welcome reception for the Commission. During the reception, the Commission was offered a welcome address, flowers, and fruit. A dispute occurred that was related to Chairman Nora Rodd’s speech delivered in response to the welcome reception. Rodd said, “We are all very happy to be going to Korea to show up the conduct of the American imperialist aggressors and those of us who’ve come from western countries are downright ashamed of the policies of our own governments” (Felton 1953, 65–66). Her address reflected the typical Cold War discourse of the Soviet Union, which described the United States as an “imperialist” and “warmonger.”

When the members left the hall after Rodd’s speech, Felton and Fleron approached Rodd and expressed their concerns about her speech. They said that the political remark of Rodd not only distorted the true hearts of the Commission visiting Korea to find out the truth, but also compromised the fact that the fact-finding commission represented diverse political views. They also added that such a speech should never be given again. Rodd listened carefully and gladly assented (Felton 1953, 66).

Nonetheless, the dispute on the following day was quite fierce. At the general meeting of the Commission, Rodd offered a “brief, but perfectly frank” statement about the speech she had delivered the day previous. Her statement reflected the content and remarks that Felton and Fleron had wanted to hear. However, the Soviet and Chinese representatives delivered a strong rebuttal of Rodd’s statements and criticized the wickedness of US capitalism. In response, Felton opposed them by emphasizing that “our own aim is not political but humanitarian.” Felton argued that no one would be convinced if the fact-finding commission started its activity “by making speeches about capitalist tigers.” Fleron also delivered a strong rebuttal and clarified that it would be better to give up the whole schedule if the freedom to reach a conclusion based on the evidence was neglected. The sharp conflicts between the two parties rapidly shifted as Ovsyannikova, the Soviet representative, delivered statements agreeing with the British and Danish representatives. With all other members emphasizing the importance of a “co-operative spirit,” the drama was settled (Felton 1953, 69–70).

These two episodes captured in the record written by Felton during the Korean War are significant for judging the overall reliability of the Korean investigation report. The fact that a conflict actually existed, suggests that the fact-finding commission’s decision-making structure was democratic and rational in nature. Several women in the Commission—including Felton, who had been a

² The document simply writes “government of North China,” without further specification; it probably refers to the local government of Liaoning Province, PRC.

member of the LCC and a clerk of the House of Commons—possessed a strong political character. These women would not have been able to readily accept decision-making structures other than democratic procedures.

Chairman Rodd listened carefully to the opinions of the British and Danish representatives who criticized her speech. The Soviet and Chinese representatives also sympathized with the importance of a co-operative spirit and offered to compromise. Through the two debates, a consensus was arrived at to exclude political elements and prioritize the discovery of the truth during the investigatory activities.

The fact-finding commission gathered each day and freely discussed the evidence they had found along with what they had seen and heard. Political remarks were restricted among themselves and the North Korean officials who met them also abstained from delivering political speeches. “There was no oratory, no flamboyant phrase, no outburst of indignation against any other country, but instead, a calm, factual statement about the destruction. . .” (Felton 1953, 85). We have to assume that the working principles of the fact-finding commission had been related to the North Korean officials in advance.

However, despite the apparent horizontal decision-making structures and efforts to keep politics out of the Committee, we will never be able to completely discount the influence of investigators from communist countries, especially the Soviet Union. At the time, the Soviet Union was continuing its criticism against US military activities in Korea, centering on the USAF’s so-called “barbarous bombings.” For example, at the UN meetings held September 5–7, 1950, the representative of the USSR insisted that the US government, supported by the governments of Europe, “was waging a colonial and imperialist war against the Korean people,” and that the most eloquent confirmation of this “could be seen in the barbarous bombardment, by the United States naval and air forces, of peaceful towns and villages both in North and South Korea” (The United Nations 1950, 236). Under such political circumstances, the Report of the WIDF could be used as important evidence of the authenticity of Soviet claims.

In spite of the obvious interest of the Soviet Union in the Commission, however, it is also significant that the Soviet Union sent only one lone investigator to the WIDF Committee and did not attempt any direct intervention in the investigatory activities. Perhaps the Soviet Union had anticipated that they could achieve their goals simply by helping the members of the committee investigate the desperate situation in North Korea. As we shall see later, the North Korean regions were already virtually destroyed by the USAF by the time members of the Committee arrived in Korea in May 1951.

The Method of Field Investigations and Composing of the Report

After starting the investigation in North Korea, the fact-finding commission tried its best to prepare and complete the report as objectively as possible. The commission members consistently asked questions, raised doubts, and tried their best to find objective evidence. Evidence of their efforts can be found in various areas.

The Commission stayed in North Korea for about twelve days. The members

arrived at Sinüiju ["Sinyju" in the WIDF report] late at night between May 16 and 17 1951, and completed their final report on May 27, just before leaving North Korea on the late evening and early morning of May 28 and 29. On the night of May 16, they slept in Sinüiju, and on May 17, they investigated all Sinüiju areas. On May 18, they completed preparing their investigation report about Sinüiju. Early in the morning of May 19 they arrived at P'yöngyang and started investigating the surrounding region that same day. On May 21 they completed their investigation report for that area. On May 22 they divided into four groups to explore the provinces of Hwanghae, P'yöngan, Kangwön, and Chagang. On May 26 and 27 they completed the overall report and all members of the Commission signed it. The members of the Commission devoted themselves to carrying out the local investigations and completing the report before returning home (Fleron, 1951a; Felton 1953, 78–161).

During their stay in North Korea, the Korean Democratic Women's League (KDWL) supported the Commission members with food, clothing, shelter, and transportation. At night, the members stayed mainly in small houses in the forest located far away from the main roads, or else in underground bunkers in town. Sometimes they even spent the night in a cave beneath a mountain (Fleron 1951a). Since most of the houses in North Korea had burned down following incendiary bombing by the USAF, the Commission members had to endure the same hardships as North Koreans.

Whenever the Commission visited a new North Korean city, they generally followed the same procedure for their investigation. Once they arrived, high local government officials, such as mayors, briefly explained about the area's current status and led a question and answer session with the Commission. The briefing involved only a calm factual statement without any expression of anger toward a particular nation or political discourse (Felton 1953, 85). Afterward, members of the Commission were divided into several groups to see and hear as much as possible within the limited time. It is assumed that the small subgroups were divided based on the language preferred by members. For example, the French, Tunisian, Algerian, and Vietnamese delegates preferring French became one group, and East and West German and Dutch delegates preferring German became another group.

The local investigation methods can be classified into three categories. The first method was free exploration. The members of the Commission traveled around to all parts of the cities freely and assessed the situation based on their individual perspectives. The second was to visit certain places under the guidance of the local government. This method was mainly used in places that required guidance from the local people. The third method was objective data gathering through interviews, taking photos, and collecting evidence.

The free exploration method was conducted mostly after the briefing and once the members had been divided into several groups with interpreters. On the first day in North Korea, the Minister of Culture and Education, Hō Chöngsuk ["Che Den Zuk" in the WIDF report³], told the Commission that "we shall do our best to show you whatever you want to see while you are in our country" (Felton

1953, 85). The local investigation activities in North Korea were conducted as the minister had promised. The Commission could visit any place, review any data, and access any item without restraint from the North Koreans. The interpreters who always accompanied the Commission did not induce the members to go in a certain direction. Felton described how “our interpreters never once suggested that we should go in one direction rather than another” (Felton 1953, 90–91). Fleron also said that they could freely visit craters and caves in and around the cities (where most of the North Koreans were living at that time) and that they could interview the people freely (Fleron 1951a). Free exploration was literally free without restrictions. In addition, the fact-finding commission was able to check the actual status of the region through the many people whom they met accidentally (Felton 1953, 89).

Visits to certain places guided by the local government were conducted mainly in areas where large-scale massacres had been committed. In the cases of regions such as Sinūiju and P’yōngyang, which were significantly damaged from the aerial bombing, free exploration alone was sufficient to identify the damages to a considerable extent, since the damage was a substantive visible phenomenon covering broad regions. Meanwhile, for the serious massacres committed in the provinces of Hwanghae, South P’yōngan, and Kangwōn, it was important to personally identify the places of confinement and burial sites of the victims. Guidance from locals was essential for investigating such places.

Whenever the Commission visited a place of confinement or burial site with a guide from the local government, they never stopped doubting the credibility of the North Koreans’ claims. At such sites, Commission members interviewed people related to the place being visited. All such people were local residents and either family members or neighbors of the victims. Since the investigation was conducted under the guidance of the local government, the Commission continued to question the political nature and credibility of the claims. Furthermore, the stories about tortures and civilian massacres were incredibly brutal and it was hard for the members to simply accept claims of such inhumane deeds as the truth without suspicion. Felton wrote that “as we listened to the detailed account of the raping and torturing of the women and of the cold-blooded destruction of crops and stocks of foodstuffs, we found ourselves unwilling to believe that such things could be true.” At the beginning of their investigations, the delegates had hoped that such testimonies were not typical in North Korea (Felton 1953, 109).

Fleron, the independent observer, directly evinced such suspicion. She suspected that “we could not know if they were Koreans or Americans who were in these mass graves.” So, “[t]hey uncovered some of the corpses for us. Those were Koreans. There was no doubt. We could also see that their hands were tied behind their backs. We saw skulls that had been crushed, and we saw bloody rags, shoes and pieces of rope.” The local people around the burial site cried and screamed as they explained about the corpses, which were clear evidence of torture and

³ Many of the Korean proper nouns in the WIDF Korea Report appear to have been rendered in English via underlying Russian/Cyrillic forms.

massacre. Nevertheless, Fleron did not stop questioning. She suspected that “it may have been South Koreans who were killed by North Koreans who lay in this mass grave and in all mass graves in North Korea! The despaired people who stood with us at the edge of the grave. . . must then have been the victims’ imported South Korean family.” Fleron also agreed that torture and massacres must have occurred in the region (Fleron 1951a).

The Commission interviewed local people and collected data in every location they visited through free exploration or under the guidance of the local government. Felton described how people would gather around the members of the Commission wherever they visited (Felton 1953, 83, 90, 118). The local people would ask who they were and the interpreters would explain to them about the fact-finding commission. Then the local people would compete to express their opinions to the Commission. The Commission heard repeated and desperate accounts of the tragedy of war and brutality of human beings. Once the local women had the chance to speak, they would suffer terribly from fear and shame. They showed anxiety when describing the sexual violence that they or other family members had suffered. Soon the local women began to wail and the surrounding people cried along with them (Felton 1953, 118, 126).

To ensure the objectivity of the testimony they heard, the commission members kept asking whether there were people with more direct and detailed information (Felton 1953, 144). As indicated in the final report, the Commission always recorded the names provided by the interviewees and recorded the interviews in detail. Thus, the interviews were quite long. The Commission reviewed all the statements with help from the interpreters. The Commission also took great care in selecting the local interviewees. For instance, they refused to be influenced by those who had strong voices. Instead, they tried to listen carefully to the testimonies of children, or of the elderly who could barely manage to stand while carrying a baby (Fleron 1951a; Felton 1953, 138).

It was also important to secure substantial corroborating evidence to enhance the objectivity of the testimonies. For example, the Commission included many photos in the report as evidence. The photos vividly showed the images of devastated North Korean cities, unexploded bombs with the serial numbers of the USAF, corpses of massacred people, North Korean women describing the incidents while crying bitterly, and the ordinary lives of North Korean people living underground. The Commission members carefully reviewed a US army baseball bat claimed to have been used for torture, empty cartridges of US forces around burial sites, deep scars on the body of victims, and fragments of human scalps (WICIK 1951, 19–23).

The final stage of the investigatory activities was to complete a final report that all members could agree on. The Commission was composed of women from eighteen countries who had to return to their homes immediately upon completing their investigations. Thus, the final report had to be completed while all of the members were still in Korea so that they could all check and agree with the contents.

To prepare and complete the report within the twelve-day limit, they

formulated an agreement on certain principles. Thus, the report on a particular region should be completed before leaving the region. Only the members who had participated in an investigation contributed to the composition of the report on that region. For instance, the investigation report on Kangwŏn Province was written by those specific members (four members including Elisabetta Gallo) who had actually investigated the province. For this reason, Fleron, who did not participate in the investigation of Kangwŏn, even mentioned that she could not completely guarantee the reliability of the contents of the report on this region when the Danish press wrote an article about the war damage there (Fleron 1951a).

In addition, according to Felton, the Commission organized the editorial committee internally in order to review the reliability of evidence and testimonies and to prepare the final report effectively (Felton 1953, 71–72). The editorial committee decided to complete the composition of their final report while in North Korea. The editorial committee reviewed and classified various information collected by their internal sub-groups. The editorial committee also organized the information logically while eliminating dubious items (Felton 1953, 131; Fleron 1951a).

After completing the draft report through the above process, the Commission members immediately discussed the contents. The discussions were held primarily in the rooms of the temporary residence where the members stayed, or in a front yard where the sunlight was shining brightly. All of the members sat around in a circle to listen carefully, criticize the report, and suggest revisions. As usual, minor controversies would arise while “listening, objecting, or suggesting amendments until we [all members of the Commission] at last reached a final draft with which everyone could agree” (Felton 1953, 131).

Verification of Major Claims in the Final Report: Achievements and Limitations

The WIDF report is composed of six chapters in total, divided according to the investigation schedule and the regions investigated. However, regardless of the format, the major contents of the final report as concerns the war damage can be divided into three parts: patterns and influence of aerial bombing; victims and aspects of torture and massacre; and victims and aspects of sexual violence against women. These are what had the most physical and direct impact on North Koreans, and were the typical forms of violence that local North Korean women, the elderly, and children—the main interviewees of the report—had to endure. Revealing the truth about these three main aspects from a contemporary viewpoint is important for evaluating the characteristics of the final report and activities of the Commission in Korea.

Aerial Bombing by the USAF in North Korea

First, we closely examine how the report describes the damage and influence of aerial bombing. The report describes that bombing damage was found in all North Korean regions and that the scale of damage was beyond imagination. The WIDF report claimed that bombing targeted all civilian-inhabited urban and rural areas. The overall destruction of urban and rural areas in North Korea was

frequently described in the final report: “In the course of the journey from Sinŭiju to P’yŏngyang the Commission observed that the towns and villages through which they passed were all completely or almost completely destroyed. . . . The ruined villages were too numerous to be listed” (WICIK 1951, 10). “The destruction [of P’yŏngyang] is now virtually 100 per cent. But in spite of this, bombing still continues” (WICIK 1951, 13). “The members, in the whole course of their journey, did not see one town that had not been destroyed, and there were very few undamaged villages” (WICIK 1951, 40).

The above report statements contradict the claims of the US government and the USAF at the time and today. In the initial stage of the Korean War, Dean Acheson, the US Secretary of State, made a public statement as follows: “The air activity of the United Nations forces in Korea has been, and is, directed solely at military targets of the invader. These targets are enemy troop concentrations, supply dumps, war plants, and communications lines” (Acheson 1950). Ernest Gross, the US representative to the United Nations, assured members of the UN Security Council of the “care and solicitude of UN air forces for Korean civilians” (*Nevada State Journal*, September 8, 1950; *Minju Sinbo*, September 7, 1950). The official viewpoint, as stated above, has been maintained until now and is reflected plainly in the book by Robert F. Futrell that actually represents the viewpoint of the USAF after the war. Futrell insisted that the USAF was bound by the following rule until the end of the Korean War. “Every effort will be made to attack military targets only, and to avoid needless civilian casualties” (Futrell 1961, 41).

However, the articles and book of Taewoo Kim, which analyze USAF documents on the Korean War, speak for the truth of the WIDF report while revealing the false claims of the US government and USAF at that time (Kim 2012a; Kim 2012b; Kim 2013). According to Kim, North Korean cities and villages were completely devastated by a “Scorched Earth Policy” that was carried out by the USAF since November 1950. We can confirm that the Commission arrived on the Korean Peninsula immediately after the devastation of the North Korean regions due to this “Scorched Earth Policy.” The WIDF report described that even small rural areas were burnt to ashes, and Kim’s articles clearly show that the description was not exaggerated at all.

According to Kim, the USAF actually carried out “precision bombing” of “military targets” in the course of the aerial bombing in North Korea during the early stages of the Korean War (July 1950–October 1950). Although it was true that most of the targets were located in densely populated areas and the accuracy rate of bombings was remarkably low, Dean Acheson’s argument that “the air activity of the United Nations forces in Korea has been, and is, directed solely at military targets of the invader,” was true to some degree (Kim 2012b, 477–478), at least in the early phase of the war.

However, the intervention of the Chinese People’s Volunteer Army (PVA) and the reversal of the war situation during late October to early November in 1950 changed the bombing strategy instantly. With the setback to the UN forces in North Korea, Douglas MacArthur, the Commander-in-Chief of the United Nations Command, ordered the implementation of the new destructive “Scorched

Earth Policy” on November 5 1950. He ordered that “every installation, facility, and village in North Korea now becomes a military and tactical target. The only exceptions are the hydroelectric power plant on the Manchurian border at Changsi and the hydroelectric power plant in Korea” (Y’Blood 1999, 258). After this order, the use of incendiary bombs, which had previously been prohibited in North Korea, was allowed. This meant the revival of the fearful military tactic that had reduced considerable parts of civilian areas in Germany and Japan to ashes during World War II.

On November 5, the day the “Scorched Earth Policy” order was issued, a massive number of incendiary bombs was dropped on the city of Kanggye located on the border between China and Korea. The bombers of the USAF military operation burnt down not only large cities and towns but also small villages and isolated houses in the mountains. On November 17 1950, MacArthur stated during a conversation with John J. Muccio, US ambassador to Korea: “unfortunately, this area will be left a desert”. (Muccio 1950). The term “this area” in MacArthur’s remark meant the whole area between “our present positions and the border.” General William Dean, who was in North Korea as a prisoner of war for most of the conflict, published his own memoir after the war. In this book, he stated that every city and village was burnt down in the wake of the bombing and that “just rubble or snowy open space” was left (Dean 1954, 272–275). The WIDF report in 1951 described that they could not find a single undamaged city, and the memoir of General William Dean supports that such a description was no exaggeration.

Torture and Massacre of Civilians

In this section we review mass confinements, beatings, torture, and massacres of North Koreans during the period of the UN forces’ occupation of North Korea. The Commission conducted local investigation activities for about ten days and concluded that “hundreds of thousands of civilians, entire families from old men to little children, have been tortured, beaten to death, burned, and buried alive.” The Commission also claimed that “these mass tortures and mass murders surpass the crimes committed by Hitler’s Nazis in temporarily-occupied Europe.” The massacres were identified as having been committed by “US soldiers and officers or else on the order of US officers.” Accordingly, it was claimed that the US Supreme Command in Korea, the commanders of UN forces, and the governments that had dispatched their troops via the UN, should be held liable for such atrocities (WICIK 1951, 6–7).

However, unlike the investigation activities into the damage caused by aerial bombing, some members of the Commission remained suspicious about the claims of violent atrocities and massacres committed in the North Korean regions. Since the members could clearly see the devastated urban and rural regions in North Korea, they did not disagree or harbor suspicions about the damage done by bombing. However, with regard to the massacres, the members could only check the prisons and burial sites of victims and had to rely on the testimony of survivors to a considerable extent. Therefore, it was natural for the members to harbor suspicions or disagree about whether the testimony was true. Furthermore, it was

the duty of the Commission to be suspicious about facts that could not be verified.

The suspicions of the Commission can be mainly divided into two categories. First, North Koreans' descriptions of the atrocities were "too inhumane and brutal." Thus, some members could not accept such a brutal explanation as the truth. Second, evidence and testimonies about the massacres could have been fabricated.

First, we review the issue of excessive brutality in testimonies about confinements, tortures, and massacres. In fact, the final report's exposition on the atrocities is so brutal that it is hard to believe that such inhumane deeds actually happened in North Korea. According to the North Korean claims at the time, about 120,000 civilians were massacred by "USA, British, and Syngman Rhee forces" in Hwanghae Province, 19,092 were killed in Anak and 23,259 were killed in Sinch'ŏn.⁴ According to the report, numerous people were confined in a warehouse in the peasant bank ("*nongmin ūnhaeng*" in the Korean version) of Anak for fifteen days without food. Those confined were beaten with iron bars and buried alive in a hillside on November 25, 1950. One woman showed her disfigured hands and claimed that she was tortured with heated knitting needles. She said she saw people buried alive in the well in front of the yard while she was being transferred for torture. The Commission actually identified corpses inside the 7-8-meter deep well. The report also including the testimony of an eleven-year-old girl named "Sŏng-ae Kim." According to the report, "her father was crucified and thrown into a river," and "her mother had had her head and her breasts cut off" (WICIK 1951, 17-19).

Such testimony about cruel confinement, torture, and massacres was shocking to European delegates who had suffered Nazi atrocities during World War II. Felton said that "we found ourselves unwilling to believe that such things could be true" when she first heard the accounts of such cruel and anti-humanitarian deeds (Felton 1953, 109). It must have been difficult for the Commission members to accept that such torture and killing were repeated routinely. However, according to the investigations conducted by the South Korean government and researchers for over twenty years since the 1990s, indiscriminate violence against and massacres of Korean civilians who were alleged to be "reds" were perpetrated on a massive scale even before the Korean War. Massacres like the Cheju April 3 Incident (1948-1954) and the Yŏsun Incident (1948) in South Korea were similarly beyond imagination with regard to their brutality (see Yang 2008; Kim 2009). In addition, many contemporary South Korean residents who had survived the Sinch'ŏn massacre and fled south vividly testified that the atrocities committed around that time were truly brutal and beyond imagination (See MBC 2002). Though the members of the Commission were extremely shocked by the brutal behaviors of torturing and killing people, such deeds were hardly an exceptional phenomenon in the history of the twentieth century.

The second suspicion of the Commission members was that the testimonies

⁴ The estimated number of casualties in the Sinch'ŏn massacre increased to 35,000 during the trial in North Korea in May 1952. *Minju Chosŏn*, May 26, 1950.

and evidence they had seen and heard could have been fabricated. For example, Fleron, the Danish independent observer, arrived with a “skeptical attitude” toward what she would see in North Korea (Christensen 1951, 80). She therefore wanted to see with her own eyes the corpses buried in the group burial site. She suspected that the buried people could be South Korean or American soldiers who had been killed by the North Koreans. So the local North Korean people dug up a few burial sites and showed the corpses to the members of the Commission. As stated in the previous section, the members vividly identified numerous tortured victims. Although she started the investigation with a skeptical attitude, she had to concede the facts that could not be denied (Fleron 1951a).

The members of the Commission tried to choose witnesses randomly on their own initiative, and could visit dugouts and caves in cities and villages and freely choose the people they interviewed. Through such processes, the members were able to ensure to a certain extent the objectivity of their findings by comparing testimonies and verifying the consistency of their contents. They also organized a “Reassuring Committee of Inquiry” for final verification of the testimonies and for deciding what should be included in the report (Fleron 1951a; Felton 1953, 131). Through such repetitive processes, the Commission members began to be assured of the factuality of the claims of cruel massacres.

However, despite the constant efforts to verify the truth of the testimony, such efforts had certain limits. For instance, the Commission had to rely on the testimonies of the North Korean people with regard to the perpetrators of the massacres. The report points to “the Americans” or “American soldiers” as the main perpetrators of torture and massacre in most of the North Korean regions. In the provinces of Hwanghae, Kangwŏn, and P’yŏngan, where cruel massacres were committed, American soldiers were described as the main perpetrators. Although “Syngman Rhee soldiers” [South Korean soldiers] were pointed out as perpetrators in some cases, they were described as murdering North Koreans “under the orders of an American officer” (WICIK 1951, 26). There were also cases where a few British soldiers were designated as the main perpetrators, but such cases were very rare (WICIK 1951, 25; Felton 1953, 150). The absolute majority of North Koreans claimed that American soldiers committed the massacres. In response, Fleron intentionally asked whether South Korean soldiers were at the site of a massacre. Surprisingly enough, only American soldiers were referred to as the main perpetrators of the massacre (Fleron, 1951a).

Recently, Korean researchers have conducted studies on massacres that occurred in Sinch’ŏn, Hwanghae province during the Korean War. According to these studies, the massacres in this region were committed mainly by local North Korean right-wing militias. Contrary to the WIDF report claiming that the massacres were committed directly by or under the orders of US forces, some Korean historians suggest that these massacres were committed primarily by radical Korean right-wing youth groups. These studies rely mostly on oral depositions from people who actually lived in the region during the Korean War. These materials are fairly consistent and substantial in volume. Although Korean historians have not reached a consensus on the role of American soldiers in

massacres committed by radical right-wing youth groups, it is undeniable that the Korean militia participated in massacres during the Korean War (see Han 2013; Yi 2004).

By contrast, the WIDF report singles out only American soldiers or South Korean soldiers under the orders of US forces as the perpetrators of massacres, without any reference to Korean right-wing youth groups. This could be used as evidence casting doubt on the reliability of the Commission's activities and final report. If the Commission intentionally omitted the participation of Korean right-wing militia in the massacres, the investigation itself would have to be reassessed. However, if the Commission did not intentionally omit the above facts, we should ask whether the interviewees or Korean interpreters fabricated the facts concerning the massacres.

Among the above possibilities, this article assumes that it is more likely that the information was distorted by the North Korean interpreters than by the North Korean interviewees who served as the primary source for the Commission. This is because the small number of interpreters could have been controlled by the North Korean government, whereas random interviewees would have been more difficult to control in a uniform manner. As mentioned, the Commission always tried to interview many random North Koreans rather than those designated by the North Korean local government. It would have been impossible for the North Korean government to completely control the testimonies of people like the women and children whom the Commission happened to encounter while walking in the night, random cave dwellers who were visited without prior notice, or peasants who were working on farms. According to Felton's record, there were Korean interpreters including "Mr. Kim" who were sent by the North Korean government (Felton 1953, 80). Without controlling the Korean interpreters who facilitated communication between the members of the Commission and Korean interviewees, it would have been impossible to completely control the statements about the atrocities of right-wing Korean militias during the course of investigations.

In addition, there are other grounds suggesting the possibility of information distortion on the part of the North Korean government. In the process of comparing the English and Korean versions of the WIDF report, I found that some of the statements translated by the North Korean government were different in the English version. For example, in the explanation of the massacre that occurred in the village of Madzen [Majön], the District of Moon Chen [Munch'öngun], Kangwön Province, the English version states that "after a few days they [the Americans who had occupied the village of Majön] set free a number of women who escaped to the mountains or hid in the ruins of their houses." On the other hand, this sentence cannot be found in the Korean version. The Commission likely described what they had seen and heard about American soldiers setting free imprisoned women, and that the North Korean government intentionally deleted descriptions that presented American soldiers in even a slightly positive light (WICIK 1951, 35; WICIK 1951 (Korean Version), 209). Such an example demonstrates that North Korea took a far more political approach to the results of the WIDF investigation. Furthermore, as mentioned repeatedly in previous

paragraphs, the fact-finding commission was composed of numerous members, including independent observers like Fleron, who prioritized discovering the truth. In such a situation, it is highly unlikely that the members would have intentionally left out an important fact like the involvement of right-wing youth groups in massacres. In addition, it is highly likely that the North Korean government did not want North Korean right-wing youths to be mentioned as one of the main actors of the massacre. The North Korean government would not want to advertise to the world the large-scale insurrection of its right-wing youth as it would reveal the instability of the North Korean social system at the time.

As mentioned before, according to recent studies on the massacres of civilians during the Korean War, it is a historically proven fact that the massacres that took place in Hwanghae Province in North Korea were indeed as brutal as described in the WIDF report. However, concerning the important fact of the perpetrators of the massacres, it should be pointed out that the involvement of Korean right-wing youth was omitted in the final report because the Commission had to rely entirely on the interpreters when hearing the testimonies of local North Koreans.

Sexual Violence against Women

Rape in war is not a modern phenomenon. It has been commonplace during wartime throughout human history. In the Middle Ages, most people believed that soldiers raped for sexual release. Women were treated as part of the victor's booty. In addition, to promote aggressive behavior, it has not been uncommon for armies or individual officers to encourage soldiers to commit rape. It functions as a form of male bonding. Furthermore, rape was a sexual form of torture with the vast majority of victims being female. As a method of torture, rape was employed to obtain information and to display power and the ability to dominate. It could be in retaliation for a woman's own actions or for those of her male compatriots. In 1998 the UN International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda finally set a precedent by recognizing rape, when it occurred on a massive scale or under orders, as a form of torture. While rape had been recognized as a war crime in the past (for example, in the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, Article 27), no one had ever been successfully prosecuted for it until the conviction of Jean-Paul Akayesu in 1998 (Lambert 2006, 481–483).

The WIDF report is historically significant in that it might be the only investigation report revealing sexual violence against women during the Korean War. In addition, it is also significant in that the victims of sexual violence cited in the report testified using their real names. Though many of the North Korean women trembled in shame and fear during the interviews, they stated their names and testified about the sexual violence they had experienced. Before giving testimony, most of the women hesitated about describing the sexual violence that they endured, or struggled and suffered from the awful memories that they wanted to forget (Felton 1953, 118–119). We need to remember that about 130,000 women suffered from sexual violence committed primarily by the Soviet army against German women during the 1945 Battle of Berlin and that up to 10% of them

committed suicide after this experience (Cherry 2006, 480). Such cases show the strong humiliation and trauma of sexual violence during wartime. North Korean women had to remember and testify to such terrible experiences.

The sexual violence against women described in the WIDF report can be divided into two types. The first type involved violent sexual harassment, torture, and forcible rape, after which the victim was murdered. The second type involved the kidnapping of women, confinement in a “brothel” [*yugwak* in the Korean version of the report], and consequent multiple incidents of sexual violence over a long period of time.

The report suggests several cases of the first type of sexual violence. For instance, the report gives an example of a P’yöngyang citizen, Kim Sun-Ok [“Kim Chöng-ok” in the Korean version of the report], and her testimony on sexual violence and the death of the secretary of the local women’s organization. “The Americans led her naked through the streets and later killed her by pushing a red-hot iron bar into her vagina” (WICIK 1951, 16). In the report, Pak On-In [Pak Ŭnin] from Saong-ni, Sinch’ön-gun, testified that “she herself saw with her own eyes an eighteen-year-old girl named Kim Yen-Sun [Kim Yönsun] being violated and then killed” (WICIK 1951, 27). In Kaichen District [Kaech’ön-gun], “as far as it is known, over 860 women were raped, but many women are ashamed to say.” “Kim Yung-Dju [Kim Yongju], 28 years old, was raped by several soldiers.” “Ree Sun-sil [Yi Sunsil], a young woman, was kept for twelve days, quite naked, in a room with many soldiers” (WICIK 1951, 41–42). Cha Ok-Sun [Ch’a Oksön], 27 years old, testified that “while in prison in Wönsan she saw that the American soldiers chose several girls each night and violated them” (WICIK 1951, 35–36).

Regarding the second type of sexual violence, the report describes cases of the establishment of a brothel in the occupied area and the kidnapping, confinement, and rape of women in the brothel. In the report, Kim Suk-Sen [Kim Suksön] testified about the establishment and operation of the brothel in the Sinch’ön region as follows: “When the US forces came to the town, they organized a brothel. They caught young girls and women and took them forcibly. The witness stated that the pretty girls were taken for the American and British officers and soldiers and the others for the Syngman Rhee troops.” She stated that she knew three girls who had been in this brothel (WICIK 1951, 27). Ree Djin-Hyeng [Yi Ch’unhyöng in the Korean version] who lived in Kaech’ön, testified about the presence of the brothel as follows: “The Americans hunted women and girls, taking them in their jeeps to their brothels. Ree and other young women escaped by smearing their faces with ashes and dressing like old women” (WICIK 1951, 42).

With regard to the establishment and operation of brothels in the North Korean regions during the Korean War, it is impossible to verify their presence even today. The testimonies included in the WIDF report are the only evidence for their existence. However, the testimonies should not be disregarded since the North Korean women at the time disclosed their real names and testified about their experiences while struggling with the awful memories. Moreover, some Korean researchers have suggested that a licensed prostitution system for Korean armed forces and UN forces was temporarily operated and then abolished in South Korea

after 1951 due to the prolonged war with North Korea (Kim 2000; Yi 2004; Park 2011). The US Military Government in Korea completely abolished state-regulated prostitution in South Korea shortly after liberation from Japan. However, brothels for soldiers began to operate in South Korea after the outbreak of the Korean War. According to military documents of the time, the “comfort facilities” [*wianso*] for UN forces were built “at the request of the stationed forces” (Park 2011, 54–55). Furthermore, according to several testimonies, some of the women who worked at the “comfort facilities” were abducted by anti-North spies or were forced to work on charges of being “reds” [*ppalgaengi*] (Kim 2011, 132–133; Park 2011, 46). The fact that new “comfort facilities” for soldiers were set up in South Korea during the war, and the testimonies that some women were forced to work there, make it difficult to dismiss the testimonies of North Koreans as false.

Although many testimonies about rape and sexual torture against North Korean women are incredibly cruel and hard to believe, they cannot be easily dismissed when viewed in the light of the history of sexual violence against women during wartime throughout the twentieth century. A typical example would be the cases of sexual violence during World War II between German and Soviet forces in eastern European regions. Sexual violence committed by German forces was mainly caused by the distorted racial policy toward non-Aryan civilian populations and the soldiers’ stress from the intense resistance of the Soviet Union. On the other hand, sexual violence committed by Soviet forces was caused by a fierce desire for vengeance and hatred generated by the brutality of German forces (Burds 2009, 35–73; Teo 1996, 191–218). It is reported that there were at least two million female victims raped by Soviet forces, including the cases in other eastern European regions (Beevor 2002, 410; Cherry 2006, 479). Thus, the North Korean women’s testimony of sexual violence in the WIDF report should not be seen as mere political propaganda from the Cold War. Instead, the testimonies should be attended to carefully as the screams of the women victims sacrificed violently in a man-centered war culture.

Conclusion

Francisca de Haan, the leading scholar of the WIDF, has evaluated the Federation as a “progressive, left-feminist international umbrella organization, with an emphasis on peace, women’s rights, anti-colonialism and anti-racism.” Although the WIDF generally supported the Soviet Union, it “does not mean that the WIDF was a “Soviet front” organization with other goals than professed.” Its US branch, the Congress of American Women, claimed to have 250,000 members by 1947, and in the early 1950s its Danish branch, the *Danmarks Demokratiske Kvindeforbund* [Denmark’s Democratic Women’s Federation], had twenty-five chapters in Copenhagen alone. She asserted that “diversity similarly characterized WIDF member organizations.” (De Haan 2012, 1–2)

Just like the diversity of the WIDF, the WIDF Korea Commission was also made up of women of various political and social backgrounds. They ranged from the communists of the Soviet Union and China, to a social democrat from Western Europe, to a liberal who had even worked for a US Intelligence Agency in the past.

Delegates from the Soviet Union and China would have participated in the WIDF Commission out of Cold War solidarity with North Korea. On the other hand, UK and Danish delegates had a relatively greater thirst for truth. There were serious and occasional conflicts between the members, but there was no great difficulty in producing the final report. The desperate and disastrous realities of North Korea were plain to see.

Upon returning home after their investigation activities in North Korea, some members of the WIDF Commission had to endure criticism and hardships from their own nations and communities. Cuban delegate and lawyer Candelaria Rodriguez was arrested upon her return. Felton, who was a politician in the British labor party, was criticized as a communist and a traitor and was expelled from her public positions. West German delegate Lilly Wächter, who was an ordinary housewife with social democratic beliefs, was arrested by US forces for violating Allied Control Council Law No. 14 (Fleron 1951b; Donert 2016, 326).⁵ However, despite all manner of constant insults and political oppression inflicted on some members throughout the Korean War period, no form of media reported that any member of the Commission had repudiated the statements of the WIDF report. As mentioned, Rodd, who was the leader of the Commission, did not change her attitude toward the WIDF report even in her interview in the 1980s.

It is assumed that the Commission members grew gradually more confident in the reliability of the report in the process of ensuring objectivity during their investigations in North Korea. According to the record of Felton, the Commission members were divided into small groups and tried “to form their own impressions of how people were living.” She affirmed that “we had seen enough” to understand the actual situation in North Korea (Felton 1953, 90, 95). The Commission members could visit any place within the cities they wanted, pay surprise visits, and talk to anyone they met in the underground civilian residential areas. Afterward, the members of the Commission could freely share and discuss investigation results in their lodgings. In writing the report, the members deleted any claim that could not be verified with concrete evidence even if the claim seemed to be true.

The reliability of the main contents and arguments of the report has been doubted for a long time. The WIDF report described that almost all of the urban and rural areas in North Korea had been burned to ashes when the members investigated the regions in May 1951. Such descriptions have been verified as the truth by the Korean War documents released by the USAF beginning in the 2000s. When the Commission members visited North Korea, all urban and rural areas and even isolated farmhouses in a remote mountain village had been burnt to the ground by incendiary bombs after execution of the USAF’s “Scorched Earth Policy” in November 1950. Thus, the report’s explanations about the bombing damages were not exaggerated, in spite of the US government and military’s claims that they only attacked “military targets” throughout the Korean War.

⁵ Unfortunately, I have not uncovered any information on what happened to communist members of the Committee right after they returned home.

In addition, given that several South Korean studies have corroborated the statements about the brutal massacres of civilians in Hwanghae Province, these statements have also proven to be true to a considerable extent. However, concerning the main perpetrators of the massacres, it is important to note that the WIDF does not mention the Korean right-wing groups that played an important role in the massacres committed in North Korea. This study has identified this omission as revealing a serious limitation to the WIDF's investigatory activities. Limitations in the investigations—especially in the case of massacres—were to be expected as the members had to rely considerably on the testimonies of North Korean residents and interpreters. As previously described in detail, the Commission members consistently doubted the testimonies they heard while trying their best to ensure the objectivity of the process of identifying the perpetrators of the massacres.

A number of North Korean women disclosed their residential region, age, and real name and testified about their own or their family members' shameful experiences of sexual violence. Of course, these Korean women's names and testimonies could have been manipulated. However, Felton stressed that "the questioning of each person took a long time. . . to identify the witnesses in such a way that they could be found and re-examined in any later investigation that might take place" (Felton 1951, 138). Cases like this of multiple victims of wartime sexual violence providing their names and testifying to their present suffering during wartime are rarely found in world history. Although the North Korean women trembled in fear and humiliation, they testified under their real names because they wanted to let the world know about the dark truth of the Korean War. They wanted people outside the Korean Peninsula to understand in detail the hardships they had suffered. This article clearly addresses the limitations of the WIDF Commission's activities. In particular, as specifically analyzed in this article, North Korea clearly tried to use the WIDF's activities politically through attempts at translational distortions in the Korean version of the WIDF report.

But distortions in translation could also be regarded as a sign of tension and distance between the WIDF Commission and the North Korean government. North Koreans must not have been able to request or order the correction of certain contents in the process of writing the report. Just as many recent studies show that the WIDF was not a mere communist group or Soviet puppet (De Haan 2010; Mooney 2013), the WIDF Korea Commission investigators were also not puppet writers under the orders of the North Korean or Soviet government.

North Korean women expressed their sincere gratitude to WIDF Commission members. Although some of them declined to be interviewed and were suspicious of strangers, many of them expressed gratitude to the members. Some of them even said they were happy to see the members. One of the questions that the Commission members were frequently asked was "will it soon be over?" (Felton 1951, 96). The North Korean people barely managed to maintain their livelihood in the devastated areas and wanted the war to end soon. Before returning home, Felton received a pair of silver spoons and chopsticks from a Korean woman. The woman explained that the silver spoons and chopsticks were "a symbol of

enduring friendship between the people of our two countries” (Felton 1951, 153). At that time, marrying couples exchanged silver spoons and chopsticks as a symbol of eternal love. Although the desires for love and peace among the members of the WIDF Commission and North Korean women were entirely ignored and suppressed by Cold War politics for many decades, it would be meaningful to pay attention to the voices of these women in the present day, as we mark seventy years since the outbreak of the Korean War. Just like those women of 70 years ago, we are still hoping for the establishment of a lasting peace on this divided and conflicted Korean Peninsula.

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