

## **Japan: 'Politicians are distorting history': Book to detail experiences of former Dutch comfort women**

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BRUSSELS — Aug. 15 will mark 68 years since the end of World War II. It will also see the publication of a book detailing the experiences of eight Dutch women who were conscripted into sex servitude for the Imperial Japanese Army.

Titled "Broken Flowers," the book will recount the life stories of women whose wartime experiences caused them to suffer extreme mental trauma for the remainder of their lives.

The book project is being undertaken by Marguerite Hamer-Monod de Froideville (hereafter, Hamer), who served from 1998 to 2001 as the president of the Project Implementation Committee in the Netherlands (PICN) for the Asian Women's Fund, which was established to provide compensation to the former "comfort women."

"Many of these women have already died — and yet politicians are continuing to distort history," commented 71-year-old Hamer, who interviewed the eight women and is overseeing the book's publication. "I want to make sure that young people know about what truly took place."

Through the process of identifying a total of 79 women who had been conscripted into the wartime brothels, Hamer became quite close with a number of them. She then began compiling the stories of eight of the women, both during the war and afterward. One of the women, Elna (not her real name), who died in 2006 at the age of 81, wrote the following poem several months before she passed away:

Blooming on that day,

Young and proud,

The flower was broken

by a blood-smeared sun —

The wound never to heal.

The blood-smeared sun in the poem refers to the *Hinomaru* (Rising Sun), or Japan's national flag.

The Japanese army advanced into Indonesia in 1942, at which time the country was occupied by Holland. A total of some 90,000 Dutch civilians and 40,000 soldiers were then put into prison camps.

Elna was sent to one such camp together with her mother in 1943 in Anbarawa, located in the center of Java Island. In February 1944, when she was 18 years old, an officer from the Japanese army took her away to a brothel (which were referred to as "comfort stations") in the city of Semarang, in the northern part of the island, together with 16 other young women between the ages of 17 and 28.

Elna was raped by the officer, as well as the military doctor who had checked her for venereal disease. Both had threatened to kill her family members in the prison camp if she refused to submit.

The brothel where Elna was kept closed down two months later after an order by military leaders, and she was sent back to the prison camp. She then underwent an abortion after learning she was pregnant.

After the war, 10 officers and civilians who had set up the Semarang brothel were convicted as Class B and C war criminals by the Temporary Court Martial in Batavia. Some were sentenced to death.

Elna continued to have nightmares of the brothel long after the war ended. Her mental trauma took a turn for the worse following the death of her husband, a Dutch soldier whom she had married after the war. For nights on end, she found herself unable to sleep.

"The lives of these women were completely ruined," emphasizes Hamer. "For them, there was no such thing as healing." It is ludicrous, therefore, to now hear politicians saying things like, the comfort women system was necessary."

*Mainichi Shimbun*, May 25, 2013

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\* <http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130525p2a00m0na008000c.html>