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## Research Article

### *Jugun Ianfu: The Hermeneutics of Comfort Women in Dulaang UP's "Nana Rosa"*

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#### ABSTRACT

This research analyzed the portrayal of comfort women in Dulaang UP's stage play *Nana Rosa* through its text and performance by applying the integrated Gadamer's 6 steps of Hermeneutics and Hall's Representation Theory. The study found that the communicated meanings could be interpreted through its elements, such as the characters, storytelling, the visual design, and auditory elements by understanding the underlying context of the stage play,

The results indicated that the effectiveness of the play's representation of comfort women is based on how it was staged. The study highlights the need by interpreting the play through observation by exploring its intention and issues that need to be addressed, assessing its coherence and how it shapes the constructed meaning presented with subtexts and symbols. However, an in-depth analysis of the entire play by selecting scenes and dialogues showed multiple notions based on its presentation. A detailed hermeneutic framework is used to determine the play's effective representation of comfort women.

**Keywords:** *Comfort women, Hermeneutics, Japanese Occupation, Nana Rosa, Polytechnic University of the Philippines, Representation, Stage play, Sustainable Development Goals, Theatre, World War II*

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## Introduction

The drama *Nana Rosa* educates us regarding Maria Rosa Luna Henson's horrific experiences being the first Filipina comfort woman not to hide and witness war crimes during World War II. The drama, performed in 2019, is a crucial historical document testifying on behalf of the survivors and condemning war-time institutional violence perpetrated against women. It is unique in the sense that it is a bringing together of history documents and performance studies, thus providing a new template in examining the comfort women

imagery in Philippine theatre (Henson, 1996; Rodell, 2017; Gorecho, 2020).

Theatre as a force for social commentary and historic representation is classically powerful. Theater brings the lives of voiceless subjects to life to enable the people to gain access to stories that otherwise fall through the cracks. *Nana Rosa* is able to undertake this work of bringing onto the stage the world of a comfort woman, advancing it to one of understanding, and reasonably proximity to contemporary listeners. Syncretic juxtaposition of historical veracity and aesthetic value is by which

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the play inscribes culture memory and produces critical argument relating to gender violence and war atrocities (Chua, 2019; Manansala, 2021).

Furthermore, Nana Rosa is one of today's subjects in debates concerning historical accountability and responsibility over comfort women. Despite all these survivor testimonies and existing documents, governments and institutions continue to reject having recruited or paid for World War II crimes. The play serves as a heartfelt reminder of this yet-unsettled issue, pressuring policymakers, scholars, and citizens alike to resist alternative histories and claim reparations (Matsumura, 2015; Yamashita, 2018).

The significance of this work lies in how it illuminates theatre, history, and cultural memory meeting in public understanding. As representative and hermeneutic critique, Nana Rosa testifies to the value of performance in maintaining historical fidelity and defying master narratives. How the play handles comfort women is not merely history but a call to end the gender violence and witness the redemptive power of narrative to truth and justice.

Textual and performance-based hermeneutic analysis according to Gadamer's Hermeneutics (Gadamer, 1989) and Hall's Representation Theory (Hall, 1997) was undertaken in the research. The research discusses how dramatic features representation of characters, narrative content, visual composition, and sounds discern our knowledge regarding the play's main themes. The objective is to investigate how the play depicts history and trauma from survival, its effectiveness in portraying the suffering of the comfort women, and how it can be applied in theater studies, historical representation, and feminism activism (Turner, 2016; Meyer, 2019).

These findings have profound implications in many areas. For theatre practitioners, it is a perception of how such historical events should be dramatized. For historians and pedagogues, it is a pointer to how drama has been employed in the documentation and transmission of historical facts. For advocacy networks, it is a reinforcement of the worth of cultural production in raising awareness regarding gender violence and historical injustice.

## Experimental Method/S

A qualitative approach was employed in analyzing the stage play Nana Rosa, incorporating textual analysis and performance studies. Textual analysis refers to the examination of written or spoken language to uncover underlying themes and meanings (Chandler, 2002<sup>8</sup>; Sahid, 2013<sup>9</sup>).

## Sources of the data

Primary sources include official working script of Nana Rosa, its filmed performance, and scholarly articles related to comfort woman narratives. Additional data were gathered from Maria Rosa Henson's autobiographical book, *Comfort Woman: Slave of Destiny* (Henson, 1996) along with the reviews and takeaways from theatre critics (Encila-Celdran, 2019<sup>11</sup>; Hawson, 2019<sup>12</sup>).

## Data Collection Procedure

Researchers conducted a formative with textual analysis, closely examining:

- Character monologues and dialogues
- stage directions and mise-en-scene (costumes, props, set design and lightning)
- Symbolism and subtext within the play
- The impact of actor performances and audience reception

## Results and Discussion

### Representation of Characters

The analysis of *Nana Rosa* highlights the performative embodiment of trauma and survival. The player utilizes two representations of Rosa - her older self and her younger self- symbolizing the tension between memory and the present (Encila-Celdran, 2019<sup>13</sup>; Mendoza, 2003<sup>14</sup>). Other comfort women in the play, such as Amonita Balajadia, Francisca Macabebe, Tomasina Salinog, Julia Porras, and Gertrude Balisalisa, serve as collective voices reinforcing the themes of historical erasure and resilience (Choe, 2021<sup>15</sup>; Yamaguchi & Kim, 2017<sup>16</sup>).

### Thematic Analysis

The results indicated that Nana Rosa effectively portrays the historical struggles of comfort women through:

### Hermeneutics of the Visual Elements (Step 1-3)

Visual Element	Scene/Dialogue Reference	Pre-Understanding	The Goal of Fundamental Agreement	Mutual Understanding & Common Language
<b>Projected Texts</b>	Act 2: "I was raped" projected on screen	Expect historical visuals.	Uses real survivor testimonies to validate history.	Multilingual text ensures accessibility.
<b>Set Design &amp; Props</b>	Act 1: Old radio plays war broadcasts	Period-accurate elements establish time and place.	The radio symbolizes the passage of time.	Props like letters and diaries serve as memory tools.
<b>Lighting Design</b>	Act 3: Spotlight isolates Nana Rosa	Darkness symbolizes trauma; light symbolizes healing.	Separates past from present.	Warm lighting = resilience; harsh lighting = trauma.

This table analyzes the visual elements in Nana Rosa such as projected texts, set design, and lighting through the first three hermeneutic steps: pre-understanding, fundamental agreement, and mutual understanding. It

shows how the audience's initial expectations are shaped by historical context and how visual cues (like lighting or props) guide shared understanding of trauma, memory, and identity.

### Hermeneutics of the Visual Elements (Step 4-6)

Scene/Dialogue Reference	Understanding The World of Things & Opinions	Communication Of Meaning	Openness to Alterity & Fusion of Horizon	Interpretation & Intertextuality
Act 1: Flashback to Nana Rosa's youth	Highlights how history and personal trauma intersect.	Frames Nana Rosa's story within the larger context of war crimes.	Encourages a new interpretation of historical memory.	Similar to <i>Inception</i> and <i>Markova: Comfort Gay</i> , where fragmented timelines shape meaning and identity.
Act 2: Comfort women share their testimonies	Presents different perspectives on the same event.	Creates a sense of shared historical trauma.	Connects survivor narratives with contemporary struggles.	Similar to <i>The Vagina Monologues</i> , where oral storytelling preserves women's experiences.

This table continues the visual analysis by applying the final three hermeneutic steps: understanding the world of things and opinions, openness to alterity and fusion of horizon, and intertextual interpretation. It explores how scenes from Nana Rosa invite deeper reflection on historical memory and trauma, drawing

connections with other cultural works like Markova: Comfort Gay and The Vagina Monologues.

The use of projected archival images reinforces the historical struggles of comfort women, grounding the narrative in real survivor testimonies (Hawson, 2019; History, n.d.).

**Hermeneutics of the Auditory Elements (Step 1-4)**

<b>Auditory Element</b>	<b>Scene/Dia- logue Refer- ence</b>	<b>Pre-Under- standing</b>	<b>The Goal of Fundamen- tal Agree- ment</b>	<b>Mutual Un- derstanding &amp; Common Language</b>	<b>Understand- ing the World of Things &amp; Opinions</b>
<b>Spoken Di- alogue</b>	Act 1: Charac- ters speak in Fil- ipino, Japanese, and English	Expectation of multilin- gual ex- changes.	Reinforces the power imbalance between op- pressors and victims.	Language bar- riers symbol- ize control and oppres- sion.	Reflects colo- nial histories and identity struggles.
<b>Music &amp; Songs</b>	Act 2: Huk- balahap anthem plays in the background	Traditional songs evoke nostalgia and history.	Nationalist music rein- forces themes of re- sistance.	Songs link past struggles with present advocacy.	Music symbol- izes collective memory.
<b>Sound of Marching Feet of Sol- diers</b>	Act 1: Comfort Women panics as they hear the growing sound of marches	Arrival of Sol- diers or armed forces	The sound of marches re- inforces au- thority and fear	Invites trau- matizing oc- currence	The sound symbolizes col- lective fear and trauma

This table examines auditory elements in the play including spoken language, music, and sound effects through the first four hermeneu-  
tic steps. It highlights how sounds function not

only as background or mood-setters but also as carriers of historical memory and emotional weight, contributing to the portrayal of oppres-  
sion and resistance.

**Hermeneutics of the Auditory Elements (Step 5-6)**

<b>Auditory Element</b>	<b>Scene/Dialogue Reference</b>	<b>Communication of Meaning</b>	<b>Openness to Al- terity &amp; Fusion of Horizon</b>	<b>Interpretation &amp; Inter- textuality</b>
<b>Spoken Dialogue</b>	Act 1: Characters speak in Filipino, Japanese, and English	Language itself becomes a form of resistance.	Encourages a global perspec- tive on war crimes.	Similar to 12 Years a Slave, where linguistic differences reflect control and oppression.
<b>Music &amp; Songs</b>	Act 2: Huk-balahap anthem plays in the background	Music carries his- torical trauma through genera- tions.	Draws parallels between past re- sistance and modern activism.	Similar to Les Misérables, where songs be- come revolutionary calls to action.
<b>Sounds of Marching Feet of Soldiers</b>	Act 1: Comfort Women panics as they hear the growing sound of marches	The sound carries memory to com- fort women who are violated by the Japanese sol- diers.	Serves as the sound that identi- fies the oppres- sors that parallels the traumatic ex- periences of com- fort women.	Similar to <i>Kunidman Party</i> , where military marches reference to era where violence oc- curs, and <i>Schindler's List</i> , where these marches are used to emphasize control and abuse.

Focusing on the final two hermeneutic steps, this table interprets how auditory components communicate meaning across cultures and time. By comparing these elements with other historical and cultural texts (*Les Misérables*, *Schindler's List*), the table demonstrates how sound invites reinterpretation of past

traumas and connects individual memory to collective identity.

Sound elements such as multilingual speech, nationalist anthem, and marching noises enhance oppression, resistance, and trauma themes, increasing historical and affective involvement (Yraola, 2020<sup>19</sup>; Li, 2021<sup>20</sup>).

### Hermeneutics of the Storytelling (Step 1 to 3)

Scene/Dialogue Reference	Pre-Understanding	The Goal of Fundamental Agreement	Mutual Understanding & Common Language
Act 1: Flashback to Nana Rosa's youth	The play follows a non-linear narrative.	Uses memory as a storytelling device.	Weaves together past and present through monologues.
Act 2: Comfort women share their testimonies	Testimonial storytelling emphasizes historical truth.	Aligns personal narratives with collective justice.	Uses direct dialogue to make history accessible.

This table explores the structure and narrative techniques used in *Nana Rosa* through the first three steps of hermeneutic analysis. It focuses on the use of non-linear storytelling,

memory, and testimonial monologues to communicate personal and collective truths, helping the audience build shared understanding with the characters.

### Hermeneutics of the Storytelling (Step 4 to 6)

Scene/Dia- logue Refer- ence	Understanding The World of Things & Opin- ions	Communication Of Meaning	Openness to Al- terity & Fusion of Horizon	Interpretation & Inter- textuality
Act 1: Flashback to Nana Rosa's youth	Highlights how history and personal trauma intersect.	Frames Nana Rosa's story within the larger context of war crimes.	Encourages a new interpretation of historical memory.	Similar to <i>Inception</i> and <i>Markova: Comfort Gay</i> , where fragmented time-lines shape meaning and identity.
Act 2: Comfort women share their testimonies	Presents different perspectives on the same event.	Creates a sense of shared historical trauma.	Connects survivor narratives with contemporary struggles.	Similar to <i>The Vagina Monologues</i> , where oral storytelling preserves women's experiences.

This table completes the narrative analysis by applying the last three hermeneutic steps. It emphasizes how *Nana Rosa* invites audiences to reflect on multiple perspectives, historical interpretations, and intertextual meanings. The storytelling approach fosters empathy and connection with broader struggles faced by women during wartime, linking memory to advocacy.

### Discussion

The study findings in this research are in agreement with existing literature on the use of theater to provide voice for marginalized communities, such as reflected in *The Vagina Monologues* and *Markova: Comfort Gay* (Boal, 2008). *Nana Rosa* belongs to the same tradition in representing the comfort women's story with emotional depth and historical factuality.

Gadamer's hermeneutics emphasizes dialogue among audience interpretation and play, while Hall's Representation Theory emphasizes the play in undermining hegemonic narratives and remaking popular memory (Hall, 1997; Gadamer, 1989). In using testimonies and intertextual narrative, *Nana Rosa* elicits sympathy and reflexive critique.

However dramatic representation must have its limits. It may oversimplify complex

trauma or risk aestheticizing pain. Various audience perceptions also happen, which can defeat the intended impact. Theater can create awareness but cannot itself bring historical justice.

Future research must examine audience reception and how plays like *Nana Rosa* feed into broader gender justice movements both in the Philippines and globally.



Figure 1. *The Old Rosa and Young Rosa*

Table 1. Example Monologues of characters from *Nana Rosa*

CHARACTER	MONOLOGUE
NANA ROSA	"Halos limampung taon kong karga ang bangungot na ito sa utak ko. Hindi pa ba mas masahol iyon sa kamatayan? Hindi ako nasanay kailanman sa lagim. Araw-araw, sinusulat ko sa kapisasong papel, "ginahasa ako!" At pagkatapos, lulukutin ko ang papel na ito't itatapon sa bintana, umaasang may dadampot, may magtatanong..."
YOUNG ROSA	"Ano ang magiging turing nila sa akin? Na ang dumi ko. Hindi malilinis ang duming ito dahil ilang libong beses akong narungisan. At kung talagang hindi ko ito ginusto, bakit hindi na lang ako nagpakamatay? Kaysa dala-dala ang duming ito. Tama si Nanay! Tama si Nanay! Ginusto kong magpakamatay. Ilang gabing ginusto kong magpakamatay. Malalaman ba nila iyon? At kung sabihin mo man sa kanila, maniniwala ba sila? E ayan ka't buhay!"
AMONITA BALAJADIA	"Ako si Amonita Balajadia, sienta'y otso. Tubong Hilagang Luzon. Naglalaba ako noon sa may ilog nang hulihin ako ng pitong sundalong Hapon at dinala sa garrison. Doon paulit-ulit akong ginahasa ng isang opisyal na Hapon, sunod sunod, sa loob ng pitong araw bago ako nakatakas..."
FRANCISCA MACABEBE	"Ako si Francisca Macabebe, sienta'y dos anyos. Taga-Iloilo. Kinse anyos ako noon nang dukutin ako ng mga Hapon noong 1944. Tatlong buwan akong kinulong sa opisyal na Hapon sa isang bahay sa kalye De La Rama, isang bahay na tinaguriang comfort station sa Iloilo noon."

CHARACTER	MONOLOGUE
<b>TOMASA SALINOG</b>	"Ako si Tomasa Salinog, sienta'y siyete. Trese anyos ako noon nang pasukin ng mga sundalong Hapon ang aming bahay at ako'y tinangay. Dalawang taon nila akong inalipin at ginahasa. <i>Pinugutan nila ang aking ama</i> . Pagkatapos ng lahat ng iyon, hindi na ako naka-balik sa pag-aaral dala ng matinding kahirapan."
<b>JULIA PORRAS</b>	"Ako si Julia Porras, taga-Davao del Norte. sienta'y siyete anyos. Trese anyos ako noon nang lusubin ng mga Hapon ang aming bayan at dinukot ang ilan sa aming mga babae. Dinala ako sa isang underground tunnel at doon kami'y binihag hanggang dumating ang mga Amerikano."
<b>GERTRUDE BALISALISA</b>	"Ako si Gertrude Balisalisa, taga-Maynila, edad sienta'y nuebe. Pinuwera ako ng mga sundalong Hapon at sinabing papatayin nila ang dalawang sanggol na anak ko kung hindi ako papayag. Dinala ako sa barracks at sa loob ng labing-apat na buwan, niyurakan nila ako. Pagkatapos ng giyera, iniwan ako ng aking asawa, tangay ang mga anak ko. Tinawag niya akong <i>tirá</i> . Hindi ko na sila nakita pa."

Table 1, Nana Rosa enacts the lives of several women who were subjected to horrendous abuse as Japanese army "comfort women" during World War II occupation of the Philippines. Nana Rosa tells of her deep and enduring trauma an experience she describes as worse than death. She endured intense self-hatred and guilt and experienced suicidal ideation during her adolescence. Amonita Balajadia's, Francisca Macabebe's, Tomasa Salinog's, and

Julia Porras's testimonies reveal histories of abduction, long-term captivity, and brutal abuse. Gertrude Balisalisa experienced sexual violence in order to protect her children, was abandoned afterward by her husband due to the war. These monologues are a testament to the chronic psychological trauma and social injustices these women experienced. They are forceful pleas for recognition, historical memory, and collective memory.

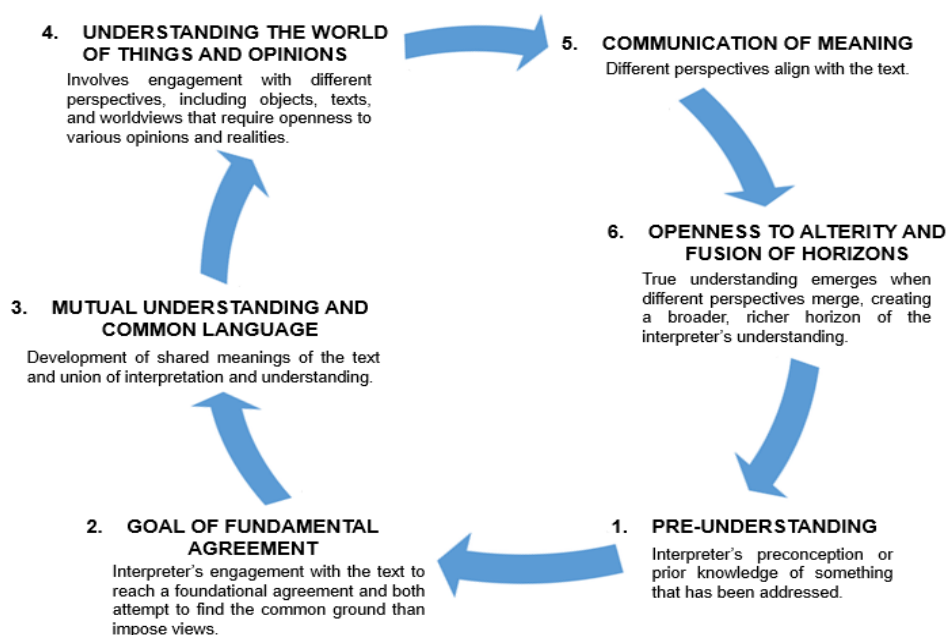


Figure 2. Gadamer's Hermeneutics

Table 2. Hermeneutics of the Characters in Nana Rosa

Step	Description
<b>1. Pre- Understanding</b>	Establishing Preconceived notions about comfort women based on historical accounts.
<b>2. Goal of Fundamental Agreement</b>	Engaging with the text to identify overarching themes of oppression and survival
<b>3. Mutual Understanding &amp; Common Language</b>	Recognizing the significance of Dialogues and monologues in conveying trauma
<b>4. Understanding the World of Things &amp; Opinions</b>	Analyzing how different characters represent distinct perspectives on comfort women's experiences
<b>5. Communication of Meaning</b>	Examining how stage elements enhance the audience's comprehension of the play's message
<b>6. Openness to Alterity &amp; Fusion of Horizons</b>	Integrating contemporary discussions on gender-based violence with historical narratives.

The six stages of the hermeneutic process are a framework for interpretation of Nana Rosa and the narratives of the comfort women. Pre-Understanding is where previous knowledge of recorded records comes into the initial comprehension of the audience. This leads to the Goal of Fundamental Agreement, where the theme of oppression and survival becomes universal among the experiences of the characters. Through Mutual Understanding & Common Language, the monologue and dialogue of the play provide the public with a sense of the density of feelings within the lived trauma of the women. As the critique unwinds, Understanding the World of Things & Opinions

brings the singularity of each woman's experience into focus, necessitating respect for each of the testimonial approaches. Communication of Meaning reveals how stage devices such as light, sound, and set augment the audience's emotional and intellectual openness to the play's message. Lastly, Openness to Alterity & Fusion of Horizons enables an exchange between past and present debates on gender violence, provoking not only empathy but also analytical thought on justice and historical trauma. This is not merely an emotional identification of the audience with the destiny of the women but also a critical analysis of the issues of sexual violence and justice.

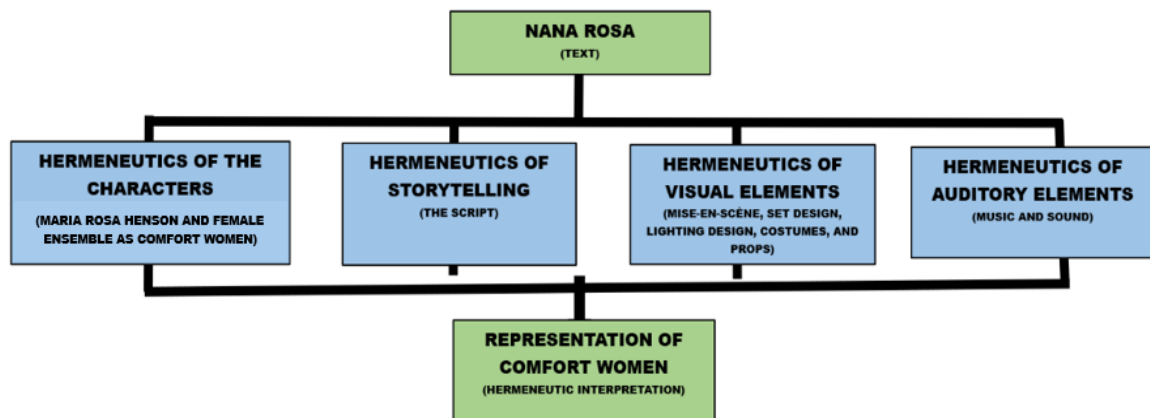


Figure 3. Conceptual Model of Hermeneutic Interpretation

The hermeneutic interpretation conceptual model of Figure 3 demonstrates how the stage play Nana Rosa is analyzed through different lenses of interpretation to reveal its underlying

meaning. The center of the model is the text itself, the Nana Rosa, which narrates the life of Maria Rosa Henson, the first Filipino comfort



woman to speak out. The reading is being tackled by four dominant hermeneutic factors: the characters, storytelling, visual, and audio. Character hermeneutics involve sensitivity regarding how Maria Rosa Henson and the female casts are being shown and how significance about them with the emotional as well as historic one is portrayed. The hermeneutics of storytelling addresses how storytelling information and information concerning the theme are presented by the script. Subordinate to that, the hermeneutics of visual content looks at items like set decoration, lighting, wardrobe, and props and the way they come together to form meaning. The hermeneutics of sounds then analyzes how music and sound contribute to the way audiences will read. Together, these elements of interpretation work towards enhancing the overall picture of the portrayal of comfort women as a hermeneutic approach that enables more in-depth knowledge regarding their history and experiences.

## Conclusion

The study determines that Nana Rosa is an authoritative testimony to the work that theatre can perform as a location of historical recuperation, ethical interrogation, and social action. By integrating the evidence of history with narrative of performance, the play gives an authoritative description of the comfort women's experience. Dependence on Gadamer's hermeneutics (Gadamer, 1989; Reshma, 2018), the criticism points to the way that theatre performance has the ability to evoke shared memory and greater investment in traumatic history. For theatre studies, this means a growing need to examine how dramaturgy, character construction, and stage space affect not only aesthetic experience but also socio-historical conversation.

Historically, Nana Rosa is an example of the way in which arts save marginalized histories that are marginalized by official history. The theatre performance staging comfort women's lived histories forces dominant narratives while recovering silenced voices and thereby is an important cultural intervention. As a result, it reinforces the role of theatre as a representation of the living archive that constitutes and supports collective memory.

At a level of advocacy, the research highlights theatre's ability to determine public awareness and mobilization. Nana Rosa's production makes policymakers, teachers, and institutions of culture prioritize the power of the stage as a means towards social justice and historic responsibility. Such theatre productions further extend research studies to explore in greater detail the roles that parallel productions have towards feminist debate, peace-making, and memory struggle both locally and internationally (Hall, 1997; Boal, 2008; Verma & Kurma, 2024).

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