Dirt
(for the Korean military sex slaves of WWII)

By Margaret Stetz

They were not dirt
though carted like excrement
hailed off by trucks
packed onto ships
and crammed into stalls
with only a bucket, a mat.

They were not dirt
though called
“p” or kyodo benjō—
“public toilets”
for soldiers
“relieving” themselves.

They were not dirt
though shoveled in mounds
not graves
at the end of the War
to cover their gaping orifices
into which pain was forced,
out of which blood was drained.

They were not dirt
though meant for the rain to dissolve,
the wind to disperse,
and insects to seize in a final rape.

1 Margaret D. Stetz is the Mae and Robert Carter Professor of Women’s Studies and Professor of Humanities at the University of Delaware, USA. She was co-editor with Bonnie B. C. Oh of Legacies of the Comfort Women of WWII (2001), the first collection of essays on Asian women’s military slavery during the Second World War, as well as co-organizer of the first international academic conference on this subject (at Georgetown University, 1996). Since then, she has published numerous book chapters and articles in peer-reviewed journals related to the movement to obtain justice for survivors of the Japanese Imperial Army’s “comfort system”.

Close Encounters in War Journal – Stories and Poems of Close Encounters in War

Poetry
They were not dirt
but their corpses, their stories
have now become clay.
Will you use it
to build them their monument?