

Sex Slavery under Domestic and Colonial Patriarchy in Nora Okja Keller's *Comfort Woman*

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Abstract. Sex slavery operated through the comfort women system during World War II has been a historical shame and an inconvenient truth for both the Japanese and the Korean. This study, through Nora Okja Keller's *Comfort Woman*, investigates the life of a Korean character forced to become a comfort woman, arguing that domestic patriarchy and colonial patriarchy are the main institutions which transform her into a sex slave. A representation of Korean comfort women, she is exploited by the patriarchal oppression in her family and the Japanese colonial patriarchy. Her body is transformed into a commodity to sustain her family and offer comfort and pleasure to Japanese soldiers. Despite her liberation, she becomes a traumatised subject whose painful memories keep haunting her even when she relocates to the United States. Patriarchal violence in the form of sex slavery has destroyed her life and left a detrimental legacy preventing her from rebuilding a new successful life. The traumatic past causes this character and her daughter to be seen as weird Asians who are “double-othered” in the United States, a new world where they are unable to recover from profound trauma in spite of their new identity as Korean American.

Keywords and phrases: comfort women, sex slavery, patriarchy, colonialism, Korean American literature

Introduction

Nora Okja Keller, a Korean American author, came to the United States with her family when she was only three years old. Although she does not have any clear memories about her homeland, her writing helps her to identify herself as part of her original country (Stoker 2018). *Comfort Woman*, her first novel, is inspired by a human rights symposium in Hawaii, in which she heard a testimony

of a former comfort woman or simply a sex slave in the Japanese army during World War II. This novel greatly contributes to the field of Korean American literature which is relatively new and small, compared with its Chinese and Japanese counterparts in the broader field of Asian American literature. In fact, Asian American literature is viewed as minority literature which is marginalised in the United States. Therefore, Korean American literature, as a subset of this minority literature, has a little space at the bookstore and gains little attention in the classroom (Chu 2004). Writing by Korean American authors has tended to be overlooked by the mainstream as can be seen that it was mostly brought to press after 1980, although a great number of Koreans immigrated to the United States in the early 20th Century as labourers at the sugar plantations in Hawaii (Kim 1997). As stated by Choi and Kim (2003), the early Korean American literature was mostly written in the Korean language, as the writers yearned for their homeland and could not distance themselves from their culture. In addition, many of them could not write in English. Their works were later translated by their masters at the plantations or their descendants. Currently, Korean American literature is written in English, and unlike the earlier period when male writers were dominating, there are more female writers than male writers in this field (Kim 1997). Although Korean American literature is seen as marginalised literature, *Comfort Woman* as a woman's writing has become a phenomenon, as it won the American Book Award in 1998 and the Elliot Cades Award in 1999. Keller used a fascinating technique to compose this novel; each chapter is narrated by either the mother or the daughter, as first-person narrators of the story. Therefore, readers will see the story through two points of view, the mother's narrative and the daughter's narrative, both of which serve as a means for them to discover their roots and to resolve their conflict between each other. These narratives reveal traumatic experiences of the mother, a former Korean comfort woman, to readers and her daughter in the novel. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the life of this character, as a representation of Korean comfort women, in order to explain how she is exploited by both domestic patriarchy and Japanese colonial patriarchy. In addition, this study looks into her trauma, as a consequence of extreme sexual abuse, which cannot be healed after liberation. Historical accounts regarding the comfort women system as well as theories related to patriarchy and colonialism were studied and employed to discuss the primary text. This will lead to the argument that two main institutions which transform her into a comfort woman include domestic patriarchy and colonial patriarchy.

Before discussing the novel and investigating how the main characters suffer from profound trauma, it is important to understand the background of the comfort women system and how it was operated. This system was started in the

Asia Pacific War, as part of World War II, which is marked as a momentous event in Asia. The war has left detrimental impacts on many groups of people in this region. Among critical groups, a large number of women suffered greatly, especially from extreme sexual abuse, as they were lured, captured, or sold, and sent to relieve Japanese soldiers' tension and stress from war at the battlefronts. These wretched women, or the so-called comfort women, were forced to sexually serve numerous Japanese soldiers and officers at comfort stations. Operated in military camps, those places were deemed military brothels, and thus the victimised women became enslaved as military prostitutes. The cruel intercourses they encountered before and during World War II have wounded them physically and psychologically. The tragedy of comfort women has become a notorious legacy left by the Japanese empire.

The origin of comfort women can be traced back to the time of the Japanese empire's rising power, which made several countries in East and Southeast Asia its colonies. As stated by Tanaka (2017), the comfort women system was started in 1932 in Shanghai, China to prevent the spread of sexual disease within the Japanese army. However, this system was possibly introduced earlier than that, as Soh (2008) posits that the story of comfort women began during the Asia Pacific War, when the Japanese army invaded Manchuria in 1931 and ended after World War II, with the Japanese defeat in 1945. Throughout the war, it was estimated that the number of comfort women ranged between 50,000 and 200,000. Although these women were from different countries, such as China, Taiwan, the Philippines, Indonesia and Myanmar, Korean women were the major group. Another reason that the Japanese army claimed—apart from preventing the spread of sexual disease—in order to set up the comfort women system was to prevent mass rape by Japanese soldiers which happened in Nanjing city and other places in the Northeast of China. Due to the claim that this system would help prevent sexual disease, reduce the number of mass rape, and allow the soldiers to relieve their stress and tension, comfort women became necessary in the eyes of the Japanese army. It is clear that the comfort women system was set up to prioritise the Japanese male body and psychology. While the system aimed to preserve Japanese soldiers' health and offer them pleasure, it ignored the misery of the victimised women. According to gender discourse, being female, ones suffered from marginalisation and oppression, and this situation was much worse for women in the colonised world. Especially for comfort women, while their bodies were utilised, their existence and well-being were ignored.

Once the comfort women system was started, women were needed. According to Tanaka (2017), there were two main methods which the Japanese army employed to recruit comfort women. Firstly, military officers would request

local leaders to supply young women to the army. Through this process, a large number of innocent women were selected and forced into service. The other method was to use the army's own recruiting agents, including brothel owners and brokers, to search for suitable women. Those agents used several methods, such as deception, threatening through violence, and even kidnapping. In addition to these methods, Soh (2008) contends that many victims were persuaded by brokers to work in factories, and they decided to follow them because they needed money to alleviate family poverty. Unfortunately, they were finally sent to comfort stations. With the above methods, the Japanese army could secure an enough number of women from different countries mentioned above to satisfy its soldiers and officers.

The lives of comfort women were beyond misery, as they were treated inhumanely as sex machines. Every day, they were forced to serve soldiers and officers of different ranks. Generally, there were specific hours for different groups of those Japanese colonists to seek pleasure from comfort women's bodies. The comfort stations were open from 9:00 a.m. or 10:00 a.m. until late at night. Usually, regulating soldiers' time was between 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., while the non-commissioned officers' time was from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. ("The Life in Comfort Stations" n.d.). Apart from long service hours, each comfort woman had to serve up to 10 men on a normal day and the number could rise to 30 or 40 on days after combat operations (Tanaka 2017). Through an extreme sexual abuse and a lack of freedom, comfort women were simply sex slaves. With these horrible conditions, a large number of them perished from various causes, including sexual diseases, murder, or even committing suicide in despair or in defiance (Stetz and Oh 2001).

Although there were several factors behind the comfort women system, the patriarchal structure in Asia served as one of the most important institutions which fostered it. The victimisation of comfort women arose "from the institutionalized everyday gender violence tolerated in patriarchal homes and enacted in the public sphere (including the battle front) steeped in what [is called] 'masculinist sexual culture' in colonial Korea and Imperial Japan" (Soh 2008, 3). Korea and Japan share similar masculinist sexual culture in that men viewed women as sources of sexual pleasure. In addition, women were also seen as men's properties which could be sold or traded for something. In Korea, some daughters were even sold by their fathers due to poverty. Their bodies were changed into money for their fathers and later into sex objects for the Japanese soldiers. In fact, the Japanese, through colonial patriarchy, exploited Korean women in several ways. According to Mackie and McLelland (2015), a large

number of them were transported to factories and mines across Korea to serve as labourers. In an extreme case, they were enslaved as sources of sexual pleasure for the Japanese soldiers at the battlefronts. Through Marxist view, Hennessy (2000) contends that women's bodies are used to generate profits as well as pleasure through patriarchy. However, their labour is neglected, although it helps men to gain benefits and pleasure in many aspects. At higher levels, their jobs also sustain social and economic structures. Hennessy writes that "Patriarchy is a historically variant form of social organisation that has been necessary to most socioeconomic systems in the world and has been fundamental to capitalism's exploitative human relations" (ibid., 23). Simply put, women are exploited both at home and at bigger social structures. Especially for women in a colonised country, they suffer from two forces of oppression, domestic patriarchy and colonial patriarchy, as Young argues, "Women therefore had to fight the double colonisation of patriarchal domination in its local as well as its imperial forms" (2001, 379). For many comfort women, their bodies brought profits to their fathers and at the same time offered pleasure to the Japanese colonists. Therefore, it can be concluded that both domestic patriarchy and colonial patriarchy were substantial institutions which generated and maintained the comfort women system.

Through a systematic sexual abuse, comfort women suffer greatly from physical and mental pain. Although some of them survive, they have to cope with day-to-day trauma. A number of them even committed suicide in order to escape from shame and traumatic memories. In *Comfort Woman* (1998), Keller characterises Akiko (whose original Korean name is Kim Soon Hyo), a former comfort woman, to represent surviving comfort women who are deeply impacted by traumatic experiences. Akiko is unable to live a normal life after she escapes and liberates herself from sex slavery. This novel reveals a very dark side of both domestic patriarchy and colonial patriarchy which reduce Korean women into sex slaves and inflict profound trauma on their psyche, preventing them from rebuilding a new successful life after liberation.

Patriarchal violence in the form of sex slavery and comfort women's tragedy

Apart from the awards mentioned at the beginning of this article, *Comfort Woman* is also chosen by *New York Times* as one of the best books of the year. Crafting this novel, Keller employs two voices, Akiko and her daughter, Beccah, to unveil the story of comfort women who suffer from sex slavery and its aftermath as a result of patriarchal violence. Each chapter is narrated by either Akiko or Beccah, so the entire novel is like their testimonies regarding their life

in both Korea and the United States. This novel can also be viewed as a protest against both domestic patriarchy in Korea and Japanese colonial patriarchy, the two institutions which transform the bodies of Korean women into sex slaves.

Akiko was born in the age of the Japanese rule over Korea which started in 1910 and ended in 1945. In fact, according to Young (2001), colonialism was another form of capitalism which works at the global level. It aimed at exploiting less powerful countries by taking advantage of natural as well as human resources. In the eyes of the colonisers, the colonies were resources providers for the enrichment of Western economy. Through military and political violence, the bodies of the colonised countries were exploited. In the Japanese annexation of Korea, its neighbouring country, we can see a similar form of exploitation operated by Western colonisers, as the Japanese empire took advantage of the body of the Korean nation, leaving its people to suffer from poverty. As stated by Lee (2013, 24), “the Japanese colonial policy was highly exploitative and [...] living conditions for Koreans, particularly during the war period, were very harsh”. Most of agricultural products such as rice were exported to Japan; these included Korean labourers who were sent to work in Japanese factories in both Korea and Japan. While the Japanese enjoyed the profit from Korean land and labourers, the majority of Koreans were poverty-stricken. This situation is regarded as an important root of Akiko’s tragedy portrayed in the novel. As a woman in a colonised country, her body is exploited in a similar way the body of Korea was abused. In his discussion of the colonial female body, Young (2001, 370) argues that “Women were positioned as colonial as well as gendered subjects”. Their bodies were used for different purposes such as producing goods and offering sexual pleasure.

Akiko’s life as a comfort woman starts when her father sells her to the Japanese army. Her story is in line with the history of comfort women which reveals that a large number of Korean women became sexually enslaved through different means. An important method which the Japanese army employed in order to recruit women was through deception by agents. Knowing that those women as well as their families suffered from poverty, the agents propagated that they would send women to work in factories and offered the family some money. In *Comfort Woman*, Soon Hyo’s situation is similar to those women. Her older sister needs to marry a neighbouring man in order to keep her father’s business. However, the man’s family will not take her sister unless they provide a dowry. Without money, Soon Hyo’s father has to sell her to the agents, who claim that they need women to work in factories in the North of Korea. Through this transaction, Soon Hyo comes to understand that she is just a family property:

I was her dowry, sold like one of the cows before and after me. [...] The Japanese say there is enough work for anyone in the cities. Girls, even, can learn factory work or serve in restaurants. You will make lots of money. (Keller 1998, 18)

This situation indicates that Soon Hyo's tragic fate clearly stems from patriarchal oppression, since her body is used as a commodity for her father to gain profit. It is also amazing that her fragile body in the eyes of the male can sustain the whole family. To many Korean families, daughters are seen as unwanted members, since the families have to give them away with dowries to their husbands' families. However, Soon Hyo's body becomes valuable because it generates income for her family. According to Won-Lim (1999), the Korean society in terms of gender has been greatly influenced by Confucianism. In history, Korean men interpreted its teachings in ways which benefited themselves and demanded absolute obedience from their daughters. The daughters were seen as private property, and it was socially acceptable whether the fathers well-treated or mistreated their daughters. The whole course of the above transaction reaffirms that Soon Hyo is truly mistreated and exploited by patriarchy in her family. In addition, through the lens of Marxist feminism, Soon Hyo becomes a victim of both capitalism and patriarchy which works hand in hand to generate profit for the capitalists. As Hennessy (2000) contends, capitalism is operated through the concepts of class, gender, and race. The superiority of the capitalists in terms of these concepts enables them to enjoy the profit through the bodies of others. In the novel, Soon Hyo, as a woman, is put at a lower class than her father who gains profit from her body. Later, in the hands of the Japanese, she, as a Korean woman, is further exploited by the concept of race.

When Soon Hyo is sent to a comfort station, she becomes property of the Japanese empire. Although she is still too young to sexually serve the Japanese soldiers, her body is used in another way, serving comfort women at the station as their servant. Her service to the comfort women is like a tool to nurture them, so that they are always ready to serve the Japanese soldiers. The use of Soon Hyo's labour proves that the Japanese soldiers do not waste any moment when they can take advantage of her. They exploit her as a child labourer:

It became my job to empty the pots. I also kept their clothes and bedding clean, combed and braided their hair, served them their meals. When I could, I brought them each a dab of grease, which they would smooth over their wounds, easing the pain of so many men. (Keller 1998, 20)

Soon Hyo is used as a tool to keep the comfort women in good conditions for the Japanese soldiers to indulge in their bodies. In other words, although she is too young to offer sexual pleasure, her labour is still used to maintain sex slavery for the Japanese empire.

Through Soon Hyo's narrative, Keller indicates that comfort women suffer greatly from the transformation of their body and identity which leads to their trauma. Serving the comfort women, Soon Hyo has a chance to learn about their misery, which she has not yet imagined it will happen to her in the future. Her narrative reveals that the first thing comfort women lose after arriving at the comfort stations is their identity because they are forced to abandon their Korean names and use Japanese names. The name is an important part of one's identity, which has given the sense of one's own self since he or she was born. Therefore, when one's name is taken away, it can be said that he or she also loses the sense of self. In the story, after being delivered to comfort stations, the comfort women's original Korean names are replaced by Japanese names: "Hanako 38, her name given because her face was once pretty as a flower. Miyoko 52, frail and unlucky as the Miyokos before her. Kimi-ko 3, with hair the colour or egg yellow" (Keller 1998, 19). Given the above Japanese names, the comfort women are re-created by the Japanese colonists as new subjects which function as sex machines. The Japanese names also signify that from now on those women no longer belong to Korea but become properties of the Japanese empire, which owns the absolute right over their bodies. That is to say, from regular Korean women, they are re-created as sex slaves to serve Japanese soldiers. The numbers after their names also confirm that they are seen as only machines or robots, not human beings. For Soon Hyo, after her body is re-created as a machine, she is forced to take a Japanese name with a number; she becomes Akiko 41.

In fact, according to the colonial concept, the colonised are always subjects of creation by the colonists. Critiquing colonial discourse between the West and the East, Said (1978) argues in *Orientalism* that the East was a subject of creation by the West, who claimed to possess more advanced knowledge and higher culture in order to invent the East through their imagination. Such invention was operated through Western epistemology, which created the East as well as its people as backward, uncivilised, barbaric, immortal, etc., for dominating and ruling purposes. Being created in such negative ways, the East was also represented by the West through books, literature, documentaries, or other media; such representation always contrasted with the nobility of the West. In terms of sexuality, Said also contends that the East was even viewed as a land which offered Western men freedom of exotic sex, as he writes, "the Orient was a place where one could look for sexual experience unobtainable in Europe" (Said

1978, 190). This notion was a result of the binary concept regarding the West and the East which entailed colonial patriarchy. While the West saw itself as the male, the East was seen as the female. Therefore, the West and the East were the representations of masculinity and femininity. With this concept, sexual oppression and exploitation became a by-product of colonialism. In *Comfort Woman*, although both Korea and Japan are Eastern countries, the same situation as discussed by Said happens to Korea and its people. Under this colonial concept, Japan is a representation of masculinity, while Korea represents femininity. The situation between Japan and Korea is considered intracontinental colonialism, as both countries are in Asia. However, the Korean nation and its people are invented or created by the Japanese colonists in the same way the West invents the East. As Korea is feminised and viewed as a land where the Japanese can enjoy freedom of sex, and Korean women are created as sex slaves who are severely exploited, the Japanese empire is clearly a duplication of Western colonialism.

In addition to the issue of names and creation, Keller employs *Comfort Woman* to condemn the Japanese colonists for a complete robbery of Korean women's freedom, another form of patriarchal oppression. As portrayed in the novel, comfort women do not have freedom of choice to choose what they want to be and cannot escape from sex slavery. In the case of Akiko, when her father decides to sell her, she simply has to give in. Moreover, inside the comfort stations, Akiko and other comfort women cannot refuse to serve the Japanese soldiers, while they are confined to their stalls, small areas for sexual intercourses, with a very few chances to go outside:

Unless they had to visit the camp doctor, their freedom outside their stalls consisted of weekly baths at the river and scheduled trips to the outhouse. If they needed to relieve themselves when it was not their turn to go outside, they could use their special pots. (Keller 1998, 19–20)

Apart from the pain stemming from their sexual services, comfort women's suffering is further aggravated by the lack of freedom. With these conditions, the term "sex slaves" which is used to refer to them is not an overstatement.

The excessive misery which comfort women have to endure caused many of them to end their lives and suffering. This tragedy happens to Induk, another comfort woman who was killed before Soon Hyo is forced to take her place. Induk sees that the only way to free herself from sex slavery under the enormous power of the Japanese colonial patriarchy is to die. Soon Hyo speculates that Induk pretends to be insane in order to get killed by the Japanese soldiers. Induk chooses death as a means to emancipate herself, since there is no hope to gain

freedom while she is still alive. Pretending to be insane, Induk refuses to offer her body to the soldiers, so she is killed in a brutal way:

Just before daybreak, they took her out of her stall and into the woods, where we couldn't hear her anymore. They brought her back skewered from her vagina to her mouth, like a pig ready for roasting. A lesson, they told the rest of us, warning us into silence. (Keller 1998, 20–21)

Induk's action is considered a rebellion. She stands up and protests against the crime against her body, refusing to allow the Japanese soldiers to exploit her womanhood any longer. Unfortunately, the depiction of her being skewered suggests that the Japanese soldiers view her as a non-human creature. Induk's body is also used as a warning to other comfort women not to rebel or do anything against the Japanese authority. In other words, fear is employed by the Japanese colonial patriarchy to keep comfort women in their places and reproduce their jobs. Most importantly, the warning of Induk's body is used to silence them. Soon Hyo is forced to replace Induk or Akiko 40. Through this process, Soon Hyo's name is also replaced by Akiko 41, the name which suggests that there have been at least 41 Korean women who were forced to become comfort women under the name Akiko. With the same names, in spite of different numbers, it can be concluded that comfort women are homogenised as a group of sex slaves with no different identities.

The new Akiko is put up for auction for her virginity, which is marked as the beginning of her tragic life as a complete comfort woman. Although she is still a young girl, the Japanese soldiers do not give her a chance to bloom: "Even though I had not yet had my first bleeding, I was auctioned off to the highest bidder. After that it was a free-for-all, and I thought I would never stop bleeding" (Keller 1998, 21). There are two concepts of bleeding which Akiko is implying through this excerpt, the bleeding from menstruation and the bleeding from being raped. Being raped at a very young age, she does not have a chance to experience the first bleeding of menstruation. Her first bleeding comes from an extreme sexual abuse. Through the auction, her virginity is treated as a commodity to render profit. After it is destroyed, she loses her value, and her body is free for any lustful Japanese soldier. As a woman, she becomes a source of both profit and pleasure for the Japanese soldiers. Saying she would not stop bleeding, Akiko knows that there would not be any chances to heal her wound due to the no-break duty as a comfort woman. The crime against her body makes her understand why Induk pretends to be insane in order to get killed; it is her excessive suffering: "That is how I know Induk didn't go crazy. She was going sane. She was planning to escape. The corpse the soldiers brought back from the

woods wasn't Induk. I was Akiko 41; it was me" (Keller 1998, 21). Akiko sees Induk's dead body as herself, since her life from now on will not be different from being dead.

Apart from being raped by innumerable men, Akiko later has to undergo forced abortion, the incident before she decides to escape. This abortion indicates that the Japanese soldiers only care about the profit and pleasure from her body, ignoring the baby who is a product of themselves. The abortion process inflicts extreme pain on Akiko's body. Moreover, while the foetus is taken out, it is clear that she is dehumanised by the Japanese empire. Seeing that she is in great pain and fatigue from the abortion, the doctor and other soldiers do not care enough to tie her down. Akiko takes this opportunity and uses her remaining energy to escape: "That night, with the blood-soaked rags still edged between my thighs, I slipped out of the tent, out of the camp" (Keller 1998, 23). Desperately, Akiko seizes this slim chance to liberate herself before she is rescued by missionaries.

Akiko's freedom comes with her passivity, as she becomes silent, refusing to talk to anybody. This can be read as a consequence of both domestic patriarchy and colonial patriarchy which render her voiceless. When her father sells her, she cannot raise any voice, and when the Japanese soldiers rape her, she has to submit to them. These two situations indicate that she is completely silenced by patriarchy in the above forms. After being rescued, she never talks to anybody but keeps doing what is told by the missionaries. Her passivity also stems from her traumatic memories, which do not fade away from her psyche. At the comfort stations, Akiko and all other comfort women are not allowed to speak or communicate with one another. They are forced to simply follow the command and offer their bodies to the Japanese soldiers:

Had they asked, I would also have responded to "close mouth" and "open legs". At the camps where the Japanese called us *Jungun Ianfu*, military comfort women, we were taught only whatever was necessary to service the soldiers. Other than that, we were not expected to understand and were forbidden to speak, any language at all. (Keller 1998, 16)

Akiko and other comfort women are forced to be passive, performing their tasks with silence in the camps. They are taught the Japanese language just enough to respond to the soldiers' needs. As Korean, their mother tongue, cannot be articulated, it can be said that not only are comfort women silenced, but their culture and heritage are also taken away. Later, although Akiko successfully escapes, she is still unable to get rid of such passivity.

As can be seen through the life of Akiko, Korean women are put into great misery by domestic patriarchy and colonial patriarchy, the two institutions which create and sustain the comfort women system. The sexual service Akiko offers to Japanese soldiers and other horrible experiences in the comfort camps result in her deep traumatic memories which constantly haunt and prevent her from having a new successful life after her self-liberation.

Trauma in the forms of haunting memories and haunting ghost

An important aftermath of sexual violence through the comfort women system in Korea as portrayed in *Comfort Woman* is the struggle against traumatic memories. Akiko's mental wounds cannot be healed after her liberation, as she is deeply impacted by the crime against her body. This novel suggests that former comfort women cannot recover from mental wounds, although they move to other countries to start a new life. This can be seen through Akiko, who greatly suffers from the aftermath of sex slavery and cannot free herself from haunting memories, even though she moves to the United States with her husband, the American minister at the church which rescues her. The horrible experiences which she has undergone trigger and then amplify trauma in her life. Akiko's suffering can be classified as a form of post-traumatic stress disorder. This psychological condition, according to Kinchin (2005, 2), stems from a situation "when a person has been exposed to an event which is outside the range of normal human experience: an event which would markedly distress almost anyone". Such experience includes a huge threat to the life of that person or his or her loved ones. The destruction of home or community can also cause post-traumatic stress disorder. Witnessing serious accidents, violence, or killings is another important trigger. Various groups have been found to suffer from this mental disruption, including soldiers, veterans, captives in concentration camps, rape victims, and those who are abused by totalitarian regimes. There are several symptoms showing in traumatised people. People diagnosed with war trauma, for example, have to cope with both emotional breakdowns and physical shock: "They screamed and wept uncontrollably. They froze and could not move. They became mute and unresponsive. They lost their memory and their capacity to feel" (Herman 1997, 20). Many victims are also reported to suffer from flashbacks of traumatic experiences and recurring nightmares because they cannot eradicate painful memories from their psyche.

In *Comfort Woman*, it is clear that Akiko, as a repeated rape victim, suffers from a symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder. The horrible situation which she has undergone in the comfort camps is beyond the range of normal human experience. Therefore, her life after liberation is not a normal one because

she cannot be free from the traumatic memories. Despite her liberation, she does not obtain true freedom from sex slavery because her mind is still enslaved in the traumatic past. She has to grapple with recurring pictures of herself and other comfort women being sexually tortured in the camps, which is shown when she still lives with the missionaries in Korea:

Whenever I stopped cleaning or gluing to stretch cramping fingers or crack my stiff neck, I heard the sounds of woman being kicked because she had used an old shirt as a sanitary pad. Or I heard a man sigh loudly as he urinated on the body where he had just pumped his seed. (Keller 1998, 65)

This excerpt not only indicates the recurring flashback of horrible scenes, but also reveals the inhumanity of the Japanese soldier who views the Korean comfort women as valueless dirt and treats them with an extreme insult. In addition, Akiko later explains that she always lives with fear of being captured and sent back to the camps again. The traumatic past makes her feel that she lacks security in life. Even in the United States, the land of freedom, she cannot be free from these haunting memories.

Another important observation which attests to Akiko's prolonged suffering from her traumatic memories is the frequent presence of Induk's ghost, which has come to her since her escape from the camps. Akiko's witness of Induk's brutal death and the gruesome way Japanese soldiers skewer her body are important reasons why she cannot remove the image of Induk from her imagination. For example, at the river after Akiko gets out of the camps, she imagines that Induk is calling her and giving her directions. Since that incident, Akiko feels that Induk has followed her everywhere, even in the United States. Induk's ghost seems to enter deeper and deeper into Akiko's consciousness, which suggests that she is profoundly traumatised. Akiko's experience of extreme sexual abuse also instigates her imagination of a Induk making love with her. In one scene, for example, she feels that Induk touches and caresses parts of her body before reaching further to her very secret part:

Her fingers dip into and flirt with the cleft, from anus to the tip of my vagina, where my blood gathers and pulses until it aches. She combs my pubic hair with her long nails, pulling at the crinkling hairs as if to straighten them. I stifle a groan, try to keep my hips still. I cannot. (Keller 1998, 145)

Akiko allows her body and imagination to go wherever Induk leads her in the ocean of desire. When her husband really makes love to her, she still does not let

Induk go away from her imagination and leave them alone in that erotic moment, as she still feels Induk's caressing. This situation can be read as Akiko's desire for sexual intercourse which comes from real love. Throughout the story, readers can see that Induk's ghost never leaves Akiko and becomes her real companion who always helps her. It can be said that Akiko's imagination of Induk comes to fulfil her desire for real love, which she has never obtained from anybody, even from her father who sells her. In another way, this situation can be read as simply another trace of her psychological problems which emerges in the form of the desire for sex from her loved one.

It is probably Akiko's imagination of Induk and her recurring ghost which makes her believe that she has a supernatural power to communicate with the spirits. This perceived special ability becomes Akiko's job in the United States, and customers often come to ask her to be a medium connecting to the spirits. Akiko becomes a messenger for those people and their dead parents, children, or other relatives to communicate with one another, as Beccah, her daughter, explains, "we'd have people camping in our kitchen and living room and out in the apartment hallway, all waiting for my mother to tell them about the death and unfulfilled desire in their lives" (Keller 1998, 10). Akiko's unusual ability instigates a conflict between herself and her daughter. Growing up in the United States, Beccah fails to understand what happens to her mother. Especially when Akiko is in trances, connecting to the spirits, Beccah cannot help thinking of her mother as another person: "It was as if the mother I knew turned off, checked out, and someone else came to rent the space" (Keller 1998, 3-4). The conflict between Beccah and Akiko stems from cultural differences between Korea, their old world, and the United States, their new world. Throughout the novel, it is clear that there is something preventing them from understanding each other, while they never have a real talk with each other. As a consequence of Akiko's strange ability, Beccah is also bullied by her American friends at school, who see her mother as weird or even insane. As Akiko's daughter, Beccah cannot avoid being seen as abnormal and unwanted by those American children: "We don't even want you in our school, you weirdo" (Keller 1998, 29). This predicament indicates that Beccah gets stuck between the old Korean world and the new American world. Beccah, as the second generation of her Korean American family who knows nothing about Akiko's life at the comfort camps, is trapped by her mother's traumatic memories. Akiko's weird behaviours cause Beccah's friends at school to view both of them as the "others", excluded from the American normative culture. In fact, as Asians on the American land, Akiko and Beccah are already labelled as the "others". Therefore, being seen as weird Asians, they are unavoidably "double-othered". This label makes it more difficult for them to be accepted into the body of the American nation.

The conflict between Beccah and Akiko remains unresolved until the end of the novel, since Akiko chooses to be passive and remain silent about her tragic past. In fact, many traumatised subjects do not want to mention their horrible experiences because they do not want to revisit the painful memories. It is after Akiko's death when Beccah learns about her miserable life at the comfort camps in Korea, which enables Beccah to make sense of what has happened to her mother. Those stories are recorded in a tape which is a legacy Akiko leaves for Beccah after her death. Akiko's voice depicts the tragedy of comfort women, enabling Beccah to comprehend how much those comfort women including her mother suffered as sex slaves:

I could not view my mother, whom I had always seen as weak and vulnerable, as one of the "comfort women" she described. Even though I heard her call out "Akiko", the name she had answered to all my life, I could not imagine her surviving what she described, for I cannot imagine myself surviving. (Keller 1998, 194)

The conflict between Beccah and Akiko is resolved, as the tape unfolds Akiko's tragedy. Unfortunately, this resolution happens after her death, so the mother and the daughter cannot have a chance to reconcile. It can be said that Akiko has been silenced by patriarchal violence until the end of the story. The death of Akiko at the end of the story suggests that it is impossible for many comfort women to have a new successful life after an extreme sexual abuse by men who employ patriarchal ideology to seek profit and pleasure from their bodies. Via *Comfort Woman*, Keller hints that surviving comfort women become traumatised subjects and have to live outside the normal sphere until the end of their lives.

Conclusion

The journey of comfort women which Akiko is forced to take starts from violence through domestic patriarchy when she becomes a commodity bringing profit to her father. In the hands of the Japanese colonial patriarchy, her virginity generates monetary value when it is put up for auction before she becomes a complete comfort woman. It is obvious that she and other comfort women are reduced to sex slaves through patriarchal violence. Being amidst the conflicts of colonialism and war, those women are victimised at an extreme scale. Many of them decide to remain silent, not wanting other people to know about their tragic past, while victims themselves also do not want to revisit the painful memories. Even for Akiko, she remains silent about her traumatic past until she dies. Her voice is taken away by both domestic patriarchy and colonial patriarchy. In fact, women in colonised countries share the same experience

about silencing which is expressed in literature. As Dodhy and Kaur (2018, 74) argue in their study of traumatised women in a novel by a female writer in Zimbabwe, a former British colony, “The afflicted women are silenced through oppression and marginalisation which results in turning them voiceless”. In similar fashion, Korean comfort women become silent because they are oppressed and marginalised.

Through *Comfort Woman*, Keller breaks the norms of patriarchy which silence women. In Korea, where patriarchy is firmly entrenched, women have no right to speak or articulate themselves. In the United States, where they become Korean Americans, they—as subjects from the Oriental world—are still voiceless. As suggested by Cheung (1997), Asian American women suffer from both Asian and Western patriarchy. It is clear that these women are double-feminised in the United States. Korean American women are confined to the feminine sphere where they are silenced by patriarchy and white supremacy. In fact, silencing is a strategy employed by the white mainstream to exclude them from the American sphere and suppress them. As stated by Duncan (2003, 15), “Silencing is a means of domination, tool in the act of domination and colonisation”. Although the term colonisation might not be used to explain the situation in the modern United States, this country is still dominated by Western colonial patriarchal ideology, since its mainstream people still view the minority groups as inferior. Without voice, Asians easily become subjects dominated and excluded by white Americans. Such exclusion is in line with other legal strategies such as the series of Immigration Acts enforced by the United States government to prevent Asian immigrants from gaining the American citizenship and other rights, as shown in the history of Asian Americans (Lowe, 1996). Without citizenship, they are seen as only alien others on the American land. In *Comfort Woman*, although Akiko and Beccah live in the period after the abolishment of Immigration Acts, they are unavoidably affected by negative images of Asians painted by that Acts.

It is clear that Akiko is silenced and marginalised by Japanese colonial patriarchy in Korea and by Western patriarchy in the United States. This is in the same vein with the situation of Asian American literature which is also marginalised by the mainstream literature. This relation indicates the connection between Asian American studies and literary studies, since both Asian American subjects and their literature are positioned at the very edge of the American sphere. Besides the excluded bodies of Asian American people discussed above, Asian American literature also seems to be excluded from the American mainstream literature. Representing the voice of Asian Americans, who are a minority group in the United States, Asian American literature is inevitably

grouped in the minority literature. Asian American literature is seen outside the American literary canon, since its people are excluded from the American society (Lim, 1997). With this condition, the voice of Asian American literature is limited by the concept of exclusion. In addition, Cheung (1997, 24) argues that “Asian American literature as a whole is still a literature of internal colonisation”. Asian American literature as well as its people are treated in a similar way to what happens to the indigenous people in the colonised countries, as they are oppressed, exploited, and “othered” by the colonisers. The United States can be considered a land of internal colonisation because minority groups are dominated and oppressed by the white mainstream in social, economic, cultural, and political aspects. In other words, although traditional colonisation has ended, colonial patriarchy still exists in the United States, a Western country which feminises subjects from less powerful countries, including Asians.

Korean American literature, as a minor branch of Asian American literature, is inevitably viewed in the same way as its broader area is viewed. Literary works by female Korean American writers, in particular, are marginalised to the very edge of the United States canonical work or even outside. Therefore, when Keller gives voice to Korean American women through *Comfort Woman*, at the same time, she gives voice to Korean American literature and Asian American literature, its broader field. In other words, Keller breaks the silence for Asian American literature to be heard and seen. However, as discussed by Duncan (2003, 11), “Breaking silence does not mean living without fear but speaking out in spite of fear of censor, judgement, challenge, and even annihilation”. In *Comfort Woman*, Keller challenges both domestic patriarchy and colonial patriarchy by condemning these two institutions for sexually enslaving Korean women and silencing them. She overcomes such fear, and protests against extreme patriarchal violence endured by all comfort women.

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