

Chapter 1

White Chrysanthemum and Comfort Woman: Japan's Notorious Colonial Legacy of 'Comfort Women'

Introduction

In this thesis, Japanese army's atrocities on its female colonial subjects is the first phenomenon that is scrutinized in order to understand the praxis of sexual violence and how it is utilized by soldiers during an active warfare. Along with this, the idea of the continuum of gendered violence is explored in order to answer the much sought out question of this thesis: why women emerge as the inevitable victims of sexual violence during the vast-scale conflicts?

Before and during the Second World War, upon the suggestions from higher-up officials, the Japanese army was provided with prostitutes. It was a popular belief among the army personnels that an easier availability of women will curb the rape incidents. Another added benefit of this tactic was the prevention of venereal diseases among the soldiers. The brothel houses that were established near the fields of engagements were called "comfort stations". The history of comfort stations can be traced back to the Shanghai incident through the very few documents that have survived on the subject, as many were destroyed after Shanghai's annexation during the Second World War when the Japanese Navy invaded China in 1932. These *ianjos* (comfort stations) were legalised and licensed systems. Their aim was to serve the military members for their leisure (Tanaka 8-10). The sex workers were regularly subjected to medical examinations to check for STDs. The development of such militarized prostitution was organic for the Japanese. Similar kinds of camps were also established

during the Siberian intervention in the course of the Russian Civil War. An initial station established in 1933 with 35 Korean and 3 Japanese women— a look at the data will show that in comparison to Japanese women, the Korean women numbers were always much higher— was called “Hygienic Facility for Prevention of Epidemics”, and the soldiers were provided with condoms and advised on their usage (11). In the statement by Dr Nakayama Tadanao, who was called offshore urgently to examine the women, one can find how these sexual slaves were viewed by the officials:

I truly realized that Joshi-gun (Young Women’s Corps) is not just a word of fantasy, and that they were a part of the military forces, indeed a military force itself [...] the women will be put on a plane as a priority, as they are necessary goods [...] Thanks to these women, the Japanese troops do not rape Chinese women. These women are therefore not just prostitutes! (qtd. in Tanaka 12).

During the Second World War, Japan was a part of the Axis powers and established itself as an imperial force over Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, Burma, and Indonesia. What was seen as licensed houses for sex-workers with decent conditions were in reality rape prisons where women from these colonies were forcefully or coercively brought without any hope for escape.

1938 saw a sudden rise in numbers of such “comfort houses”. The of the reasons associated with the proliferation were the large battalions of the Japanese in China and the Nanking massacre at the beginning of November of 1937. Nanking’s civilians’ torture was infamously declared the “rape of Nanking”. The soldiers grievously injured, raped, mutilated the bodies, and burned houses during the invasion. The large numbers of violently raped and murdered victims compelled the authorities to organise more such stations. In a letter drafted in June 1938, which was uniformly circulated to each army unit, the need for brothels was stated:

[...] the reason for such strong anti-Japanese sentiment [...among Chinese] is widespread rape committed by Japanese military personnel in many places [...] Therefore, frequent occurrence of rape in various places is not just a matter of criminal law. It is nothing but high treason [... for it hampers the army's strategic movement and is against the nation...]

Therefore, it is of vital importance that individual acts by our military personnel be strictly controlled, and that, at the same time, facilities for sexual pleasure be established promptly, in order to prevent our men from inadvertently breaking the law due to the lack of such facilities. (qtd. in Tanaka 16)

In 1938, the transportation of Korean women was done on a large scale to meet the demands of the soldiers (Tanaka 14). The fear that Chinese women could be used as spies led the authorities to not employ them (at least not in an official capacity). Initially, the Japanese women were recruited, but quickly the authorities recognised the chance to use their colonial subjects in Korea. The poverty-stricken Korea and the easily available Chinese women were targeted and forced into 'comfort stations'.

Even today, the 'comfort stations' by the Japanese are not recognised for their true nature. The defense that is given by many is that all the recruitment that happened was consensual and never forced. Many have claimed that it helped curb rape incidents. But the testimonies and narratives that surround this notorious legacy of militarized prostitution or strategic rape houses go to lengths to establish how even today the nationalist fervour blinds many to the atrocities suffered by women. A medical doctor appointed to check a few Chinese girls confessed in his diary that one girl had been too shy to take off her clothes and started crying during the examination. The same

happened to the other girl. Stricken with this behaviour, he doubted if these girls were willing or not (Tanaka 22).

On September 19 in 1940, a document was given to all military units in order to inform the achievements of the measures taken during Chinese confrontation to boost military discipline. The article titled “Measures for enhancing military discipline based upon experiences in the China Incident” stated that the soldiers psychologically were so impacted by the treatment at the “comfort stations” that the effect on their demeanour was “most immediate and profound”, and the maintenance of such houses was necessary and imperative in order to keep the soldiers healthy and control their appetites in a foreign environment which compels them to be “rough” (24).

Japan has made reparations through monetary funds and official statements of apologies time and again. But there have always been certain stipulations to these reparations. In the 2015 bilateral agreement, the stipulation set forth by the Japanese foreign minister stated that the governments of both sides would not accuse or criticize each other on this matter on international ground or at the UN, which was also accepted by the Korean government (“Announcement”). The lack of genuine apology led some of the surviving victims to file a lawsuit regarding this decision which rushed towards an unsatisfactory resolution instead of methodically tackling the issue with empathy.

This chapter focuses on the issue of the “comfort woman” system, that was devised and utilised during the Second World War by the Japanese Imperial Army, through the novels based on the same theme. *Comfort Woman* by Nora Okja Keller, a Korean-American writer, traces the journey of a mother, Akiko, a former ‘comfort woman’ and her daughter Beccah, born to her during her marriage to an American missionary after her escape. The story is divided between the two narrators, the mother and the daughter, and alternates between the two. It deals with their relationship with

each other and how, in diverse ways, they engage with the world around them. Where Akiko is ridden with the spirits of the past, on the other hand, Beccah finds it difficult to accept her mother's 'craziness' in her American world, where she finds herself already a half-foreign entity because of her Korean descent. Akiko sifts through her memories as a comfort woman on different occasions and hides her past life from her daughter until after she dies. The story is about the reconciliation between the two which is achieved only after Akiko's death.

The other novel that I have selected is *White Chrysanthemum* by Mary Lynn Bracht. The story is divided intermittently between two sisters, Hana and Emi. Hana's narration is set in colonial times (during the 1940s) whereas, Emi's narration is set in present times (from 2012), when she is an old woman and remembers her missing sister. The issue of "comfort woman" is raised through Hana's character who is abducted by a Japanese soldier at the age of sixteen. Hana finds strength in her Korean identity as a *haenyeo* (a sea-diver/fisher-woman) and wishes to survive and escape, whereas her sister Emi struggles to reconcile with her past and break her silence, which has burdened her with guilt.

'Comfort Women' or Sexual Slaves: Scrutinising the Tangents of Patriarchal Colonialism and Nationalism

The term 'comfort woman' is innocuous in its making. The usage is romanticized and feminized: where else will you find comfort but in a woman's arms? There is a political motive in language, especially when the creation is by men and it is thrust on women. The term camouflages the ordeals of the women and obscures the reality through its manipulation of language. In reality, the women who came to be

known as ‘comfort women’ were mostly sexual slaves to the Japanese army. The name confuses and reflects the complicity of women. Many would think of them as sex-workers, and therefore, the initiation as a form of recruitment. Interestingly, after 1945, the comfort stations were closed, but as soon as the Korean War started, so did the system of militarized prostitution, albeit under a different name. The women were now referred as “*yang gong ju*” translated as “western princess” because they became the sex providers for the UN soldiers stationed in Korea. The language becomes hegemonised by the androgynistic undercurrents through such terms, so much so that even today, in the face of reality, Koreans and Japanese choose to use the euphemistic ironic identities given to these women.

Even with available documents and books on the subject, the comfort stations are not widely acknowledged as slave stations. In 1991, Kim Haksun became the first survivor of the sexual slavery camps to come out and publicly recount her tragic fate at the hands of the Japanese Imperial Army. She expressed her anger at the Japanese authorities for downplaying the sexual violence and the real forced nature of such stations. Her testimony and the lawsuits by many other survivors and their families led to a feminist paradigm shift in Korea (Wakabayashi 236). The novel by Nora Okja Keller came soon afterwards in 1996 riding the same shift. Keller transformed her readers into potential witnesses through her powerful writing.

The many women who ended up in these camps have tales of coercion, abduction, and deceit to tell. Akiko was sold to the Japanese soldiers by her sister. Very early in her life, Akiko lost her parents, and her two other sisters ran away from home. Without the protection from her father or mother, the oldest sister, in order to marry and secure her life, used Akiko as the leverage to gain dowry money for her marriage. Akiko was misinformed that she would be only a labour at the factory. At the age of

twelve, she ended up as a ‘comfort woman’: “That was my first night as the new Akiko. I was given her clothes, which were too big” (Keller 21).

Hana of the *White Chrysanthemum* chose to sacrifice herself instead of her younger sister when a Japanese soldier was about to stumble upon her. She had heard tales of Japanese soldiers shipping off girls to factories in Japan, and knowing that the soldier at any given moment would stumble upon her sister, she decided to act on her promise to their mother to protect her sister. She decides to deliberately run towards her unfortunate future.

The young girls along with Hana muse about their new clothes: “a beige dress, nylons, white knickers and a cotton bra” (Bracht 27). One of the girls confidently informs them all that they are now a part of “Women’s Patriotic Service Corps” and this was their uniform (27). On the surface, the name of the organization appears innocuous, but such organizational names were euphemistic fronts and facades kept by the Japanese to hide from the accusations that might hound them after the war:

[D]rafting of women was made legal by 1942, [still] the female recruitment was nominally carried out [as] “voluntary” participation. This is why the Japanese government persistently denied until 1933 any coercion in the recruitment of Korean women in the *Yoja Congsindae* (Women’s Voluntary Labor Service Corp). (Soh 1288)

The exclamatory remark made by Dr. Tadanao (mentioned in the chapter’s introduction) of “These women are [...] not just prostitutes!” represents the sexist and chauvinistic male psyche (qtd. in Tanaka 12). Patriotism was viewed by the soldiers as above anything else; it was used as a banner to provide them with a perfect excuse to sexually exploit and use these women. They were, after all, not ‘just prostitutes’ but national servants of the greatest patriots, the soldiers. Patriotism is considered “not

merely a generous and laudable emotion, but a paramount and overwhelming duty, to which everything else which men have called duties must give way” (Everett 36).

A critical assessment of patriotism in relation to feminism is not a new concept. It happened when Britain first entered the First World War. The suffragette movement had been gaining momentum at an exponential speed when the war started, and the women’s rights activists had to choose between keeping up the cause for their liberty or serving a nation which had denied them the political right to even have a say in the said war. American suffragette Alice Paul famously declared that men go to war with guns when they are “denied justice”, and demanding voting rights is the women’s war, which they had chosen to fight, albeit with banners (“National Woman's Party”). Virginia Woolf went a step further and declared that a woman has “no country” in her work *Three Guineas* (Woolf Ch. 3). She eschews all the claims made by men about ‘protecting’ women. According to Woolf, through the rejection of this ‘patriotic’ culture, women can reclaim their bodies which have been owned by patriarchs through such declarations. Even though women emerge as distraught war victims, it is wrong to assume that the soldiers fight in their interests. It is noteworthy that the root word for both ‘patriarch’ and ‘patriot’ comes from the Greek *pater* and the genitive *patros* which means ‘father’. Rane Wilder Lane in a letter had described her issue with the philosophy of patriotism:

To me the very word, patriot, has collective connotations. *Pater*, father; *patria*, fatherland; patriarch, generating source and ruler of a family-Whole. And patriotism is everywhere regarded as obedience to, dependence on, self-sacrifice for, the divinely ordained ruler. (McBride 266)

This is not to say that patriotism makes men rape, but if it is utilised with a blatant disregard for females in a society, it can present an opportunity for an already

patriarchal and chauvinist society to act immorally in the hate-fuelled chaos of the war without any qualms or feelings of guilt. A recent example of this kind of overlapping between the issue of “national interest” and a female-centred situation can be observed in the Japanese government’s severe campaign to get the statues of ‘comfort women’ removed from major sites all around the world. The Japanese government had missed the point completely. The statues strengthen the discourse of memory and do not seek to attack contemporary Japan for their past crimes. The presence of the statues is a reminder for the whole world to recognise the threat to the universality of women rights. The “comfort woman” was one of the many systems that had existed to exploit women during the World Wars and the memorization of the same through statues by different countries is not an accusation but a symbolic transnational development towards a united front.

The victims’ testimonies and the surge of memoirs against the ‘comfort stations’ have not been accepted unanimously in Japan. Many scholars from Japan point to the primary sources left by authoritative figures that represent a picture of legit sexual collaboration and use those to refute the popular sentiments, law suits, and litigation against alleged Japanese war criminals (Wakabayashi 237). The whole idea to look for a proof of women’s victimization through an elite male gaze is redundant and full of folly. Ueno Chizuko, a sociologist from Tokyo University, takes a dig at those researchers who have tried to utilize only the primary sources to reach their conclusions. The real truth can only surface by reading through the “plurality of valid representations”; the oral sources therefore cannot be discounted for their minute errors or contradictions (236). One such contradiction is the usage of the term ‘comfort woman’ by many victims themselves. The simplicity of the testimonies originates because of the uneducated and illiterate status among these women in post-war period

(237). Along with this, many women have claimed that the recollection of their pasts as sexual slaves makes them physically ill and psychologically vulnerable.

One should understand that in modern terminology, 'comfort women' would fall under the category of prostitutes, based, at least, on the definition and meaning that the Japanese documentation allude to. In the very beginning, the stations mostly recruited sex workers from Japan. The comfort camps were originally established as brothels where the soldiers would avail a sex-related service and pay for it. In 1872, an ordinance made prostitution legal in Japan and the policy was by default extended to wherever soldiers were stationed. The vast majority of scholars believe that the situation of enslaved women deteriorated after the Nanking massacre (Yoko 55). The massacre involved raping and brutal mutilation of Chinese women. And just like it had happened the first time under the guidance of Colonel Okamura Yasuji after the Manchuria incident (1941), women were drafted at large scales from colonies to serve the soldiers as sexual slaves after the Nanking incident (55). For the Japanese, the co-relation between the rape incidents and war-like situations was so evident that 'comfort women' were sought as a necessity.

An army doctor stationed in Shanghai inspected the bodies of around 100 women out of which eighty percent were Koreans. They were deceitfully brought from their homes on the pretext of being provided work at factories. The factories turned out to be the stations and the sexual work for which they had been brought was never paid for. The prostitute, in ideal circumstances, would receive pay and would have rights to her body. She will hold the power to deny or accept the said work, but a slave is a free commodity. Slaves can be beaten, raped, killed without any concern for the civil laws. The female colonial subject was already a powerless entity, and it was easy not to see her as a human. Therefore, there was no question of rights. It was during this time that

the strength of Japanese 'comfort women' dwindled and more and more colonial subjects were brought in to replace them. The 'comfort women' system was not only a misogynistic institution but it was also an imperial subjugation by the rulers. The victims of forced sexual attacks were the colonial subjects. In most of the cases, the Korean women who were brought in for such recruitment were virgins, whereas the Japanese women volunteered and had a history of being engaged in sex work before they were stationed. There still remains the issue of the system of prostitution that many scholars firmly believe to be a patriarchal creation through which poor women were made to suffer. Many researchers like Yuki Tanaka and Takamura Itsue have produced detailed research works that show how even poor Japanese women were used to lead Japan from a feudal state to a capital one (Tanaka 182). Prostitution cannot be accounted as a professional choice as most of the women that choose it do so because of their economic and social conditions. Where the Japanese women had suffered because of poverty, the Korean, Chinese or Filipino women were treated ruthlessly because of their weak economic situation and also their status as colonial subjects. Pyong Gap Min acknowledges the intersection of class, gender and colonization as the reason for the severe victimization of Korean women:

Koreans were colonial subjects, almost completely governed by Japanese officials and military police. Employment promises also worked effectively because the Japanese colonial economic policy had devastated Korean agriculture so that many young Korean women from farming families were ready to leave home for meaningful jobs. (Min 945)

The issue of colonial subjugation and mistreatment was not limited to women. In the novel *White Chrysanthemum*, there is an instance in the book where Hana recalls her mother's words to her uncle, who had been forcefully recruited to serve the Japanese

Army: “You’re barely even a man. You haven’t married. You have no children. They’re exterminating us with this war. There will be no Koreans left in this country” (Bracht 24). The colonial subjects were expendable. For men, it was enlisting in the army or working as a social slave; for women, it was sexual servitude. Hana’s mother explains to her what the Japanese do to the girls they take and why they do it:

The Japanese believe it [rape] will aid them in battle. Help them be victorious in the war. They think it is their right to release energy and receive pleasure, even when they are so far away from home, because they risk their lives for the emperor They believe this so much that they take our girls and ship them all over the world. (34)

There are ample testimonies by women who claim that their situation worsened as colonial subjects (Min 945). The patriarchal customs in Korea prevented the victims from returning to a state of normalcy. Akiko has no family to return to, but she has an affinity for her village. Her inability to embrace her much-loved village comes from her experiences at the camp. She realised that for the other sheltered girls at the missionary, war was just “a minor disruption”, but for her, it had been sordidly extensive. She agrees to go to America with the minister, for she believes that her village was “as far as heaven” for her (Keller 101). She does not think herself worthy of the purity of heaven that her village represents. The deeply embedded notion of rape of a woman and its relation to the honour of a family is a common patriarchal construct in all nations. One girl from Hana’s village, who had been kept as a ‘comfort woman’, returns, but all that the women of the village can talk about is the “shame” that will lead the father to die early and the “wildness” in the girl, which might be the symptoms of PTSD (Bracht 33). Their dialogues are a perfect example of patriarchal thought processes where the victim, a girl, is only a nuisance to the father-patriarch. Her missing

status was much more acceptable to the quotidian society stuck in the patriarchal *status quo* bias.

The honour of the family and nation often coincide in situations of war. It is common to associate a woman with the chaste symbol of nationalism where the only person who can be credited with her ownership is a male who belongs to same community. The nationalist standpoint like this, which makes women into a fraternal commodity, also engages in the anti-colonial discourse by its very nature. Any damage to this commodity would be seen as an insult to the masculinity of the whole nation (Chow 6). This regulation of woman's body by male powers is rejected through Akiko's relationship with the haunting spirit of Induk, which plays upon their homoerotic desires that are much more fulfilling. Through her relation with a victim like herself that transcends beyond the living word, Akiko deconstructs the phallogentric language that hierarchises written over oral, the living over the dead, the realistic over the magical, and heterosexual desires over homosexual ones.

The American missionary, who later becomes Akiko's husband, is a predator in whom we see the representation of the continuum of forceful intrusion in a woman's life that eventually leads to her grossly abusive situation in society. He is a prototype of the Japanese soldiers who are enabled by many such intrusive practices that have come to be seen as common in a world of 'peace'. What happens to Akiko in her marriage with the missionary will not be defined by many as 'real rape', a stereotyping that has led to many problems. But the victim recognises the similarities and the abuse suffered by the hands of two different aggressors, the missionary who coercively violates her bodily integrity and the Japanese who do the same albeit through force and power. For Akiko, the orgasmic shout from the husband is "much like the shouts the men at the camp gave" when they ejaculated (Keller 146).

Pushed into the corner, Akiko accepts the life that the American missionary offers even when she realises the potential threat that he emanates. Emi's marriage in *White Chrysanthemum* is similar to what Akiko faces with the missionary. Emi, who was saved by her sister Hana from the Japanese soldiers, falls prey to the political violation of her will during the Korean War. Right after her father is brutally murdered by the supporters of the communist regime, she is forcefully married to a man who had fled from the northern region to 'secure' her father's property that will belong to her only through her husband. These marriages, in both cases, force one to look at and scrutinise the very structure in which they happen. Both the women are rendered helpless through the social dictates and circumstances of their society. The reason they become helpless is also rooted in the patriarchal order of things and the marriage that they are forced into, which is just slightly better than the situation that they were in. Pushed into a corner, the women have no agency to act on their accords. Their marriages might appear to some as a conscious decision, but to a greater degree, they are captured in the grander scheme of "male solidification of power, the patriarchy" (Brownmiller 17).

This patriarchal system is further strengthened by the silences that women impose on themselves. A perfect example of this kind of silence comes from *Comfort Woman*. Akiko keeps her history of exploitation by her husband and the Japanese soldiers a secret from her daughter, even after she grows up. It is only after her death that her daughter learns half of the truth, the other half about her father's hand in Akiko's victimization is never voiced. Emi too hides the details of her troublesome marriage from her children. Similarly, Beccah hides from her mother the troublesome feelings she has stashed about her father. The readers are grimly pushed into several vague hints that point to a forced incestuous relationship between the father and the

daughter. The poem by Beccah for her school project can be interpreted as the conduit to the truth of the sexually abusive practices by the father. She compares her father to a black hole that eats everything: “a platter of grasping fingers/ a snack of salty eyes/ the delicacy of a tongue, still warm from calling [his] name” (Keller 131). Akiko, in the very beginning of the novel, indirectly confesses the truth about her hatred for her dead husband. Through this opening, the readers are given a hope for the vocalization of the past. The very abhorrence that Akiko has for the husband shifts to the physical body and manifests through her allergic reaction to the food that is set out for his death anniversary. After losing her father at an early age, Beccah relies on her mother’s accounts, which are mostly seeped in lies. The false stories of their love and happiness are told in an emotionless voice by Akiko, almost like a routine. Akiko never realises that Beccah remembers her father at his worst. The memories in Beccah’s mind keep on sharpening as the text moves forward. The security that Beccah believes a father can offer is tarnished by her nightmares where the father binds her arms and attacks her with his burning bright blue eyes, reducing her to “nothingness” (2).

The lies and the secrets strained the mother-daughter relationship. Beccah discounted almost everything that her mother believed in. It is interesting that where Beccah’s traumas lead her to become subversive in her male romantic friendships, Akiko’s turn her into a powerful force with homoerotic desires. Even with the hidden truth, through her beliefs and shamanism, Akiko subverts the patriarchal hierarchies. The sickness given by the father that Akiko forever tries to expel from her daughter’s body is a symbolic representation of overthrowing female subservience to the father’s/husband’s dynasty built around them both through Christianity and the literal presence of the father/husband. Beccah’s birth couldn’t have been possible without the father and this biological reality troubles Akiko’s psyche. The biological half that is her

husband in her daughter (even with all the love that she has for her) pushes her towards frantic obsessions. Every illness that Beccah suffers from becomes the manifestation of “*Sal*”, the flesh that was given to her by the father:

Stink-breath. *Sal* from your father Alternately wailing over my out-of-control body and cursing my father, who passed his *sal* to me She detected another genetically embedded arrow, more evidence of impurity left by my haole father: the odor of cheese and milk and meat—animal waste. “You have to stop feeding the sickness in your body, and starve the *sal* out of you.” (82-84)

The threat of patriarchal infringement forever scares Akiko for her daughter:

I tried to protect my daughter from the doctors [all male], from their dirty hands and eyes. I scissored my legs closed, wanting to keep my child cradled within me, safe. But they roped my legs, stretching them open into the Japanese character for “man”. (35)

The Japanese language follows a system called the Kanji, derived from the Chinese writing system (Matsunaga 1). The script is based on pictorial representations. The object of interest is shown through a minimalist icon or drawing. For example, the word river is denoted with three lines that represent its flowing nature (川), the word tree is represented by the trunk, roots, and a horizontal slash that represents the branches (木), man/person is represented with two open legs (人): the same character that Akiko relates to after she is forced to open her legs. It is interesting that Akiko uses the 'man' character from the Kanji script to denote her loss of agency and her change in state. The Japanese character for man denotes, through iconography, movement and therefore power, as opposed to the woman character in Kanji script, which has forever been represented as a kneeling woman. Her change in state from the scissor-legged/kneeling

woman (as both are closely related to the idea of keeping the legs closed) to the man with open legs ironically makes her weaker. The change is forced on her, and the agency is ripped out of her grasp. From the Japanese Kanji ‘*onna*’ (woman), represented as the kneeling woman: 女, she becomes a sexualised figure. It seems like a conscious thought on the part of the writer to problematise the semiotic system of Japanese Kanji.

With the fictional worlds in both of these novels holding the female characters at the centre, the women acquire agency through this kind of portrayal. Their present situations are full of strife because of the severe patriarchal attacks that they have faced in the past. The story of *Comfort Woman* offers the writer the opportunity to develop on the mutual identification (although troubled by the secrets) between the mother and the daughter. The distance that Beccah feels from her mother originates from her half-Korean and half-American identity, her shame of her mother’s ‘superstitious’ Korean beliefs, and the fear of her mother never recovering from one of her stints where she is possessed by spirit/s. The sociological factor strains their relationship, but the love between the two still remains strong, mostly through Akiko’s concerns that sometimes are exaggerated in proportion to the health problems that Beccah suffers from. Nancy Chowdrow, an American sociologist, expresses her belief that the relationship between mothers and daughters has an erotic current underneath the more socially acceptable role:

Although the family structure [...] rests on institutionalized heterosexuality, it also places heterosexuality under considerable “strain”. And ultimately, because women can rarely fulfill with men their needs for love of a deep, intimate, identificatory kind, women come to want children with whom they can regain that kind of intimacy [...T]hese bonds often persist despite considerable

hostility and animosity, since those negative effects rest on ongoing love in the first place. (qtd. in Stone 48)

In *White Chrysanthemum*, Hana's secret wish for another sister when her mother becomes pregnant is rooted in the same belief of fulfilment that Stone talks about. She wants someone who will understand her world intimately. She wishes for a sister with whom she can share the world of the sea (Bracht 8). The simple conviction in her mind that she has to hide her feelings from her father about the soon-to-be born sibling is rooted in the dangers that a patriarch in a heterosexual family structure emanates.

Challenging Patriarchy through the Supernatural, the Superstitions, and the Unique Korean Identity

The novel *Comfort Woman* has a curious mixture of the supernatural, the stories from Korean folklore, and Magical Realism. The supernatural is represented through the presence of Induk, a spirit whose connection with Akiko manifests because of her traumatic days at the camp. The supernatural can be effectively neutralized by a rational reader as a part of Akiko's mental condition, but a deeper level of scrutiny reveals the presence of an actual spirit in the incidents where Akiko's possession is utilised as a way of earning by Auntie Reno. Ghost stories by women writers, when mixed with historical accounts, are a challenge to the patriarchy or any repressive institute for that matter. It pushes the history and the past into the centre of a narrative:

[H]aunting is one way in which abusive systems of power make themselves known and their impacts felt in everyday life, especially when they are supposedly over and done with (slavery, for instance) [...] What's distinctive

about haunting is that it is an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known, sometimes very directly, sometimes more obliquely. (Gordon xvi)

Akiko's hidden past, which she does not voice to her daughter or the one that her husband does not want to listen to, is given a medium through her trances when Induk supposedly enters her body. The only interactions Akiko had had with Induk before she died were limited to her shouts and wailing from another cell. All that silence that had been imposed on the 'comfort women' through the rigid system of the camp was broken by Induk's scathing attack on the inhumanity that she, along with the others, was subjected to: "I am Korea, I am a woman, I am alive. I am seventeen, I had a family just like you do, I am a daughter, I am a sister" (Keller 20). She kept on repeating this and other things about her life, like her name, her family history, her mother's recipes, the national anthem—all that made her who she was—until she was killed. Induk, even in her battle cries, refuses to partake in the patriotism in the regular fashion of Korean men. Her revolution is uniquely hers and female-centric. Akiko loses her Korean identity after Induk takes hers back by wailing into the night even after repeated warnings and death threats from the soldier. Through her revolutionary cries and by bravely facing her death by the hands of the Japanese soldiers, Induk transcends the boundaries of commonality and becomes unique. She had made a impression on Akiko's young mind through her thorough defiance. It is, maybe, for this reason that Induk 'haunts' her mind to the very end. Akiko 41 takes place of Induk who was before this night Akiko 40. The spiritual or psychological connection that binds the two is reflected in those moments where Akiko's body is not in her control: "She comes in singing, entering with full voice, filling me so that there is no me except for her, Induk" (36). Induk is the symbolic representation of the revolutionary spirit. This revolution

manifests in Akiko when she rejects the Christian god and prays to Induk (the symbolic revolution), and contests her husband's claim over her body. When Induk disappears for some time during Akiko's initial time in the missionary, she has a chance to take in Christian learning and desert her belief in the Korean values. But every day when she is asked to pray during the communion, she prays to Induk, and when they talk about heaven, she imagines a free Korea.

Induk, who first appeared in front of Akiko when she had passed out near a stream, after giving her sustenance and strength, told her to go to Manshim (Shaman) Ahjima (Aunt), the old lady who will perform shamanic rites for the dead. Manshim Ahjima refuses to perform "*Kut*", a ritualistic practise done by shamans that involves dancing, singing, and praying for the welfare of humans and spirits (J.Y. Lee 27). She calls the shamanic practise "the devil's work" and showing her cross necklace tells Akiko that she has been "saved". It becomes evident through Manshim Ahjima how deeply the roots of Christianity have been planted in Korea. She is no longer a *manshim* (shaman) and has started working as an aid to the Christian missionary to earn money. She deceitfully brings Akiko to the Christian missionary and leaves her there, ignoring her cries.

After Akiko enters the missionary, all her cries to Induk go unanswered. After a lot of pleading and weeping, Induk comes back. Akiko and Induk both feel angry at one another. Akiko, because she had done all that Induk had asked, and was still abandoned in another prison by a beloved. But Induk's blame comes from her rotten state, both as a dead body and as a spirit. She blames Akiko for leaving her corpse to rot in the camp and not performing the final rights: "Why did you leave me to putrefy in the open air, as food for the wild animals, just as if I were an animal?" (Keller 95-96).

The rotten and maggot infested body of Induk represents all those women who had not been able to escape. When she forces Akiko to look at her ghastly body, her challenge can be seen in relation to what most of the women had to countenance after they became free. Their bodies will be seen as rotten masses. As a woman, Akiko understands Induk and all those who had suffered in a similar way. It is for this reason, she finds Induk, who is the personification of female solidarity and support, beautiful even in her rotten state (96). Induk's spirit seeks the same comfort that was sought by the daughter's ghost in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*.

There is a commonality in women's experiences. The universality of social structures like patriarchy, sexism, misogyny among many others is responsible for that. But the cultural variations of how such structures are implemented are important in the light of how they are rejected by the ethnocentric feminist forces. The Korean patriarchy had been influenced and set its tone according to the Confucian values that had made their way through China during the Chosun Dynasty (H.Y. Lee 189). Hierarchical and gender boundaries became strict in order to achieve a 'cordial and conflict-free' atmosphere. The patriarchal system assumed a gigantic form and women were seen as inferior citizens who were to make the lives of the males in family resourceful by being docile. Similar to this is Akiko's experience her husband where neo-Confucian values are replaced by the Christian ones.

In modern times, shamanism, like other forms of ritualistic healing, is seen by many as a hoax and a shady practice that has been created to rip off people by creating false beliefs and propagating superstitions. But during the Koryo Dynasty, shamans were respected and were offered high positions in the king's court. Shamanism has been studied not only as a religion or ritualistic practice rather as an art form that includes "songs, chants, recitations, dances, paintings, and costumes to emphasise their

[shamans] cultural distinctiveness” (H.Y. Lee 187). Shamanism in Korea is predominately a female profession, and gender-based growth can be traced back to the Chosun Dynasty’s male-oriented Neo-Confucian way of standardising citizens’ lives. During those times, shamanism provided women with the agency that was being aggressively destroyed through misogynistic Confucian ways.

To become a Shaman, one has to go through ‘*shinbyung*’, an initiation that causes one to fall sick without any cure unless he/she accepts the call of the deities. Dongsoo Kim in her article observes that many women who go through ‘*shinbyung*’ have had suffered “personal tragedies or exploitation” by others (129). It can be assumed that Akiko’s powers and her connection to the spiritual world is triggered by the atrocities she had faced at the Japanese camp. The initiation causes the illness as a physical manifestation of the psychological traumas of the past that must be healed through an acceptance of shamanism: “On the basis of her own adverse life experiences and the sense of vulnerability that once wounded her heart, the shaman can now heal the wounds of others” (189). Auntie Reno voices a similar sentiment to Beccah after her mother’s death. According to Auntie Reno, Akiko’s sufferings, as extreme as they were, enabled her to know other people’s heartaches and cure them (Keller 203).

In the novel, the supernatural is subscribed as a motif to subvert and question the patriarchy. Superstitions are seen as an irrational belief system in a society that conforms to and provide credibility to certain ambivalent magical-religious narratives. In many cultures, superstitions or popular household beliefs can produce a social effect that may adversely affect the women, but here the choices made by the writer are particularly female oriented. The novel emphasises the properties of food and how they affect the female body at certain phases of a her life. When Akiko becomes pregnant with Beccah, she realises that her disproportionate consumption of ginseng (a plant that

is commonly found in China and Korea) prevented her from conceiving for almost two decades. She claims that ginseng had imbalanced her female energies. Among its many other uses, ginseng is commonly utilised as a home remedy in Korea and China for erectile dysfunction. Similarly, the seaweed soup is commonly offered to women after childbirth and thus becomes an antithesis of ginseng (Dennis et al. 494). Induk explains to Akiko that her body after Beccah's birth is mostly living on a female energy, and the seaweed becomes the food of 'life' for a woman during her post-partum period (Keller 37). The belief has been scientifically challenged but still holds strong culturally. It comes as no surprise that the word superstition originates from the Latin word *superstes* which means surviving or outliving (289). It is important to note that even when these practises are of indeterminate character, they still exist and only stand disowned by a strong sense of rationality or sophistication. They resurface in times of "stress and strain, and in emotional crisis, when the element of chance is prominent and insecurity is rife" (James 293).

The choice of food becomes prominently vegan as the fear of '*sal*' threatens to disrupt Beccah and her mother's life. Akiko, the mother, calls the smell that emanates from Beccah's body the smell of animal waste, the source of which is in Beccah and her father's American diet of cheese, milk, and meat. The mother puts her on a strict diet of ritualistic food that has "white rice cake, bowls of water, oranges and mixed vegetable *namul* [edible grass]" (85). Though reluctant to follow the diet, Beccah realised that the food had brought a positive change in her body. The women dissociate themselves from the food of the father/the men. Akiko tells her daughter to refrain from "feeding the sickness". In contrast, Saja, the devil that Akiko forever tries to ward off, mostly feeds on meat, pig or chicken. Akiko's special vegetarian ritual "celebrate[s] the grace of eating plants [which] will contribute to [destabilize] patriarchal consumption"

(Adams 244). In a world made and defined by patriarchal models, superstitions have been selectively weaponised against the Others. Keller's intellectual and selective use of beliefs has created a balance in the narratives in a world that often tries to obliterate the alternative meanings and dispositions. This prevents the cultural lynching and critical dismemberment by which women narratives lose their values and disappear from the discourse.

Akiko's ambivalence between the silence and her distinctive and exclusive style of communication can be read as an oddly specific dilemma that many war victims like her suffer from. It is common to choose a form other than orality to break free from the tomb of silence. For Akiko, it is the transcendence to the spiritual world that she experiences through shamanism and for Hana, it is her distinguished and special relationship with water.

To question the credibility of Akiko's claims of Induk and the spiritual world is a way to hammer in the silence. Beccah's rejection in her mother's belief is the reason that she is unable to decipher the meanings of Akiko's wailings, songs and dances. Akiko had never been silent about her trauma; she had just found a different and uncommon way to articulate it. For Akiko, language is a vicious perpetrator that "dissects" a body into pieces (Keller 22). In contrast, we have the husband who has knowledge of four languages. The language morphs and changes shapes; the meaning of a word is not set in stone, and Akiko has learned this the hard way: the word '*poji*' (vagina) transforms to become a whole female body; "comfort woman" as an identification tag can never explain the atrocities and trauma one had suffered; and a woman who had been raped can be considered a sinner. She rejects the meaningful language that holds more power in the binary structures of things and favours the broken and crying calls of the spiritual haunting. As one who had been marginalised,

she chose the marginal shamanic language to address her pain. Beccah finally understands that her mother had always been telling her everything; it was she who was not listening. From “senseless wails [and] high-pitched keening”, the voice of her mother recorded on a tape transformed into a song, a story with names that were lost in the Japanese camps (Keller 191).

In both the novels, the characters accept their Korean identity and draw strength from it. The Korean identity that surfaces in the novels does not have a nationalist or patriotic ardor. It comes from the marginal elements of Korean culture that are associated with female power or expression. In *White Chrysanthemum*, it is the Haneyo culture, whereas in *Comfort Woman*, Akiko resurrects her Korean ancestry and a sense of belonging through shamanism. They assert themselves through their core beliefs in deeply rooted conventional feminist ideology. Their feminism does not partake in the modern western notions.

Hana’s story begins with her initiation into becoming a *Haeneyo*, a deep-sea diver. The ceremony involves a shaman, a prayer and invocation of the unpopular Dragon Sea God. In silence of the night, the women defy the Japanese orders that have outlawed such ceremonies and prohibited the propagation of Korean culture in any way. The readers soon realise that this is a dream from the past, a world of happier memories that are broken by the reality of the Japanese soldier still asleep in her room. But these dreams of the home give her the power to carry on: “The ceremony was one of power and strength, just like the women of the sea, just like Hana. [The soldiers] will not defeat her” (Bracht 3). In Hana’s world, diving is a woman’s work and this offers them a unique freedom.

Akiko’s profession as a shaman also accords her with similar empowerment and a way to hold onto the Korean culture in her own eccentric way. Akiko becomes a

victim of Japanese colonialism and, through her marriage, the American missionary's. The writer has tried to expose the aspects of American neo-imperialism by utilizing Akiko's relation with her husband. The oppressive force of powerful structures that diabolically assume different shapes and disguises is evident through Akiko's life at the Christian missionary after her escape from an egregious institute like the comfort stations. Where the Japanese assault is conspicuous, the missionary functions quite insidiously. Akiko's body, which was first used at the camps, is used again in the missionary, but this time it is to force an ideology on her:

Eventually, I turned my eyes away and gave my body to them. After bathing, dressing, and feeding me, the women pressed a Bible into my hands and led me to a small room that was not much bigger than the stall I had in the camps. (63)

The similarities between the two places of oppression are uncanny. The likeness between the sounds at the missionary and the camps keeps on escalating until they start to merge. The sounds of hands slapping on the pulpit were replaced by the sounds of women being slapped on their buttocks, the movements of the congregation opening the bibles were replaced by ricocheting bullets, and finally, every sound from the missionary' world became one with the camp (Keller 70). What saves her in these circumstances is the belief in the countless different elements of her Korean identity – the songs of Induk's defiance that came in the form of the national anthem that she kept on bellowing even when the soldiers brutally assaulted her, her mother's lullabies that she sang for her daughter's good sleep, the sound of river which symbolises Akiko's liberation, the secret whispers among women in camp to keep in touch with each other –all these become a way to escape the oppressive structure of the missionary and the living nightmares of her life in the camp (71).

The missionary husband tries his best to break Akiko's identification with her past and her country through his Christian beliefs. He dies trying to convert her, but Akiko never budes. Beccah's identity is similarly threatened in her subconscious by her father's beliefs which is evident in the incident where the Manoa Walker transforms and becomes one with her father who abrasively tells her to accept Christianity and come under the fold of the 'true' religion. Beccah holds onto her dead mother's beliefs and tells the Walker that her mother was not a Christian as the Walker-father had claimed (167). It is noteworthy that she does not counter one religious' belief by another but rather chooses the one idea that encompasses her mother's whole being. She tells the Walker/father that her mother was "Korean" (167). Hana and Akiko do not become a rendition of the political or public female body that comes to represent the colonized land, but they become the powerful nations themselves. Their identification to the land is unique and outside the bounds of male-tainted perceptions of female bodies under which they are either to be protected or ravished. Korean identity enables Akiko to avenge herself of all the times that her husband had tried to force his view on her. His death anniversary becomes a way to deliver poetic justice: the ritual is performed by Akiko in the unique Taoist way which is a passive-aggressive violation of his Christian beliefs that he had indulged in during his lifetime. Akiko's helplessness and her inability to reject the perverse advances of the missionary in both the marriage and her living style find a channel of representation through the death anniversary rituals where the dead aggressor is mute and cannot retaliate in favour of his religious beliefs and fight for his identity.

Beccah and the readers learn of Akiko's real name, her Korean name, by the end of the novel. The process of renaming continues when in missionary Akiko is called Mary after the biblical Mary Magdalene, who is erroneously assumed by many to be

the prostitute who was saved by Jesus Christ. The American missionary, ironically enough, considers himself a saviour of Akiko and forces her to accept Christianity.

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