

THE HANDMAIDENS' PLIGHT: AN INVESTIGATION OF SURVIVOR IDEOLOGIES OF
MARGINALIZED ASIAN WOMEN

A Thesis by

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The following faculty members have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content, and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts with a major in English.

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DEDICATION

To God for bringing about this project's conception through its conclusion; to my husband for his unwavering love and inspiration, and to my children for their prayers and support

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ABSTRACT

Many subjugated Asian women have been overwhelmed and expunged by their traumatic ordeals, and yet many have emerged triumphant despite inconceivable odds to proclaim their tragic narratives, even as they undergo great trials and suffering. Such desperate struggles beg the question: “What sustainable ideologies embraced by these women helped them to transcend the intensity of their perpetrators’ harshest and at times inhumane treatment?” This study investigates the nature of women oppression, at the intersections of racism and sexism represented by three respective Asian protagonists, and their corresponding narratives: Pramoedya Ananta Toer’s concubine, in *This Earth of Mankind*, Nora Okja Keller’s sex slave in *Comfort Woman*, and Maxine Hong Kingston’s depreciated daughter in *The Woman Warrior*.

The investigation is two-fold: understanding the nature of oppressive systems and documenting these women’s evolving “survivor ideologies.” While the socio-historical methodology is employed to understand the machinations of repressive systems, the psychoanalytical approach is adopted to explore the psychology of patriarchy and trauma. Finally, the autobiographical process is used to understand evolving cultural hybridity.

The investigation reveals resilient “survivor ideologies” of the concubine’s transforming accomplishments, the “comfort woman’s” affirming intersubjectivity, and the “woman warrior’s” defining selfhood. The study also implicates societies’ collusion with hegemonic powers and/or monolithic ideologies, and societies’ perpetuation of oppressive tyrannies. Although oppressive systems such as patriarchy are anachronistic in 21st century modern societies, yet vestiges of traditional repressions are metastasizing into such modern day cousins as pornography, illiteracy, and abject poverty that continue to perpetuate a woman’s subjugation.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: OPPRESSIVE IDEOLOGIES

History has been a painful witness to the oppression of Asian women through the centuries. Although many subjugated women have been overwhelmed and expunged from history by their traumatic ordeals, yet many have emerged triumphant despite inconceivable odds to proclaim their tragic narratives, even as they undergo physical, mental, and emotional duress. Such desperate struggles beg the question: “What sustainable ideologies embraced by these women helped them to transcend the intensity of their perpetrators’ harshest and at times inhumane treatment?”

This study investigates the nature of women’s oppression as represented by three respective Asian novelists: Pramoedya Ananta Toer’s concubine, in *This Earth of Mankind* (Indonesia), Nora Okja Keller’s sex slave in *Comfort Woman* (Korea), and Maxine Hong Kingston’s depreciated daughter in *The Woman Warrior*, (United States of America). The investigation also explores the causes of domination over women and examines the different survivor ideologies that sustained these women during their subjugation, at the intersections of racism and sexism.

In Indonesia, the Dutch colonists in their search for the coveted East Indies spices exerted imperial hegemony over the Indonesian archipelago, from the 17th through the 19th centuries. In the process, not only were the islands’ residents colonized, but some native women were procured as concubines. Such procurement subsequently caused their rejection by their own sexist society, as well as their disenfranchisement by the same racist colonizers that abused them. Native men seem to be complicit in subjugating their own countrywomen. In Japanese-occupied

Korea, during World War II, the racist Japanese Imperial Army took young Korean virgins to be “comfort women.” These incarcerated women became sex slaves and were raped several times a day in “comfort stations” designed for the benefit of Japanese soldiers. The women contracted venereal diseases, sustained unwanted pregnancies, and underwent abortions alluded in The University of North Carolina’s magazine article by Dottie Horn entitled “Comfort Women,” citing graduate student, Carolyn Berndt’s research on “the story of Pak Kumjoo, one of the Japanese Army’s comfort women during World War II.” In addition, Korean women’s subjugation was facilitated by their own sexist Confucian culture.

Finally, despite their immigration to America, Chinese immigrants in the 1940s continued to promote Chinese sexist, patriarchal mores and traditional customs that devalued the cultural and emotional worth of their wives and daughters, subduing their voices and subjugating their wills. The Chinese immigrants may have left China, but they brought their chauvinistic views with them.

Upon a cursory glance at the issues above, one could only suspect that the machinations of a dominant ideology underlie the oppression of women in engendering their inequality and subjugation. The repressive gender’s workings could be summed up in one word: “patriarchy.” Eventually, many critical questions pertinent to women’s marginalization arise, such as: What larger implication does Toer’s “nyai” in *This Earth of Mankind* invoke by her rebellion against both her colonial Dutch masters, as well as her own native countrymen? How is patriarchy implicated in Dutch colonialism? Do native men abet the sexual exchange of their women as part of their trading transactions? Was she successful in confronting her colonial oppressors? How did Keller’s *Comfort Woman*, Soon Hyo/Akiko’s “madness” help her cope with the post-trauma of a former embattled sex slave? How is Japanese patriarchy implicated in engendering her

psychological displacement and dissolution? Did her own sexist cultural ideology facilitate her enslavement? What informs her survivor ideology? Finally, why is Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*'s defiance of ancient and traditional Chinese ideology significant in the subjective psyche of a woman's self-representation? How did her memoirs help her achieve selfhood?

Clearly, these intersections of racism and sexism illuminate the oppression of women from these three countries: Indonesia, Korea, and China. A critic is led to question the nature of the dominant ideologies that created a climate of fear and subjugation, endemic to the existing populace at the time. However, when the causes of oppression are successfully identified, the solutions to the debasement of women may be found. However, the path to such clear identification is often fraught with uncertain outcomes as repressive ideologies thrive on society's collusion and perpetuation. Therefore, whenever women succeed in confronting overbearing ideologies that shackle and demean them, the dominant ideologies' oppressors and abusers are exposed revealing their surreptitious agenda of subjugation. Hence, exploring these anti-establishment ideologies becomes crucial for society's knowledge and effectiveness in combating oppressive tyrannies.

My investigation follows a two-fold process: understanding the nature of dominant systems of repression and documenting these women's evolving survivor ideologies. In order to accomplish the former, the methodology of my investigation in Toer's *This Earth of Mankind* undertakes the socio-historical approach to understand the role of the Dutch colonists and their impact upon native East Indies society, especially in their abuse of women through concubinage. While the socio-historical approach was also applied to Keller's *Comfort Woman*, to survey the exploitive role of the Japanese Imperial Army in Korea and the unwitting collusion of Korea's

Confucian ideology in the oppression of their women, psychoanalytical methods were engaged to explore the extent of the psychological trauma engendered by sexual enslavement. Finally, I adopted the autobiographical methodology to Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* in order to assess the repressive repercussions of traditional Chinese ideology upon evolving assimilated identities and their new freedoms in America.

These methodologies were also adopted to assess the survivors' ideologies that reveal the concubine's transforming accomplishments, the comfort woman's affirming intersubjectivity, and the woman warrior's defining autobiography. The outcomes of the two-pronged investigation are summarized in this thesis' conclusion.

There are several pertinent works that inform my scholarship. One of the crucial works that helped me in the framing of a major argument of my thesis is derived from sociologist Allan G. Johnson's work, entitled *The Gender Knot: Unraveling Our Patriarchal Legacy* (2005) in which he explains the dominant ideology's social impact and its relationship with the embittered issues experienced by marginalized women. I also employed the helpful views presented by psychoanalyst Jessica Benjamin's *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and the Problem of Domination* by training the psychoanalytical lens on the subjugator's rationale for domination that subsequently engenders the commodification of women. I also consulted Benjamin's *Like Subjects, Love Objects: Essays on Recognition and Sexual Difference* to demonstrate the significant application of the intersubjective theory in Keller's protagonist's post-traumatic existence. Finally, the resourceful work of Sidonie Smith's and Julia Watson's *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* informed me of the various ways self-representation could be executed, in the search for selfhood.

Whether one champions the concubine's adversarial cry for enfranchisement, or empathizes with the comfort woman's plea for intersubjectivity, or takes up the cudgels with the woman warrior's contention for autonomy, I hope that these women's struggles have in turn inspired us to confront our oppressors, cope with our trauma, and re-assess our selfhood.

CHAPTER 2

THE ADVERSARIAL CONCUBINE

The story of the handmaiden-concubine of our narrative *This Earth of Mankind* takes place in 1898, on the island of Java in the grip of Dutch colonialism. In fact, the Dutch ruled from the northwest coast of Java, in the city of Batavia, which is now called Jakarta, the present-day capital of Indonesia, a hub of social, economic and political activity. Altogether, the East Indies felt the oppressive Dutch presence for almost three-and-a-half centuries before emerging as modern “Indonesia” to achieve sovereignty in 1945. While these historical facts provide the racial setting for the concubine-character, Nyai Ontosoroh and her colonial oppression, in Pramoedya Ananta Toer’s novel entitled *This Earth of Mankind*, Ontosoroh’s own Muslim and sexist culture is also implicated in bringing about her servitude. In this intersection of racism and sexism, Nyai Ontosoroh finds herself twice oppressed by her colonial masters and her patriarchal parents. However, despite the oppression, she refuses to be defeated and instead demonstrates unusual survivor skills that not only captivated her 19th century audience, but inspire a 21st century forum, to revisit the shape and form of that centuries-old oppression. In fact, today, the bigoted modes employed by that colonial canon of subjugation may be considered to be tantamount to a crime against humanity based on human rights abuses. What is the handmaiden’s survivor ideology? What are the factors that accounted for her ability to overcome insurmountable odds even as she experienced forces that are beyond her control? In this discussion, I will argue that by examining the concubine’s oppressors’ modus operandi through the endemic perpetuation of patriarchy, humanity would gain invaluable insight into the

subaltern's survivor ideology and glean cogent instruction from her gallant revolt against her subjugators.

Rather than blaming history for Nyai Ontosoroh's subjection, perhaps it is more instructive if the investigation explores further afield for the cause of her repression, by examining the common instigating factor present in both her racist/colonial, and sexist/native custodians: patriarchy. In both colonial and indigenous East Indies societies of the late 19th century, power and control resided firmly in male hands. Max Lane, the translator of Toer's narrative, *This Earth of Mankind*, while describing the seafaring vessels that berthed in ports like Surabaya notes that "ships carried Dutch officials, businessmen, and adventurers from all over Europe, seeking their fortunes and perhaps ending up in the Dutch Colonial Army or prison" (Toer 9). Based on the patriarchal conventions of the day, it is safe to assume that men most probably made up a high percentage of the passengers on these 19th century seafaring vessels, a majority of whom may even be breadwinners, supporting families in their homeland of Holland. The preponderance of Dutch nationals in the East Indies during this period of time is re-affirmed by the *European Journal of Human Genetics* in their 2004 data research entitled "Founder Mutations among the Dutch," stating that:

"during the first half of the 19th century, the number of Dutch émigrés living in the Dutch East Indies was around 2,100 persons. Following the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, that number increased to around 11,000 by the end of the 19th century" (Zeegers).

It is also interesting to note that at the same historical moment, East Indies women of all classes were in the throes of their own patriarchal repression. One of the early Javanese woman emancipists, Raden Adjeng Kartini (1879-1904) is recorded as being "struck" by the following

line in one of the novels by Multatuli, a 19th century Dutch writer, and a critic of colonial abuses: “Father said to her that to know, and to understand, and to desire, was a sin for a girl” (Jayawardena 143-144). Kartini’s own writings “reflected some of the problems faced by upper-class women [like her] and their desire for emancipation through education ...” (141) as she herself is “denied further education because she was female” (144). She writes of being “constrained by the usual restrictions of high Javanese society, [instigating her] ... in advocating women’s rights and condemning the prevalent practices of polygamy, female seclusion and forced marriage” (142). Therefore, the indigenous women of the East Indies are twice repressed: by colonialism on the one hand, and on the other, by their own local customs and taboos.

Patriarchy is a structured social system used as a conduit for the dissemination of power. According to sociologist Allan G. Johnson’s *The Gender Knot: Unraveling Our Patriarchal Legacy*, “*structure*” refers to “the ways privilege and oppression are organized through social relationships and unequal distributions of power, rewards, opportunities, and resources” (Johnson 41). The Dutch caste system is an example of a social hierarchy devised to maintain inequality in East Indies society during their colonial rule. The indigenous people of the East Indies, or “Native,” was regarded as the lowest class in the colonial social structure, with the Indo or “Mixed-Blood” strata forming the middle tier, topped by the ruling Dutch or “Pure” status at the pinnacle of the class system. Such an imposed pecking order enables the inequitable distribution of power by the colonists, which is manifested in its disallowance of representation in Dutch courts, for example, against the indigenous people (a point to be dealt with in greater detail, later in this discussion).

Patriarchy revolves around the notion of “male privilege” (Johnson 19). As the man sees himself assuming the responsibility for *bringing home the bacon*, he feels privy to lay down the

ground-rules as well, founding a system of dominance and subordination. Johnson observes that there is a:

“...well-documented relationship between earnings and decision-making power in families, the common tendency to see the breadwinner as the ‘head of the household,’ ... and the cultural devaluing of people who don’t ‘work’ (i.e., earn money) for a living and the respect and elevated status for those who do” (208).

He states that “dominant groups ... take responsibility for whatever affirms their superior status and reinforces their privileged position.” Therefore, it is apparent when male dominance is established other weaker men and women would need to toe the line. Eventually, the system of patriarchy and its accompanying nexus of unwritten rules and nuances that dictate, inform, and shape social behavior emerge as supreme laws of the land.

In Toer’s *This Earth Of Mankind*, the dispensation of patriarchy by privileged males is respectively executed in both the colonial persona of Herman Mellema and the indigenous figure of Sastrotomo, Ontosoroh’s father. Herman Mellema is “Tuan Besar Kuasa” which means the “great powerful master, a term used for a Dutch administrator or other powerful official” (Toer 367). Being the Dutch factory administrator where Sastrotomo works as a mere factory clerk, Mellema has the colonial power to promote him to the level of a “factory cashier,” (Toer 81) a position, Sastrotomo highly covets. Despite other proposals of marriage for Ontosoroh, his beautiful daughter, Sastrotomo declines them all, only to offer her to Mellema later, in exchange for the elevated factory position he yearns. The Native version of patriarchy is personified by the absolute head of Javanese families where “father decide[s] everything” (Toer 82) and the petrified daughter “must carry out all [her] parents’ orders, especially Father’s,” (83) even if she

is to be reduced from a dutiful and domesticated subject to a transacted, sexualized object of desire. Hence, the systemic bigoted order of power travels from colonial master to native employee and familial head, which finally subjugates the handmaiden.

In the 19th century patriarchal mindset, the commodification of women is treated as just another expeditious enterprise engaged in by privileged men of power. After the exchange of “twenty-five guilders, representing Father’s surrender” of Ontosoroh to Mellema, “along with the promise that Father would be made cashier...,” (84) the marriage transaction is completed. Ontosoroh narrates how “powerless” (85) she felt when Mellema first “picked [her] up and carried [her] around the room like a wooden doll.” He then “threw [her] up and caught [her] on his hip” (86). Later, he “picked up [her] body from the floor, put it on the bed, and laid it down there,” (87) she, being not aware “how long that mountain of flesh was with [her],” before she “fainted” in frigid terror on their wedding night. Not only is Ontosoroh sold for career advancement, she is also reduced to a lecherous plaything.

Moreover, the endemic system of patriarchy seems to promote the notion that no personal accounting is needed for one’s moral scruples. These powerful and authoritative men, not only objectify women, but they appear to be nonchalant about their instigative role in inciting society’s backlash against Ontosoroh predicated upon ingrained standards of feminine honor. Unknown to Ontosoroh at the time, Mellema was already married in Holland, even though he was unaware that his Dutch wife had legally divorced him “after efforts to find [him] were unsuccessful” (Toer 342). Yet, he proceeds with this new “marital” arrangement that would not constitute a legal marriage, in both Dutch and Javanese societies, and reduces Ontosoroh’s social standing to concubine status or to the pejorative “nyai” as she is called in Javanese society. In such communities, *nyais* are perceived to be “low, dirty, without culture, moved only by lust”

(54). Furthermore, they are relegated to “families of prostitutes; ... people without character, destined to sink into nothingness, leaving no trace” (54). If there was any hint of remorse shown by Ontosoroh’s father for the venal transaction of his daughter or any prick of conscience on Mellema’s part to nullify the contract between him and Sastrotomo, it is not evident. Ontosoroh’s subaltern state becomes irrevocably sealed by the two men, with “the title Nyai [that] would follow [her] forever, for ... life” (93). Even when a visiting school teacher wishes to address her as “Ma’am” (228) instead of “Nyai,” she adamantly insists to be addressed in the latter, in a recriminating voice “bitter and filled with a desire for revenge which would not be satisfied,” (229) painfully intimating the fact of “a master who owns me, my person” (228). Resigning to her fate and as the sale of her person becomes complete she takes her place among society’s outcasts.

It is worthy to note that at this historic time, Southeast Asian society’s objectification of their women is an admissible way of life. Barbara Watson Andaya’s revealing journal article entitled: “From Temporary Wife to Prostitute: Sexuality and Economic Change in Early Modern Southeast Asia,” discusses the shifting attitudes in the sexual commodification of women in Southeast Asia from the 14th to the late 19th centuries. Upon their arrival in Southeast Asia in the 16th century, Europeans “found that foreign traders commonly entered into a temporary marriage with local women who also helped them in trade” (11) writes Andaya. The purpose of these transitory marriages was to promote “kinship networks critical to the whole commercial structure” (Andaya 13) for Asian men who needed “companionship and assistance” while trading far from their homeland, preferably in communities where kinship ties can be fostered. Furthermore, “basic to most Southeast Asian cultures was the belief that access to a woman’s body was part of a reciprocal process in which the exchange of gifts was critical,” (14) and “by

receiving valuable or unusual gifts from foreign traders, women and their families acquired prestige items that could be displayed or exchanged, significantly enhancing their status within the community” notes Andaya. Hence, Asian patriarchy appears enterprisingly accepting of the transaction of their women’s bodies without regard for the men’s culpability of moral turpitude in the sex trade.

However, as time passed, such promiscuous attitudes towards women grew more conservative. As the numbers of Christian Dutch women were small in Southeast Asia in this early colonial era, “frequently lower-ranking Europeans adopted what indigenous society initially viewed as a continuation of the temporary marriage concept but which Europeans re-categorized and demoted to concubinage” (Andaya 22). Early consenting indigenous attitudes toward these transitory marriages seemed to have given way to outright censure as reflected in Ontosoroh’s own Javanese society by the late 19th century, a society who condemned and labeled her with the pejorative title of “nyai” or “concubine” (Toer 86). This change of attitude may have come about because “local communities” (Andaya 23) became aware that “Europeans considered concubinage—cohabitation without a legal document and Church approval—not as a temporary marriage but as an irregular and sinful relationship” especially on the island of Java, where the Christian-professed Dutch influence was felt most. However, in Ontosoroh’s case, public disapprobation did not prevent her father and the “Christian” Dutchman from engaging in their despicable transaction.

Interestingly, the ignominy of Ontosoroh’s status spurs her notions of self-autonomy, and starts her on the road to economic independence and the shaping of a viable survivor ideology. Ontosoroh, like other Asian concubines who assist in their partner’s trade, also helps to run her master’s lucrative dairy business. Although she resigns her fate to being Mellema’s concubine,

she is also keenly cognizant that her economic prospects are at best tenuous as Mellema “could leave home for the Netherlands at any moment, leaving [her], and forgetting everything about Tulangan” (Toer 88). Despite the possibility of a tenuous future, Ontosoroh has the uncanny wisdom that “never made herself dependent” upon Mellema’s support even in her subaltern state. Instead, slowly but surely, she trades her repression for her own future independence, by assessing and capitalizing the options that lay before her “for that eventuality” of his departure from her life.

How does Ontosoroh survive in a society that both reduced her to an object, and that which condemned her immoral status? Even if she has nothing else to her name, Ontosoroh has a strong sense of self and a tenacious moral center responsible for shaping a survivor ideology that supported and rebuilt her crushed ego. Initially, the shock and shame of her deprecated status engenders a withdrawn feeling of self-loathing causing her to be “ashamed to meet the outside world ... acquaintances, [and] neighbors” (Toer 88). In her mortified state, she dismissed all her servants, as “there were to be no witnesses to my life as a nyai...no reports about me: a degraded woman, without value, no real will of her own” she narrates. She resolves to defy her own society by turning her back on the same family and community that dishonored her.

In an act of self-empowerment, she exacts retribution upon her parents, especially her father, by repeatedly refusing to receive them in her home and returning their letters. Her “wounded pride and self-respect” makes her vow “never [to] look upon [her] home or [her] parents again ... to remember them.” Denouncing them, she says: “my mother was incapable of defending me, so she was not fit to be my mother” (87) and “my father sold me like the offspring of a horse; he wasn’t fit to be my father. I don’t have any parents.” Ontosoroh survives her ordeal by confronting her shame and reshaping its ruins. In shame’s shadows, she reconstructs an

ideology of willful survival by flaunting the social taboo of absolute filial compliance for independent, cultural authenticity, to counteract the debilitating effects of society's censure of her personage.

Ontosoroh is driven by the will to overcome the odds against her. She undertakes the total burden of domestic duties upon herself, and is determined that she might as well be "the very best nyai" she could be by learning all there is to learn about her master and his lifestyle. She studies his personal habits of hygiene, undertakes domestic chores, as well as "cooking European food," and engaging in the East Indies version of the Cult of Domesticity, which must have endeared her to Mellema. She is honor-bound to be her own self-made, Javanese-renaissance woman of sorts.

Interestingly, Toer's narrative also reveals the other side of colonial patriarchy: the benign and philanthropic master. It is Herman Mellema's response to Ontosoroh as a patient teacher and a supportive counselor that salvages Ontosoroh's trampled pride. While Mellema's conduct in procuring her is reprehensible, he becomes an exemplary colonial patriarch, for a while. His magnanimity empowers her with a Dutch education that results in her ability "to read and write, to speak and to put together Dutch sentences" which bolsters her self-esteem. His love of reading demonstrated by the monthly arrival of books and magazines from the Netherlands transfers to her as well. When she misreads, he would correct and teach her the "meaning of words [she] didn't understand" (91). She is ordered to read a quota of books, and later to recount "their contents" to him. Knowing the Dutch language, the language of privilege and power of the era gives Ontosoroh the inward confidence to be "no longer ashamed if [she] had to meet with old acquaintances" (89). She begins to feel that she is his "equal" as Mellema reaffirms her by being available, consulting, and engaging her in all the discussions, which in turn restores her

“self-respect.” Thus, as benign patriarchy demonstrates the ability to empower and transform lives, perceptive Ontosoroh seizes these opportunities for further self-improvement and social mobility.

Continual transformation and self-improvement instruct and direct Ontosoroh’s survivor ideology. Ontosoroh takes full advantage of Mellema’s offer of a Dutch education, the opportunity to run the dairy business, her personal savings, even her own personal grooming, and deportment, all are crucial tools in restoring her confidence and self-esteem. These tools of personal self-reformation grant her the inner strength to defend herself, even when both her business and her daughter are later taken away from her. She is “taught how to look after [cattle].” (89) She takes “a role in making decisions on all matters,” even giving orders to hired workers in their expanding dairy business, and is told that she is “the master of their livelihood” (90). Soon she realizes that Mellema is actually “dependent” (89) on her and not she on him. Therefore, although she is publicly depreciated in her concubine status, conversely, she is privately bolstered in her self-esteem.

Her survivor ideology is also given a monetary boost. The viability of her economic survival grows when Mellema paid Ontosoroh for her “labor” (92) in the business. Mellema’s payments allow her to purchase a “rice mill and other plants and equipment with her own savings.” Later, she is even given “a share of five years’ profit, five thousand guilders” which she puts “in a bank under [her] own name.” Her savings eventually accumulate to “more than ten thousand guilders” (94). In the course of time, she becomes a “shareholder” (96) in the business. While Ontosoroh’s colonized body used to be her only means of survival, she has now accrued substantial finance and capital to empower her with a strong economic base to stand on.

Mellema's final philanthropic gift to Ontosoroh is a beauty and deportment makeover that further bolsters her survivor ideology. Under Mellema's tutelage she is "taught how to dress properly, to choose matching colors" (90). He heuristically instructs her to maintain her beauty because "a crumpled face and untidy clothes ... reflect a crumpled and untidy business" and "no one will trust you" (91) he says. She even asks herself: "Had I become a Dutch woman with brown skin?" as she directs a reversed cultural gaze upon "the backwardness of the Natives around [her]." Taking advantage of Mellema's "philanthropy," Ontosoroh transforms from a former petrified "wooden doll" (85) into an animated agent of change. If beneficent patriarchy had pursued its transforming trajectory, the final chapter of Toer's narrative would have taken a different course. Unfortunately, Mellema abandoned his commendable agenda for Ontosoroh's empowerment, leaving her to charter her own destiny.

Ontosoroh's revolutionized ideology is tested by Minke, her indigenous but Dutch educated son-in-law-to-be when he first meets her. Minke, who was aware that Ontosoroh shares his Native roots, becomes "amazed not only that this Native woman could speak Dutch so well, but also that she was so relaxed with a male guest" (30). The Javanese culture to which Minke and Ontosoroh belong is highly governed by their traditions or *adat* dictating their women's conduct and behavior, especially in the public space. Sulistyowati Irianto, a legal anthropologist from The University of Indonesia comments that the "adat" is "a term introduced by the Dutch scholar Schnouck Hurgronje," whereby "people consciously observed the *adat* law as guidance for their behavior." As a result, the "*adat* mirrored the view of life of indigenous Indonesians, and the context was specifically local" (Irianto 240). However, while the *adat* seems to represent native patriarchy's protective arm in shielding their women from inappropriate social settings, such customs are also inhibitive by restricting their women's ability

to socialize and to develop freely. Ontosoroh's demeanor troubles Minke and arouses nagging questions such as: "Where was she educated?" and "Who educated her to be so free, just like a European woman?" (Toer 30). The fact that Minke embraces such views reflects the extent the sexist Javanese patriarchy hold their women's liberties hostage, and prevent women like Ontosoroh from realizing their own potential in advancing to heights of sophistication, foreign to Javanese men.

No other area underscores the oppressive legacy of colonial patriarchy more than its legal system. Dutch laws were the absolute tools of subjugation for the endemic perpetuation and regulation of its "system of privilege" (Johnson 232). Therefore, when the lowly concubine comes before the mighty Dutch court and accuses them of wrongdoing instead, it is indeed a tribute to the strength and viability of her survivor ideology. Ontosoroh is put on trial when Mellema was murdered and appears in the Dutch court that would otherwise have barred her entry because of her race and status. The bigoted Dutch Court insists that Ontosoroh speak "Javanese," (287) even though she communicates "in flawless Dutch," an action by the Court which demonstrates another hegemonic attempt by her colonial masters to exert their imperial control. In a heated attempt to put Ontosoroh, the Native in her place, the irate Dutch prosecutor lays down the Dutch structure of their strictly observed caste system:

'She [Annelies] is an Indo, an Indo, she's above you! Minke is a Native, though with *forum privilegiatum*, the right to appear before this court, meaning he's above you, Nyai, ... But Miss Annelies remains above Natives forever.'

Colonial patriarchy perpetuates its ideology through its courts, but it is simultaneously blind to its own bigotry. Despite their intimidation, the Court fails to silence the adversarial handmaiden from Java.

Instead, by a sudden twist of events, the Dutch court finds itself unexpectedly tried and cross-examined by Ontosoroh. It begins when the naive Dutch prosecutor, in the process of establishing a murder motive proceeds to denigrate Ontosoroh's family by asking how she would permit "such improper relations" to occur between Minke and Annelies who are perceived to be sleeping together, even though they were unmarried. Although the prosecutor's irrelevant question succeeds only in diverting attention away from Mellema's murder, it leads Ontosoroh to question the Court's motive instead. Ontosoroh suggests that the Court's harassment of Minke is prompted by his "Native" (Toer 287) racial status. By forcing the race question, Ontosoroh is, in turn, imputing the Dutch court of racial discrimination.

Ontosoroh then seizes the opportunity to implicate the Dutch on their double moral standards for their accusations regarding Minke's and Annelise's relationship, when they, themselves are guilty of turning a blind eye to their own men consorting with native women like her, in concubinage. Fearlessly, she interrogates them about "Indos," like her daughter, who was born with the "ties of slavery" and yet "they [her parents] were never challenged by the law" (287). Instead, she continues: "Europeans are able to purchase Native women just as I was purchased" implicating the Dutch of their own duplicity, by operating on one promiscuous level for themselves and another for the indigenous Natives. Before Ontosoroh is dragged away from the court, she offers one last searing commentary about her oppressors by demanding: "Who turned me into a concubine? Who turned us all into nyais?" (288) Deftly, Ontosoroh herself answered her own politically charged questions, defiantly stating: "European gentlemen, made masters." Ontosoroh's outburst "silenced" the court as if stunned by this "Native woman" who "had now become the unofficial prosecutor, plaintiff against the European race—a race now ridiculing their own deeds." Ontosoroh's survivor ideology not only withstands the test of racial

bias, it emboldens her to confront the deceit and hypocrisy of her colonial oppressors by putting them on trial.

“Oppressive systems” depend on “consensus” (Johnson 163) in order to thrive and maintain power and control, and imperial Dutch rule over the Indies is no exception. Eventually, the oppressor’s hand subjugates Nyai Ontosoroh. Dutch citizens with the consent of Dutch laws confiscate Ontosoroh’s business and property. Because her concubine status is illegal under Dutch laws and she lacks the proper documentation to prove that her business enterprise is part of “her property,” (329) even though “the land was bought in [her] name,” she is dispossessed of both her property and her children. The deceased Mellema’s “entire property and wealth” is instead divided among Mellema’s legitimate son from Holland and Ontosoroh’s biological children by Mellema, who are acknowledged by him, and therefore, considered as his possessions. Because Annelies is deemed “legally under age” (327) under Dutch laws, Mellema’s Dutch son is appointed as her legal guardian and she is expatriated to Holland, like a commodity, even though documents from the “civil registry office” (326) could prove that Ontosoroh is Annelies’ birth-mother. Consenting Dutch laws assist in plundering Ontosoroh, and they even have the power to override her inalienable rights of parenthood.

Is there a public outcry of exploitation and violation of human rights? The only outright opposition to autocratic Dutch arbitration comes from the Islamic community protesting Dutch refusal to acknowledge Annelies’ eventual officialized Islamic marriage to Minke. However, even as armed Madurese natives attempt to prevent Annelies’ expatriation, they are defeated by Marechaussee troops from the Netherlands Indies Army. Finally, Ontosoroh and a very small group of people with a growing national consciousness of Dutch repression could only form one tenuous and solitary voice against the oppressor’s machinations.

Ontosoroh's survivor ideology informs us of the significance of her resolute spirit, her strong moral center, and the utility of self-improvement in the areas of education, business, and language that help her to fight another day. Despite being coerced into concubinage, a contemptible position of shame and humiliation, Ontosoroh comes back fighting for her personhood. She rebounds and returns a counter-punch, against her colonial Dutch masters' racism and her patriarchal parents' sexism. In this intersection where racism meets sexism, as a social outcast, she dismantles cultural taboos of repressive filial piety for liberating cultural legitimacy. Although the balance of power unfairly tilts in favor of her oppressors, namely, the imperia, racist Dutch and the servile, sexist Javanese patriarchy, the adversarial handmaiden remains undaunted to the very end. Her survivor spirit beckons us beyond the grave to avenge her of the repressive deeds of her colonial masters and patriarchal fathers, by engaging in her cautionary tale.

CHAPTER 3

THE INTERSUBJECTIVE *COMFORT WOMAN*

The protagonist of Nora Okja Keller's *Comfort Woman* is subjugated to three forms of patriarchal oppressions: Japanese colonizers of Korea, Korean society's adherence to Confucian patriarchal ideology, and an American missionary's abuse of Judeo-Christian scriptures. During Japan's oppressive rule of Korea from 1910 to 1945, Japan forbids the speaking of the Korean lingua franca and instead enforces "Japanese" as "the national language" (Jayawardena 217). Koreans are "ordered to change their names to Japanese ones and to swear allegiance to the Emperor." Keller's Korean protagonist, "Soon Hyo" (Keller 195) who is enslaved as one of the "*Jungun Ianfu*, 'military comfort women'" (16) (Japanese translation) assumes the Japanese name of "Akiko" (16). Among countless atrocities committed by the Japanese colonizers, one of the most heinous of crimes inflicted against Korean women is their systematic rape in "comfort stations" —a euphemism for military brothels established to serve Japanese soldiers during World War II. Many of these women, who suffered from acts of violence, come away experiencing post-traumatic stress disorders and other aberrant behaviors stemming from such vile treatment. For those who endured and "pulled through," one wonders what informs their survivor ideology. Despite Akiko's three oppressors' attempts to subjugate her, I will maintain that she manages to forge a survivor ideology that enables her to cope with the trauma of being a sex slave, empowers her to sustain financial autonomy, and restores her identity through maternity.

Japanese soldiers, imbued with patriarchy and by acting as colonizers coerced Korean women such as Akiko into sexual slavery. In his article entitled: "Korean 'Comfort Women':

The Intersection of Colonial Power, Gender, and Class,” sociologist Professor Pyong Gap Min writes: “Korean victims of sexual slavery are similar to other Korean groups of Pacific War victims in that they all were forcibly drafted for one or another type of service to the Japanese military and inhumanly treated mainly because they were subjects of Japan's colony” (944). In contrast to the widespread coercion of Korean women in general, “Japanese virgins” were less likely to be recruited for the “military brothels,” because these actions “would have resulted in the Japanese public's distrust of the military,” according to Yoshimi, as recorded by Min. Instead, “Japanese comfort women mainly were prostitutes and others engaged in entertainment jobs.” However, the Japanese Imperial Army forcefully coerced “young, unmarried [Korean] virgins in their teens and early 20s ... for sexual slavery.” While Japanese comfort women “were paid for their services,” the “Korean sexual slaves usually served a large number of enlisted men and were treated more brutally than were Japanese comfort women,” according to Kurahashi and Yun, as reported by Min. These historical events occurring in Korea at the time of WWII are personified in Keller’s *Comfort Woman*, circulating as “rumors” about “girls bought or stolen from villages outside the city, [being] sent to Japanese recreation centers” (19). Keller’s Akiko, however, is betrayed by her eldest sister, who sold her to the soldiers to procure a marriage “dowry” (18) for herself.

As history bears out, the beginnings of systematic sexual slavery originated in the era of “Meiji imperial Japan,” where the “subordination of each family and woman to the state and the emperor was a unique aspect of the Japanese patriarchal system...” (Min 947). Each family pays homage to the emperor as its supreme “head,” and “women were considered important mainly because of their childbearing potential to produce future soldiers,” according to Chung, as noted by Min. Eventually, “the establishment of military sexual slavery by the Japanese government

had much to do with the notion, prevalent in Meiji imperial Japan, that women could be used in any way to serve the purpose of the Japanese state and the emperor” (Min 947-948). Therefore, the “subordination of women to the state and the emperor under the state patriarchal system in imperial Japan became the ideological foundation for the establishment of military brothels to “comfort” Japanese soldiers” (947) stated Min. Once these brothels of prostitution became licensed and legalized, the Japanese patriarchal rationale did not hesitate to apply the precedent beyond national borders.

The objectification of women results in reducing them to objects of shame and worthlessness and is brought about by patriarchal rationale. Sociologist Allan G. Johnson, in his book entitled *The Gender Knot*, writes: “The more that men pursue control and judge themselves by their success of it, the more they experience everyone and everything outside themselves as objects” (200-201). Because objects “...can simply be handled, used, or dealt with as their betters see fit,” Johnson continues, “this provides a rationale for controlling others: that male superiority gives men the *right*, if not the obligation, to control women...” (201). The Japanese executed a brutal campaign during their occupation of Korea, affirming the very attitude that Johnson describes. Sociologist Pyong Gap Min reported that “the Japanese government considered the Korean people--whether men or women--mainly as instruments to be expended for its war purpose,” (944) according to Yun, writes Min. As a result, “they believed that Korean young women could be used effectively for their war efforts by meeting the sexual desires of their soldiers.” The same concept of patriarchy’s rationale used for facilitating a subjugating agenda is also discussed by noted feminist theorist and psychoanalyst, Jessica Benjamin in her book entitled *The Bonds of Love*: “rationalization ... sets the stage for a form of domination that appears to be gender-neutral, indeed, to have no subject at all” which “dovetails with the oedipal

denial of woman's subjectivity, [reducing] the other to object" (185). Historically, it is not apparent that the Imperial Japanese Army's rationale for the systematic creation of "comfort stations," ever considered the ethical implications of their military policy. If they did, they must have looked the other way.

Capitalizing upon their hegemonic status, the Japanese Imperial Army raped, brutalized and dismembered any resistance to their power, urged on by their imperial anima, and devoid of any normal morality. "Prejudice against their colonial subjects," (Min 944) was rife among the Japanese and justified their inhumane brutality against Korean women. Min wrote that even though "Japanese soldiers who used military brothels committed extreme forms of abuse and humiliation against Korean comfort women... the Japanese military authorities did not try to discourage their soldiers from treating Korean sexual slaves inhumanly." Min's sociological report substantiates Keller's description of Akiko's experiences in *Comfort Woman*.

Akiko's oppression is caused by the Japanese Imperial Army led by the Emperor of Japan, the supreme patriarchal authority. Her tragic experience dramatizes Japanese sadism and monstrosity: "...I heard men laughing and betting on how many men one comfort woman could service before she split open.../...I heard a man sigh loudly as he urinated on the body where he had just pumped his seed.../... I heard the grinding of trucks delivering more men and more military supplies: food rations... new women to replace the ones that died, their bodies erupting in pus" (Keller 64-65). Akiko explains how women infected with venereal disease were treated: "when the fist-sized eruptions swelled the women shut and spread to other parts, climbing toward lips and eyes, the officers took the women out of the camp...I believe the officers abandoned them in the woods, [as] disposable commodities" (147). Finally, Akiko narrates how a "commanding officer" exterminates incapacitated comfort women who could no longer

provide their services by riddling them with “a spray of random bullets;” women, who were suffering from diseases that distorted their faces with blisters or who were pregnant. While their remains “...burned, smoke and ash soaking the camps with the smell of roasting meat, he whistled the “*Kimigayo*” his national anthem.” The callousness and depravity along with the notion that the spoils of war belongs to the victor, leave a traumatized Akiko hauntingly recounting atrocities, so paralyzed in spirit that she is unable to react in any other way.

While a colonial power subjugates her people and her body, Akiko is also dominated and fettered by her cultural Confucian ideology that Korea shares with Japan as well. Both Korean and Japanese patriarchies objectify their women through their monolithic perpetuation of immutable Confucian values that originate from China, shaping and regulating their mores, culture, customs, and eventually their psyche. In her book entitled *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, concerning China, in the section designated as “Confucianism and Women,” sociology Professor Kumari Jayawardena writes that rigidly structured Confucian society “subject[s]” a woman to “‘Three Obediences’: males were always her superiors to whom obedience was due — to her father when unmarried, to her husband when married, and to her son when widowed” (170-171). Likewise, Korea’s “society became rigid and stratified along hierarchical lines with a woman deriving her status only from that of her father, husband or son” (214). In Japan, a Japanese woman is viewed as “merely a “‘borrowed womb’” according to Sievers as noted by Jayawardena. She is also expected to follow the same Confucian model of the “ideal woman” who “...should never disfigure her face with anger. She should be diffident in speech, never presuming to be familiar with her husband...she must endure without complaint” as “quoted in Vavich 1967:404” (229) recorded Jayawardena. Therefore, both Korea’s and

Japan's shared Confucian ideology further facilitates and abets Korean women's subjugation by their Japanese colonizers.

Clearly, Korean women occupy an inferior status with regard to their men at every stage of their lives. The "Confucian family system with its emphasis on domination by the male persisted in Korean society until modern times" observes Jayawardena (215). A married Korean woman "belonged to the family of her husband" continues Jayawardena, which is affirmed by Keller's Akiko's own mother. As a young student, Akiko's mother demonstrates an independent and revolutionary streak, but she is eventually subsumed into her husband's family upon her marriage. Her subjugation is reflected in the following reminder from her parent in-laws: "Marriage is not about love but about duty. About having sons. About keeping the family name" (Keller 180). Her mother then "bowed twice to her new in-laws ... [and] never heard her name again." Jayawardena again affirms that Korean "women did not have names, being identified only by their relationship to their menfolk" (215). Korea's rigid Confucian ideology subjugates the woman's role within the familial structure and consigns her selfhood to oblivion.

Confucian ideology subordinates women through societally imposed notions of feminine chastity and exacerbates their degraded status. Yi-Ik, a Korean philosopher and social critic, as well as a Confucian scholar of the 18th century, ruminating on women's education writes: "Reading and learning are the domains of men. For a woman it is enough if she shows the Confucian virtues of diligence, frugality and chastity" (Jayawardena 216). Furthermore, women are "required to protect their chastity under all circumstances and to swear loyalty to their husbands" (171). However, Confucian chastity is such a monolithic concept of modesty that it hinders women from throwing off their yoke of bondage to men, and leads women to loathe themselves, despite the fact that they, themselves are often the innocent victims of sexual abuse.

Nora Keller's protagonist knows that once she "entered the recreation camps, that [her] home village of Sulsulham was as far away as heaven for [her]," (101) because as a "fallen woman," (94) going home is no longer an option for her. Her defilement at the hands of the Japanese soldiers would bring dishonor to her family and would relegate her to a life of perpetual reproach and shame. Instead, she prefers death.

Akiko describes the woman whose mother carried a knife for self-protection, the knife representing "her pride in her virtue" (144). The glorified mother became the envy of all because she possessed the "right to kill herself," should her person be violated. However, since Akiko is unsuccessful in fighting off her rapists, she considers herself a "coward." When she arrives at the missionaries' building where they attempt to bathe her, she "wanted to tell them that it would do no good; I would never become clean enough to keep" (62). She perceives herself so debased, as never to be "worthy" again for anyone. In fact, in a self-nullifying posture, she considers herself as "dead" (93). When the opportunity to replace her enforced Japanese name of "Akiko" availed itself, she does not even wish to re-appropriate her original Korean birth-name of "Soon Hyo," because she feels "... after what had happened to [her], she had no right to use the name [she] was born with" (93). Not only were sexually abused Korean women subjugated by their Japanese perpetrators, but also by their own patriarchal canon's notion of chastity that dictates their moral worth and continues to fetter them even when they are freed from their captors.

While Keller's *Comfort Woman* dramatizes historical events in Korea perpetrated by the Japanese, the trauma of systematic desecration of "comfort women" continues to shame them into silence even years after atrocities have been documented. Sociologist Min recorded that: "Even in the early 1980s, sexual abuse victims in South Korea, whether married or not, rarely reported attacks to the police because of [the] stigma attached to sexual victims" according to

Lee and “the same stigma forced the victims of Japanese military sexual slavery to keep silent for half a century” (949). Professor Min’s article, alluded to earlier, included interviews with “76 Korean victims by members of the Research Association ... and [his] own interviews with 19 victims [who] reveal their horrible experiences at the hands of the Japanese military” (941). The interview of a former comfort woman is recorded as follows:

“When asked why she kept silent about her suffering for such a long period of time, Lee Young-Ok, a 73-year-old survivor of sexual slavery, responded, “At that time, a woman's chastity was considered more important than her life. How could I tell people I was daily raped by many soldiers. It would have been a great humiliation to my parents. Many times I regretted I came back home alive. It would have been better for me to die there... Yet, looking back I am angry at the fact that because of traditional Korean customs I had to hide my past without myself doing anything wrong” (Min 950).

Despite tortured testimonies given by former comfort women, some Japanese still deny the occurrence of these atrocities committed against these women which includes women from other Asian countries, as well as The Netherlands: “Japan’s [former] Prime Minister Shinzo Abe [2006-2007] has ... denied the existence of institutionalized sexual slavery of foreign women during Japanese imperialism in World War II, thereby nullifying the statement the Japanese government made in 1993 toward a recognition of the crimes committed against women in sexual servitude in military camps” notes Silvia Schultermundl in her article entitled “Writing Rape, Trauma, and Trans-nationality onto the Female Body: Matrilineal Em-body-ment in Nora Okja Keller’s *Comfort Woman*.” The Japanese denial of their World War II military prostitution

and their criminal role in acts against humanity only re-inflict psychological scars that such trauma engenders in these “comfort women.”

One wonders whether the traumatic impact goes beyond the physical aggression that such brutal experiences have on comfort women like Akiko. While the Japanese military’s rationale led them to their depraved acts against humanity, their victims are condemned to live in “altered states of existence.” Although Akiko physically survives the Japanese occupation and the violation of her body, the desecration of her emotional and mental psyche unhinges her ability to function “reasonably.” Keller’s narrative reveals how Akiko, now unable to sense her own personhood perceives herself as “the corpse that the soldiers brought back from the woods,” (21) referring to the deceased “Akiko 40,” whom she now replaces as the “new Akiko.” She feels she is “dead,” (93) even though she is “alive.” She personifies the ambiguous condition that postmodernists describe as the “eternal return with the loss of the distinction between the real and the apparent world...a phantasm or simulacrum” as Gary Aylesworth notes in his article entitled “Postmodernism.” Akiko now exists only as a shadow of her original self. Eventually, living as a naturalized American citizen, in Hawaii, after her American husband’s demise, Akiko’s psyche occupies different worlds in order to escape her traumatized past. In order to defend her mother’s mental condition before the incredulous Reno, upon the latter’s discovery of Akiko’s erratic behavior, her daughter, Beccah cries: “She’s not crazy!” (Keller 7) even though overwhelming evidence points to her insanity.

Referring to the “dissolution of epistemic coherence” Gary Aylesworth evokes the thoughts from French philosopher and literary theorist, Jean-François Lyotard’s *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, 1984, in which Lyotard describes how “the subject moves from position to position, now as sender, now as addressee, now as referent...” and “the loss of a

continuous meta-narrative therefore breaks the subject into heterogeneous moments of subjectivity that do not cohere into an identity.” Keller vividly captures Akiko’s traumatized memories by discursively narrating her tale from Akiko’s perspective to her daughter, Beccah’s viewpoint, and back again to Akiko’s, conveying a desperate melancholia and reflecting Akiko’s disparate persona. As a result, “in such narratives, the problem of recalling and recreating a past life involves organizing the inescapable but often disabling force of memory and negotiating its fragmentary intrusions with increasing, if partial, understanding” noted Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson in their *Reading Autobiography*. Although the Americanized Akiko is now freed from her oppressors, psychologically she is displaced and no longer knows who she really is. She slides instead into an aberrant sub-narrative in which she uses three different identities of Akikos: her virginal self, her debased self, and her autonomous self. Perpetually mourning for her pristine but lost state of girlhood, while rejecting her degraded status of a “battalion slave,” (Keller 193) she suppresses the “pain of memory” (Smith and Watson) even as she experiences her newly-acquired state of selfhood.

Akiko’s post military-camp days are filled with recurring thoughts of her camp experiences, the cognizance that is symptomatic of the post-traumatic stress of being a sex slave. Cathy Caruth in her book entitled *Unclaimed Experience* writes that the “Greek *trauma*, or ‘wound,’ according to Freud “... is understood as a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind” (3). Elaborating further from Freud’s *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Caruth explains that this “wound of the mind—the breach in the mind’s experience of time, self, and the world—is not, like the wound of the body, a simple and healable event.” Instead, the damage is “...not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor” (4). Although, Akiko’s afflicted subconscious does not

manifest itself externally during her stay with the missionaries, her internal trauma reenacts in the form of reechoing and haunting memories of the camp experiences even after arriving within safe walls: “Invading my daily routine at the mission house, shattering the gaps between movement and silence, were the gruntings of soldier after soldier and the sounds of flesh slapping against flesh” (Keller 64).

So traumatized is Akiko by the bestial camp experience, that when her preacher husband-to-be “...slap[s] the pulpit for emphasis, [she hears instead] ... the sounds of women’s naked buttocks being slapped as they were paraded in front of a new arrival of troops” and “when the congregation stood, opening and riffling through their black books,” she hears instead “...the shrieking of bullets ricocheting at the feet of women the soldiers were momentarily bored with” (70).

Caruth continues that trauma is “always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available” (4). Finally, “this truth, in its delayed appearance and its belated address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language.” As a result, Akiko’s post-traumatized stress later manifests itself in her consorting with the spirits as a shaman, as well as indulging in other seemingly aberrant behavior.

In her nightmarish state of aberrancy, what informs Akiko’s survivor ideology? Ironically, her bizarre lifestyle as a shaman enables her to secure a sufficient income to maintain a “survivor ideology.” Despite the nightmarish trauma that constantly haunts her, Akiko with the help of Reno, assumes a mediating identity as a shaman in the turmoil of dissolving selfhood. Opportunistic “Auntie Reno,” (5) her employer, who promptly recognizes Akiko’s uncanny “gift” (9) of knowing Reno’s private life narrative without her prior intimation to Akiko, quickly

advertises her as a “renowned fortune-teller and spirit medium in Japan and Korea” (11). She “...knew suffahrin’ like I no can even imagine” testifies Reno (203). She “can travel of dis world into hell, cause she already been there and back and know the way” attests Reno (203). As a result of the income from the séances she conducts, she becomes financially independent, eventually paying for her house in full, so that her daughter will not be saddled with debt upon her death. Akiko even manages to create a bank account for Beccah. Therefore, by communing with the spirits in her hyperrealistic world where the line between reality and fantasy blurs, Akiko manages to sustain a supportable living for herself and her daughter.

Akiko’s survivor ideology would be impossible without the agency of her alter ego, “Induk,” (5) a paranormal spirit in Korean shamanism, who satisfies her inter-subjective need. The most aberrant manifestation of Akiko’s person is seen through her relationship with the perceived spirit of deceased “Akiko 40,” her compatriot who appears to her in the form and personality of “Induk.” It is Induk who eventually actuates a survivor perspective that helps her cope with her “insanity.” In order to tenably function in her altered state of mind, Akiko needs to relate to someone or to something at a supranatural, psychic level that the people in her life such as Reno, Beccah, and Richard Bradley, her husband could never attain. In contrast, Induk succeeds in assuming the paranormal, interrelated entity that fulfils Akiko’s disembodied need to become her inter-subjective alter ego. In another book by Jessica Benjamin entitled *Like Subjects, Love Objects* she writes, “Intersubjective theory postulates that the other must be recognized as another subject in order for the self to fully experience his or her subjectivity in the other’s presence” (30). Akiko recognizes Induk as another “subject” just like her, having undergone the same hellish life she did. Consequently, Akiko perceives Induk to be returning the

recognition by communicating with her beyond the grave, a supernatural event that occurs in the hour of her darkest abjection.

By assuming the different roles of rescuer, mentor, collaborator, and companion, Induk commissions Akiko's survivor ideology. It is rescuer Induk who finds her "sprawled next to an unnamed stream" (Keller 36), resuscitates her with "ginseng" and "stroke[s] her head" after she escapes from the military camp. It is mentor Induk who insists that she uses her "hands and knees" and instructs her "to climb" (38) out of the river to save herself and continue her struggle for freedom, even when she was physically drained having just had her baby forcibly aborted from her womb with a stick, the night before her escape. It is collaborator Induk who speaks for her and directs her to Manshin Ahjima, an old shaman, who in turn hands her over to the American missionaries. Finally, companion Induk accompanies her "not only across the country but across the world, to become [her] guardian" (104). Due to their shared tortured past, Akiko forges a sustainable and unbreakable bond with Induk that eventually helps her to restructure a sustainable survivor ideology, despite suffering from cognitive dissonance engendered by systemic Japanese defilement.

Induk also assumes the inter-subjective maternal figure of "Omoni" (180) or "mother" for Akiko, and symbolically represents both her deceased and exemplary mother and the collective national consciousness of her lost motherland of Korea. According to Benjamin's *Like Subjects, Love Objects*, "feminist critics of psychoanalysis have suggested that the conceptualization of the first other, the mother, as an object underlies this theoretical lacuna" (31). When Induk appears to the battered and dazed Akiko at the stream after she makes her escape from the Japanese military camp, Akiko first perceived Induk as her "mother," (36) as "the boundaries between them [Akiko's mother and Induk] melted, blending their features, merging their spirits." Akiko

has always looked up to her own biological mother as a "...a princess...a student...a revolutionary...a wife who knew her duty. And a mother who loved her daughters..." (182). Like her admirable mother, Induk, or Akiko 40 while she was alive, exhibits exemplary conduct by courageously inspiring the other comfort women in the camp. Eventually, she sacrifices herself by verbally denouncing her perpetrator's "invasion of her country and her body" (20). In her final hours, Induk releases a rallying cry, shouting "I am Korea..." Now deceased, Induk comes to Akiko's rescue as a protective mother would in her darkest hour of need. When Akiko gives birth to Beccah, it is Induk who educates her about her own maternal body, just as Akiko's own mother would if she had been alive. It is Induk who passes on maternal wisdom to her daughter. It is Induk who ameliorates Akiko's chances of survival by assuming the spirit of intersubjectivity alluded to by Jessica Benjamin earlier.

Beccah, Akiko's daughter is also an integral part of Akiko's survivor ideology. Akiko needs Beccah, who was born in the same zodiac month as her own birth mother to materialize her need for maternal intersubjectivity, while Induk responds to her supernaturally. As Akiko searches in Beccah for clues of her own deceased mother, Beccah becomes "this link to the dead" as well as "the only living thing [she] love[s]" (18). This inter-relatedness connecting death and life brings about the maternal intersubjectivity that helps Akiko thrive, an intersubjectivity enabling her to make sense of her trauma. As she nurses, Beccah, "her heat invades ... and becomes mine, her heart beats against mine, becoming mine, becoming me, and gives me life" (55). Subject to subject, she nurtures Beccah as the infant responds to her. In contrast, Akiko could not relate to "the dolls, stacked against each other in the closet, staring at us through the doors and walls with their unblinking, sightless eyes." Compared to their lifelessness, a real life baby like Beccah brings about a maternal intersubjective bonding in the

definition of her renewed life as a mother. It enables her to replace her former painful object-experience as a sex slave. While Korean-American Beccah struggles to understand her mother, a mother who is clearly “the Other” in America’s collective consciousness, Akiko on the other hand needs Beccah’s affirmation to confirm her maternal status. This is all the more significant because Akiko whose “insides [were] too bruised and battered,” (15) and “impossible to properly heal” engendered by her Japanese abusers shocked her doctors by conceiving. When Beccah did not wish to assume the responsibility of having children of her own, Akiko turns to her and says: “...how will you know how much I love you if you don’t have your own children?” Akiko’s maternal love for Beccah reaffirms her own subjectivity, the crucial component sorely needed to build her fragile survivor ideology.

Akiko’s final round of oppression comes in the patriarchal form of Richard Bradley, her American preacher husband, a man who attempts to subjugate her through his abuse of biblical scriptures. By doing so, he puts her survivor ideology through the final test. Only this time, she emerges the victor. Seizing upon her defenseless handmaiden’s status, Bradley first attempts to subjugate Akiko by imposing marriage. While his marriage proposition assumes the cloak of legitimacy, it also facilitates the consummation of his lust for her. Although Bradley genuinely attempts to help Akiko before their marriage by his empathetic desire to understand her troubled past, he proceeds to marry her despite his failure to arrive at a clear understanding of her post-traumatic stress. Clearly, he wants to fulfill his carnality first, before attending to her complex psychological needs. From Akiko’s sordid camp experiences, she sees through preacher Bradley’s lechery: “he wanted me—a young girl—not for his God but for himself (95). Even one of Bradley’s co-missionaries warns him of the scriptural sin of lasciviousness in an attempt to have him reconsider his decision to marry Akiko, a woman who is clearly unprepared for

marriage. However, while Bradley refutes the foregoing dissenter by counter-quoting another scripture for being judgmental, he intimates to Akiko later in their marriage, that “it is better to marry than to burn...and I am burning for you,” (106). While the Apostle Paul warns the Corinthian church (King James 1 Cor. 6.9) to eschew this lustful predicament, Bradley misuses the same biblical passage to grant him the legitimacy to pursue his lechery, even at the expense of Akiko’s predisposition in the matter. By lusting after Akiko, he objectifies her all over again, just as the Japanese soldiers who violated her.

Bradley again misuses the Bible for his own ends to convert Akiko to Christianity. In order to make her his wife, he would first have to ensure that she becomes a Christian, because believers are not to be “unevenly yoked” (Keller 101) in marriage. After all, the Apostle Paul, in 2 Cor. 6.14 stresses an uncompromising adherence to the purity of the Christian faith through the marital union of believers, not non-believers. However, in Bradley’s capacity as an exemplary “shepherd” (101) of his flock, he misappropriates this scripture to baptize Akiko, even though she does not embrace his faith. As a result of her coerced conversion, Akiko feels “empty, desolate, [and] abandoned,” (103) when she arose from her baptism through immersion. Instead of alleviating Akiko’s attendant psychological problems, Bradley subjugates her further by enforcing her Christian conversion. In an ironic twist, Akiko turns to Induk, the paranormal spirit in Korean shamanism, for her “salvation,” (96) instead of turning to God, and by doing so she rejects Bradley’s Christianity altogether.

Bradley continues to misapply the use of Biblical scriptures for his own benefit and at Akiko’s expense. While he commands her to submit to him, being the “head of the wife and savior of her body,” (112) citing authority to do so from the Apostle Paul’s letter to the Ephesian church, in Ephesians 5.22-23, Bradley conveniently neglects the rest of the biblical, conjugal

injunctions. The consecutive verses from Ephesians 5.25-33, also require that a husband love his wife just as his own body. While biblical scriptures clearly delineate a patriarchal hierarchy, Bradley chooses to dispense spousal sovereignty without any due consideration for Akiko's subjectivity. Instead, he disregards Paul's injunction for husbands to love their wives, and facilitates Akiko's return to oppression.

But, once again, Akiko turns to Induk to undermine her loveless marriage, which in turn informs her survivor ideology. Clearly, Akiko is equally guilty of taking advantage of her sham marriage of convenience by accepting Bradley, since she feels she could no longer return to her village of Sulsulham as an honorable woman. While she is blameworthy for her own duplicity in accepting Bradley's marriage proposal, it is Bradley's blatant disregard in engendering her "a Christian...a wife...an American" (104), all in quick succession, that exacerbates her subjugation. Even though Akiko becomes a naturalized American citizen through her marriage to Bradley, she could not identify with America's collective consciousness because she realizes that she has "no face and no place in this country" (110). However, it is Induk who radicalizes Akiko's cultural perspective by enculturating her survivor ideology, by asking her to "suck, to taste, to make ... America...home, [her] own" (113). Finally, in a spirit of subversion and aversion, Akiko experiences sexual ecstasies with Induk, even while she and Bradley engage in sex. Bradley's eventual realization of his wife's grotesque fantasies causes him to lose his sexual desire for her, feeling that "he had damned himself" (148) through their sexual union. Akiko knowing "then that he would not use [her] again like that," is finally liberated from all forms of sexual subjugation. To Akiko, Bradley's carnality, his Christian faith, his conjugal rights, and his nation—all represent varying degrees of patriarchal oppression. In an attempt to throw off the yoke of bondage, Akiko uses Induk to subvert Bradley's patriarchal enforcement of her

wifely submission. Eventually, she outlives Bradley, freed of all her past oppressions to forge an independent survivor ideology, predicated on her own terms.

Keller's Akiko is thrice marginalized by patriarchy: indentured as a military sex slave by the imperial Japanese, relegated as a subaltern by her traditional Korean society, and finally exploited as a defenseless handmaiden by a lustful American missionary. But, despite being robbed of selfhood and agency, and experiencing dislocation and insanity, Akiko constructs a survivor ideology that helps her cope with sexual trauma and carnality, sustains a viable economic prosperity, and reclaims intersubjectivity through shamanism and maternity.

CHAPTER 4

THE AVENGING WOMAN WARRIOR

An autobiography makes possible the recollection of one's journey accounted and recapitulated through respective transactions and memoirs of life's events. However, autobiography also presents the opportunity to investigate one's history, to mediate opposing claims and to appropriate new overtures for selfhood. "Autobiographical acts have always taken place at conflicted cultural sites where discourses intersect, contradict, and displace one another, where narrators are pulled and tugged into complex and contradictory self-positionings through a performative dialogism" (109) write authors, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson in *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narrative*. As a result, new perspectives of selfhood and new identities are born as demonstrated in Maxine Hong Kingston's autobiography entitled *The Woman Warrior* as she confronts ancestral Chinese patriarchy for their marginalization of women. Wielding the autobiography as both a defensive and a combative weapon, just as a warrior would engage the sword to defend honor, to emancipate kith and kin, and to appropriate selfhood, Kingston deconstructs her mother's confusing tales and contends with her monolithic cultural ideology that represses and subjugates young Maxine. As a swordsman of letters, she appropriates 'differentiated speech,' (Vice 18) that Bakhtin's *heteroglossia* prescribes, by assailing multiple "speaking positions" (Smith 21) to subvert the oppressor's voice and inscribes a self-determining register. Despite the complexity of self-representation, I would suggest that Kingston forges a survivor ideology through imaginative misprisions that subvert the authority of her mother's "talk-stories," refashioning both patriarchal and matriarchal power to reassert a fearless agenda of selfhood.

Lee Sangwha in her article entitled “The Patriarchy in China: An Investigation of Public and Private Spheres” alludes to patriarchal rule dominating the “Zhou era” in ancient China. “Under the patriarchal system, the norm that women were required to be submissive and self-sacrificing was a norm that was strengthened and reproduced by the ideology that women were psychologically and physically weak” writes Sangwha. Furthermore, “girls grew up learning the inferior value of their existence and gender norms, and they kept reproducing an unequal gender system” she adds. However, by entitling her autobiography “*Woman Warrior*,” Kingston posits an adversarial posture, customarily enacted in the male sphere, antithetical to ancient Chinese women, but conveying a devious attempt to contend with patriarchy.

Using her autobiography as an ethnographic tool, Kingston informs her audience, not only about traditional China’s social attitudes and customs, attitudes and customs oppressive to women, but she also demonstrates the transaction of cultural currency in these borderlands for the forging of a hybridized identity. Through her narrative entitled *White Tigers*, Kingston intimates these degrading attitudes towards women upheld by both her family and the immigrant enclave where she resides in America. Compared to Chinese men, Chinese women conduct their belittled lives without agency in traditional China. Such nullifying sensibilities accompany Kingston’s immigrant parents to America. Chinese girls born in America continue to be devalued because ““there’s no profit in raising girls”” (Kingston 48) states one of Kingston’s parents. In fact, it is ““better to raise geese than girls”” he or she continues. In another narrative entitled *A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe*, Kingston narrates how a great uncle berates the girls in the family reducing them to “maggots,” (191). In addition, the “villagers” (48) also shared the common sentiment that ““feeding girls is feeding cowbirds,”” causing Kingston to “thrash on the floor and screaming so hard [she] couldn’t talk.” Even when she revisits her parents’ home after

living on her own, she felt she “had to get out of hating range,” (55) upon reviewing her parents’ “ink drawing of poor people snagging their neighbors’ flotage with long flood hooks and pushing the girl babies on down the river.” However, her culture seems to be apathetic to its own negating and nullifying sexism. Only later, did Kingston realize that when China turned Communist, after her parents left the country, China (PRC) “was against girl slavery and girl infanticide” (191). Also, Chinese parents do not reveal their true sentiments: “That’s what we’re supposed to say. That’s what Chinese say. We like to say the opposite” (204) confesses Kingston’s mother. However, their oppositional speech acts inadvertently beget the revolutionary zeal of interlocution in their exasperated daughter, who is desperately seeking for self-affirmation and self-definition in the New World.

Assuming the ideological “I,” (Smith and Watson 61) Kingston sets out to explore “the concept of personhood” by championing an emancipating persona to replace the monolithic identity constructs of her culture. In *Reading Autobiography*, authors Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson write: “immigrant narratives...become sites through which formerly marginal or displaced subjects explore the terms of their cultural identities and their diasporic allegiances” (107). At this very site, Kingston discovers the difficulty of drawing clear lines to demarcate where Chinese ethnicity ends and American identity begins as Chinese-Americans, defined as “...people of full or half Chinese ancestry; American-born or naturalized immigrants...” (Ling 136). In a dialogic attempt to draw in her sub-culture into her autobiography, Kingston strikes an adjudicating posture by asking her addressees:

“Chinese-Americans, when you try to understand what things in you are Chinese,

how do you separate what is peculiar to childhood, to poverty, insanities, one family, your mother who marked your growing with stories, from what is Chinese? What is Chinese tradition and what is the movies?" (8)

Straddling between two cultures, "American born Chinese American writers, like Kingston ... tend to be more individualistic and to have an inward focus," (137) writes Amy Ling in her essay entitled "Chinese American Writers: The tradition behind Maxine Hong Kingston." Their "centers are not stable and single," she continues and their "consciousness, as W.E.B. Dubois pointed out for African Americans, is double; their vision bifocal and fluctuating." Kingston discovers that the quest for a stable identity may be an elusive process.

However, despite the challenges of arriving at a stable status of personhood, the autobiography affords Kingston, new liberties in the transaction of cultural preferences, in the refashioning of identities, and in the crossing over to other borderlands of the New World order. For example, Americanized Kingston rejects Chinese immigrants' "loud voices, unmodulated to American tones," (Kingston 13). She prefers "walking erect (knees straight, toes pointed forward, not pigeon-toed, which is Chinese-feminine) and speaking in an inaudible voice," as she attempts to "turn [her]self [into] the American feminine." Prodded by stirrings of evolving hybridity, "assimilated" (Smith and Watson 106) Chinese-Americans such as Kingston could pen their "histories as new American subjects". In so doing, they could redefine their selfhood through their coming-of-age experiences, and locate their unique positioning as hyphenated identities in the New World. Therefore, from such de-centered perspectives, assimilating Kingston explores her own repressions, re-writes her ethnic past, and forges a new sub-cultural consciousness reflecting the shifting ethos of swirling trans-cultural transactions.

Appropriating dialogic discourse afforded through the autobiographical forum, Kingston further accomplishes self-affirming goals by deploying various guises of the “autobiographical ‘I’[s],” namely: “the narrating ‘I,’” “the narrated ‘I,’” and the “ideological ‘I’” (Smith and Watson 58). Using these “marker[s] of self-referentiality” at cultural and ideological junctions, she projects a multitude of voices: self-inquiring, colluding, dissenting, subverting, advocating, transforming, and finally, liberating, to engender selfhood. From the outset, Kingston realizes the problem she has with her mother’s tales has to do with her struggle for her own self-representation. While she resorts to autobiography to distill a clearly defined ideological voice in her enquiry into “the concept of personhood,” (Smith and Watson 61), she also begins to explore notions of representation in the larger world in which she lives as a Chinese-American. Through the prism of another dominant culture, America that she favors, Kingston perceives the Chinese “I,” (Kingston 166) as repressive, needing the complicated “seven strokes” to execute itself, as opposed to the American “I” that only needs “three strokes” to represent its bold and confident self. Upon assimilating America’s perceived exceptionalism with her own cultural values, Kingston begins to forge a hybrid ideology of autonomy in a personalized forum that showcases her appropriation of certain American freedoms circumscribing monolithic values.

Oppressed by her parents’ repressive ideology towards women, Kingston rebelliously begins her autobiography with a short narrative entitled *No Name Woman* by engaging in a double-voiced discourse to expose the rampant practice of sexism. While she engages the narrated “I” as the “subject of history,” (Smith and Watson 60) in narrating her disgraced aunt’s tale, she subverts patriarchy using the narrating “I,” as the “agent of discourse.” Through the narrated “I,” she reveals her historical role as a subject-collaborator with her parents in “deliberately forgetting” (Kingston 18) her fallen aunt, for “fifty years” (19). They “want me to

participate in her punishment. And I have” (18) narrates Kingston. However, Kingston repositions and replaces the voice of collusion with the voice of dissension. She begins by rebelling against her mother’s injunction, autobiographically rewriting her family’s shame instead, to “devote pages of paper” (Kingston 19) to her aunt. Then, employing a covert subverter’s voice, she deconstructs her mother’s account of her fallen aunt’s story by recasting her as a liberated woman with her own sexual fantasies, assimilating her conventional Chinese aunt with more subjective liberties. In so doing, Kingston is also advocating for her own autonomous agenda.

The taboo topic of sex is not openly discussed in ancient China as evidenced by Kingston’s own intimation that “sex was unspeakable” (18). However, by broaching her aunt’s potentially sensual propensities, Kingston subtly conducts a revolutionary act against established patriarchy by calling for a reform of sorts. While her subversion marks her new status as a liberated Chinese American woman who is rejecting the conventional patronage of male privilege, at the expense of female honor, Kingston’s deliberate engagement confronts Chinese male sovereignty and accountability. Furthermore, by suggesting that Chinese women may also be capable of lechery, an exclusive man’s domain, she deconstructs the monolithic gender play of power, undermining ancestral patriarchy, and accords her aunt, subjectivity.

In addition, by using autobiography as an instigating tool, Kingston subverts the hegemonic voice of patriarchy by shifting the social and moral onus on to the males. Testing the limits of patriarchal patience, Kingston goes further to suggest that since a woman in ancient China could not afford the luxury of choice as she “always did as she was told,” (Kingston 9), hence, her aunt’s pregnancy is brought about by enforced rape, shifting dishonor and blame to the men. Kingston also accuses patriarchy of a double standard: “they expected her alone to keep

the traditional ways, which her brothers, now among the barbarians could fumble without detection” but “heavy, deep-rooted women [like Kingston’s ancestral aunt] were to maintain the past against the flood, safe for returning” (10). Kingston ascribes her aunt one final chance at selfhood saying: “...she was a spite suicide, drowning herself in the drinking water” (19) suggesting a recalcitrant persona capable of delivering the final oppositional blow. In this daring, re-casting process, she advocates an individualistic and subjective discourse through her memoirs, which in turn becomes an empowering act of rebellion and self-representation.

Capitalizing upon her hybridized identity, Kingston moves on to imbue Fa Mu Lan, the Chinese legendary heroine with a strong, narrating “I,” as a heroic agent of change in her *White Tigers* narrative. She sets out to deconstruct monolithic cultural myths and legends, replacing them with her sub-cultural notion of selfhood. From a different speaking position, Kingston sets out to construct another misprision of the Chinese legend of “Fa Mu Lan” to wrestle selfhood from the patriarchal prototype warrior, and refashion her to fit her Kingston’s Chinese-American notions of heroism. However, her deconstruction of the tale of the traditional Chinese heroine generates contentious debates especially among her own sub-culture’s critics,— many of whom condemn Kingston of her misappropriation of the Chinese folk tale of “Hua Mulan,” the legendary, female soldier, who takes her father’s place in the Chinese army. Taking issue with her artistic license, Kingston’s critics argue that she compromises “cultural authenticity and artistic integrity” (Wong 7). Frank Chin, one of her critics sarcastically writes: “Kingston ... confirm[s] the fantasy that everything sick and sickening about the white self-image is really Chinese,” (Chin 28). He alludes to her distortion of Chinese historiography, that he sees as resulting in a “fake China,” that only panders to “white fantasy” and not truly “Chinese-American history.”

At these cultural junctions, new representations of selfhood clash with conventional models and give rise to dissenting voices opposing or resisting change, stoking the controversial intensity of her autobiography. In Sau-Ling Wong's essay entitled "Autobiography as Guided Chinatown Tour?", Wong puts the finger on the pulse of the controversy contending that although Kingston's book is "billed as autobiography rather than fiction" yet "much of the book departs from the popular definition of autobiography as an unadorned factual account of a person's own life" (Wong 30). For proof of Kingston's liberal fictionalization, Wong cites the "deviations" (33) in Kingston's "Fa Mu Lan" with regard to her "tattooing of the woman warrior," as well as the "spirit-marriage to the waiting childhood sweetheart, a wish fulfilling inversion of the No Name Woman's fate, ... utterly unlikely in ancient China, considering the lowly place of women." Wong also notes that the "traditional Fa Mu Lan is never described as having been pregnant and giving birth to a child while in male disguise." Finally, Wong writes "the Fa Mu Lan of 'Mulan Shi' is a defender of the establishment, her spirit patriarchal as well as patriotic" which is "a far cry from a peasant rebel..." Clearly, Kingston is guilty in misappropriating the traditional Fa Mu Lan legend, and re-fashioning it to suit her evolving Chinese-American perspective.

However, it is this deployment of a fictionalized and hybridized heroine that marks the exact site of a cultural and psychological struggle, and decisively delivers an empowered selfhood, through a life-imitating-art styled autobiography. Commenting on Kingston's Fa Mu Lan, Wong observes that "the section on the girl's period of training in the mountains draws extensively on popular martial arts 'novels' or 'romances' (WUXIA XIAOSHUO) as well as from traditional fantasy lore on SHENXIAN ('immortals')," (33) indicating the workings of creative hybridity that informs Kingston's Fa Mu Lan. Despite critics' accusations of her fictionalized

reconstruction of the original woman warrior, Sidonie Smith, in her essay entitled “Filiality and Woman’s Autobiographical Storytelling” puts aside all negative criticism by focusing on the emancipated life of Kingston’s heroine instead. A woman who becomes a hero, as a result of unshackled agency: “this ‘life’ enables her to escape confinement in conventional female scripts and to enter the realm of heroic masculine pursuits—of education, adventure, public accomplishment, and fame” (Smith 157). Literally, the modified Fa Mu Lan becomes a metonymical trope for new and liberating heroics that her ancient construction would never allow.

Without doubt, Kingston symbolically uses her autobiography as a “cultural discourse” (Smith and Watson 38) to deliver an empowered “embodiment” of selfhood. Unlike the original Fa Mu Lan who exemplifies the mildly liberated handmaiden in a monolithic patriarchal system, Kingston’s Fa Mu Lan’s body is literally tattooed with “...oaths and names,” (Kingston 36) an act that is traditionally executed on men. Kingston’s Fa Mu Lan’s body is symbolically empowered as a “textual surface upon which a person’s life is inscribed” (Smith and Watson 37) just as “life narrative is a site of embodied knowledge because autobiographical narrators are embodied subjects.” Thus, Kingston’s autobiography aids in her own self-personification as she works out her personal skirmishes for selfhood in Fa Mu Lan’s heroics. Sidonie Smith’s essay “Filiality...” mentioned earlier reinforce the corresponding idea that “the identities of woman warrior and of woman narrator interpenetrate until biography becomes autobiography, until Kingston and Fa Mu Lan are one,” (157) underscoring their shared personae.

Kingston’s Fa Mu Lan is imbued with an aura of masculinity. After years of absence spent in training as a warrior, Fa Mu Lan’s return to her parents’ home is celebrated by her “parents kill[ing] a chicken ... as if they were welcoming home a son...” She inspires

unprecedented confidence that the "...villagers relinquished their real gifts to [her] — their sons" (38). Despite the tensions and hardships of war, she meets her future husband, undergoes pregnancy, her condition hidden by an "armor altered so that [she] looked like a powerful, big man" (41). After a successful military campaign, she arrives home to deliver her people from yet another oppressor, the exploitive baron and the rest of his clan. However, as she disrobes her military regalia, she settles down to being a wife and mother, as well as a dutiful daughter and daughter-in-law. Of Kingston's autobiography, Smith writes: "...the lines of her story as woman warrior and the lines of her text as woman autobiographer reproduced an androcentric paradigm of identity and selfhood and thereby serve the symbolic order in 'perfect filiality'" (158). Even Sau-Ling Wong who earlier proved Kingston's fictionalization of the legendary heroine concedes that she successfully "spurns the simplistic lesson of the traditional Fa Mu Lan tale, creating instead a potentially subversive woman warrior to whom even traditions yield" (Wong 45).

While there seems to be an intentional forgetting of her disgraced aunt in *No Name Woman*, and a collective remembering of Fa Mu Lan in *White Tigers*, Kingston ends her autobiography with an intense actualizing in *A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe*. Appropriating instigative and performative agency, she deploys the narrating "I" to bring about her complete transmutation from dutiful daughter to avenging swordsman of letters. She first takes issue with her mother's mutilation of her "frenum," (163) in order to loosen it says her mother, but incredulous Kingston perceives it as an attempt to silence her physically and symbolically. "If my mother was not lying she should not have cut more, ... because I have a terrible time talking" doubts Kingston, "or she should not have cut at all, tampering with my speech" (164) charges Kingston. Kingston blames her parents for distorting her speech, symbolically sabotaging her

voice for self-representation. She attributes her failure in kindergarten to the fact that her parents could not teach her English, not realizing the dominant culture's hegemony of imposing its language of power and privilege, and, therefore, its way of life, upon her disenfranchised minority community in America of the 1940s. Nonetheless, Kingston is precociously cognizant that while the power of speech gives voice to thoughts, it could also be muzzled to engender silence, the silence that co-opts men and women to abet patriarchy in its crime.

Consequently, Kingston assumes the tormentor's voice to confront an old cultural nemesis: silence that represents patriarchy's tool for crippling her selfhood. Kingston perceives that silence is co-opted by her sexist, traditional culture: "I knew the silence had to do with being a Chinese girl" (165) writes Kingston. Her culturally conforming schoolmate, "the quiet girl," (172) embodies all the stereo-typical attributes that Chinese culture expects of her, and becomes Kingston's "alter-ego" (Cheung 88). Kingston regards her as both collaborator and perpetrator of the oppressor's silencing campaign. As a result, Kingston berates the "dumb" (Kingston 180) girl for her refusal to divulge her name, causing Kingston to recall how her whole class had earlier laughed at another classmate, who did not know his father's name, an episode reflecting the ancient Chinese culture's convention, where a wife and son would not address familiarly a sovereign husband and father, by name. Goaded on by the memory of that classroom incident, Kingston decries the silent girl's muffled responses, attributing her muteness to the lack of a moral will to fight her own culture's monolithic traditions: "'Talk!'" I would scare the words out of her. If she had had little bound feet, the toes twisted under the balls, I would have jumped up and landed on them – crunch! – stomped on them with my iron shoes," (178) provokes Kingston, alluding to the foot-binding traditions of ancient China's women, and the debilitating consequences attending them.

Kingston feels empowered by her assimilation as a Chinese American, and she intends to underscore the imperative need to capitalize the opportunities available to her sub-culture in America. Therefore, through the agency of autobiography, she hopes to render a self-actualizing act by didactically conveying the advantages of assimilation. Callously, she deprecates her quiet schoolmate for her lack of perspicacity hindering her ability to seize opportunities for assimilating the American lifestyle that Kingston embraces, to achieve selfhood:

“Don’t you ever want to be a cheerleader? Or a pompon girl? What are you going to do for a living? Yeah, you’re going to have to work because you can’t be a housewife... You’ve got to let people know you have a personality and a brain. You think somebody is going to take care of you all your stupid life?” (180).

Denigrating as this taunting is, one misses the point if one misconstrues Kingston’s provocation as nullifying the quiet girl’s personhood. Instead, Kingston’s foresight to apprehend the potency and relevancy of these issues engendering a woman’s self-representation and autonomy, long before they matter seems prescient. As it turns out, this quiet girl, later in life continues to live with her parents, “supported” and “protected by her family, as they would normally have done in China...not sent off to school with strangers, ghosts, boys” (182). However, at the same time, underlying Kingston’s torment seems to be her “self-contempt at being Chinese,” (Cheung 89) for all its restrictive cultural implications, largely brought about by traditional cultural values. After accosting and tormenting the perceived adherent without success, Kingston becomes psychologically scarred by falling victim to her own aggression; she finds herself for “the next eighteen months sick in bed with a mysterious illness” (181). Interestingly, it is Kingston’s willing engagement in a multiple-voiced discourse — Chinese, Chinese-American, and American confabulation that creates the angst that sharpens the cognitive blade of the

prospective warrior's sword, a sword facilitating her transition from artless tormentor to artful swordsman of letters. Even while writing her autobiography, Kingston must have envisioned the risks she was taking by liberating her disgraced aunt and bestowing exceptional autonomy to an ancestral heroine, yet goaded by an agenda of selfhood in the spirit of Fa Mu Lan, Kingston heroically braves patriarchal ire and future charges of ancestral betrayal.

In the goal for selfhood, Kingston actualizes herself into being a “game-changer,” in her autobiography. “I want you to tell that hulk, that gorilla-ape to go away and never bother us again” (201) screams Kingston to her parents, who hopes to marry her off to the “mentally retarded boy,” (195) who is “stupid but very rich” (197). Kingston changes the rules of the game where marriages are arranged in Chinese families. Instead, she alone will decide her future marital plans, overturning her mother's monolithic sexist supposition that women “would grow up a wife and a slave,” (21) and, hence, reinforcing the subjugated status of ancestral Chinese women. In an attempt to drive away the suitors that her parents have arranged, Kingston intentionally behaves unattractively before them by dropping dishes, limping with a walking stick, twisting her mouth, entangling her hand in her hair, spilling soup over them and sweeping under the future grooms with brooms that the Chinese associates with “bad luck” (194). Unlike Ts'ai Yen, the Han “poetess” (208) in “A.D. 175” first captured by the Southern Hsiung-nu chieftain to be his wife, and then “ransomed and married to Tung Ssu so that her father would have Han descendants,” (210), Kingston will not be forced into marriage neither through captivity nor through pre-arranged parental schemes.

Conversely, like Ts'ai Yen, who “sang about China” (209) while in captivity, and conveyed her “sadness and anger,” (209) Kingston appropriates Ts'ai Yen's remonstrance by counteracting her parents' premarital plans with her own manifesto: “I know how to get A's, and

they say I could be a scientist or a mathematician if I want. I can make a living and take care of myself. So you don't have to find me a keeper who's too dumb to know a bad bargain" (201). It is unreservedly clear that Kingston is neither intending to be anyone's slave nor wife. She concludes that her desideratum would be to "leave home in order to see the world logically, logic the new way of seeing" (204). Eventually, she settles contentedly for "plastics, periodical tables, t.v. dinners with vegetables no more complex than peas mixed with diced carrots," and attaining a degree of self-affirming selfhood.

Finally, Kingston appropriates what she perceives to be the spunk and poise of American selfhood to forge a survivor discourse in the form of a personalized autobiography. Despite the odds, she accomplishes the feat by inscribing a liberated and forceful female persona, in place of the handmaiden of her mother's mythic tales. In the journey of self-actualization from marginalized daughter to autobiographer of her childhood memoirs, Kingston assumes all three personas: as the self-explorer of her personhood, as the subject of history, and as the agent of discourse. Using multiple dialogic voices of enquiry, subversion, and transformation, Kingston situates a multi-layered survivor ideology that dispels the enforced Chinese girl's crippling silence, and instead informs her liberating evolution, even in the face of a sexist, oppressive, ancestral canon.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION: SUSTAINABLE SURVIVOR IDEOLOGIES

Patriarchal ideology first initiates the rationale for society's implementation of their policies. Subsequently, by engendering a system of privilege, patriarchy creates social conventions that thrive on oppression to implement its agenda, conventions which in turn collude with society's unconscious awareness of their subtle and pervasive influence over time. As a result, historic attempts to counteract domination assume monolithic proportions and make it almost impossible for oppressed women such as the Indonesian concubine, the Korean sex slave, and the Chinese daughter to confront such tyrannies. However, despite their oppressors' machinations of subjugation and effacement, these three Asian women endured their trials and suffering, and forged their respective survivor ideologies. Their respective textual narratives attest to their courage, their tenacity, and their resolve.

Despite being twice marginalized by colonialism and paternal patriarchy, Toer's lowly concubine, Ontosoroh capitalized upon the economic and educational opportunities availed her, to become an astute businesswoman and a polyglot, conversant in Javanese, Malay and Dutch. Her training and education restored her self-confidence and selfhood. Her transformative survivor ideology empowered her to confront courageously her oppressors' perpetuation of her disenfranchisement. By confronting Dutch laws, she fearlessly exposed their double standards at the expense of her colonized nation: their practice of concubinage and their anti-native legal system. Finally, renouncing her own parents who sold her into sexual slavery, Ontosoroh raised acute consciousness concerning the moral fiber of her own paternal patriarchal society, who abetted the sexual exchange of their women as part of their trading transactions.

Despite her three oppressors, namely: the Japanese military, Korean Confucian society, and American spousal patriarchy, Keller's Akiko escaped her enslavement, her monolithic culture, and her sham marriage to forge a sustainable survivor ideology. In spite of her uterine-scarred abortion, she conceived her daughter, who in turn provided her the intersubjectivity she sought; her practice of shamanism provided her, a viable income, even as she managed her post-war trauma of dislocation through her alter-ego Induk. She even withstood her missionary husband's carnality and duplicity. Keller's disturbing account of Akiko's mental condition surely implicates the Japanese military for engendering her psychological displacement and dissolution. Abetting Akiko's exploitation is her own patriarchy's monolithic beliefs that continue to perpetuate gender inequalities in Korean society.

In the face of monolithic values of traditional China concerning gender discrimination, Kingston defied Chinese patriarchal sexism to forge her survivor ideology through intentional misprisions of the familial tale of her disgraced aunt, and the legendary tale of woman warrior, Fa Mu Lan. In the process, she replaces ancient patriarchal paradigms of the subjugated handmaiden, with her new identity, daringly asserting the subjective psyche of a woman's self-representation. Appropriating her childhood memoirs, Kingston wields her pen as a swordsman of letters, to project different voices and personae: silenced daughter, avenger, warrior, tormenter and rebel, in defiance of traditional Chinese notions of womanhood. "Speaking from her position at the margins, she resists participation in the fictions at the center of culture, including the fictions of man and of woman ... appropriat[ing] bits and pieces of those fictions for her own purposes," writes Sidonie Smith in *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography* (58). In the end, Kingston's survivor ideology is forged through her autobiography delivering a resounding selfhood.

In the present, “enlightened” 21st century world of the United States, some may argue that the hegemonic nuances of colonialism and the repressive codes of cultural patriarchy against women are anachronistic, and, therefore, irrelevant to modern day American experience. However, there are disturbing vestiges of an ancient struggle in today’s modern world: racial and gender exploitation at the work place, physical and sexual abuse at home, the single mother’s raising of children, and the sole bearing of housework by women, while simultaneously working to make ends meet, to name but a few of the exploitative practices. Although laws protecting the rights of women vary from non-existent to inadequate, during the late 19th and 20th centuries, yet today’s modern societies fail to glean pertinent and redemptive lessons from these historical injustices against women, as exemplified above. Instead, women’s oppression has metastasized into present day forms of pornography and abject illiteracy and poverty worldwide.

Mainstream pornography may provide the 21st century version of women’s commodification. Margarita Windisch, who teaches at Victoria University in Australia, in her article based on her workshop presentation at the Feminist Futures conference in Melbourne, on May 28, 2011 writes: “The production and consumption of porn is situated in a capitalist, neo-liberal context that pushes particular gender roles and images of women onto the public” and “predominantly women are portrayed as objects for the male gaze and as servants to the household and the broader economy.” One would think that modern society would learn from lessons of moral ignominy that result from the historical objectification of women, but Windisch’s following comment indicates otherwise: “sexist pornography is a reflection of power dynamics in a very sexist world.” Apparently, modern society has not imbibed the wisdom of discontinuing its traditional practice of gender exploitation.

Today women face oppression brought about by illiteracy and poverty. In Indonesia, “the poorest Indonesian women are workers, village housewives, young women and urban poor women” reported Zely Ariane. Ms. Ariane is an activist with “Perempuan Mahardhika” and national spokesperson of the Political Committee of the Poor-Peoples Democratic Party (KPRM-PRD), on *Direct Action*, an online newsletter, in April 2011. She cites that illiteracy is a major factor that accounts for women’s educational setback. Citing statistics from “Indonesian Health Demography Survey, in 2008,” she states: “Around 6.5 million Indonesian women are illiterate, twice the number of illiterate men, and women’s participation in higher education is lower.” Women comprise “88% of the unemployed in Jakarta” according to the Indonesian Statistics Bureau. She continues: “these numbers are worsening because women are laid off more often than men because they are not considered family heads.” She reports that “millions of Indonesian migrant workers, without proper skills and unfamiliar with workers’ or women’s rights, have been sent abroad, mostly as domestic workers” as they are considered the “cheapest ... labour.” However, they “...experience sexual abuse, rape, unwanted pregnancy, physical abuse and trauma, sometimes to the point of driving them to suicide.” Women are again disadvantaged by patriarchy, and victimized by their lack of education and economic resources.

At these intersections of racism and sexism, the arduous journey of the marginalized woman is an unenviable one. Historically, men’s biased views of women have led them to treat women as inferior in many ways: starting from their weaker physique, underrating their intellect, devaluing their economic worth and treating them as sexual objects. However, as my study shows, in the face of dominant ideologies of oppression and effacement, these women successfully coped and survived their appalling predicament. By investigating the plight of these discredited women, I hope to bring a greater awareness of the nature of male aggression, the

abuses engendered by male privilege and the duplicity of gender politics. Furthermore, through these women's compelling survivor ideologies, I hope I have succeeded in convicting society, of its own unwitting complicity, by buying into oppressive ideologies that only undermine the dignity and integrity of its personhood.

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