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Her-story: A Gendered Analysis of Wartime Violence in Lisa See's *The Island of Sea Women*

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Abstract

The research paper explores gender-based violence in conflicts on the Korean peninsula through textual analysis of Lisa See's novel *The Island of Sea Women*. Johan Galtung's theory of violence serves as the theoretical background for the study. Using the dimensions of violence prescribed by Galtung, the paper examines the different types of violence women are subjected to in warzones. The research paper finds that women suffer immense physical, physiological and structural violence in conflicted areas specifically due to their gender. Physical transgressions against women in war include bodily harm, sexual violence, physical displacement, domestic violence and dangerous working conditions. Instances of psychological violence include threats of violence, conscription of male family members, mourning the loss of loved ones, breakdown of female relationships and suffering from social stigmatization. Structural violence against women includes extensive poverty, lack of food and education and financial exploitation. The different types of violence suffered by women in warzones create a comprehensive image of the war experiences of women and literary works centered around such narratives provide a necessary representation of female experiences of war. The paper, thus, platforms women's voices and hopes to lend visibility to female experiences of violence.

Keywords: Gender-based violence, structural violence, gendered analysis, wartime violence, social stigmatization

Introduction

Wars and conflicts have been a constant part of history since the very beginning of human existence. The existence of conflicts between humans can be traced back even to prehistoric times due to the discovery of large-scale human remains that show clear indications of violent death (Greenspan, 2023). Even today, after centuries of evolution, war remains a constant part of global politics with several different parts of the world actively engaging in violent conflict.

The pervasiveness of war throughout history has been well-documented in different discourses. The effect that this violent institution has had on human beings through the centuries is undeniable and is a subject that is still studied today due to the continuation of warfare in present times. Traditional society has established strict gender binaries around the workings of the world. Consequently, discourses around war have traditionally been accepted as part of the masculine rather than the feminine. Men have been at the forefront of all the major wars the world has seen. They have been considered the decision-makers, the stakeholders, and the major combatants. Waller and Rycenga (2001, xvi) assert that when it comes to violence, female narratives have traditionally been considered “non-stories.” Due to this pervasiveness narrative, women have been relegated to the margins when it comes to war.

Wars and conflict have always been associated with literary and artistic expression. In its very rudimentary stage, literature featured themes of war and violence extensively. Some of the most popular literary works of the Greek and Roman civilization center around wars which are considered pioneers in the genre of war literature. Macmillan (2020) attributes the popularity of themes of war in literature to the human fascination with stories that showcase feats of bravery and adventure. In fact, the first known literary work written in the English language is also a war epic called *Beowulf*. These seminal works of war literature primarily featured male characters, describing their experiences of war and feats of bravery in a larger-than-life manner. Female characters, if present in the plots at all, were usually representatives of stereotyped ideas of femininity in those times. These women are either presented as pictures of domesticity or chattel to be bargained with at will. Homer’s Helen, for example, is a woman of unspeakable beauty who is the catalyst of an interminable war that brings about the destruction of a great city. Thus, traditional war literature has often not presented a very well-rounded image of female characters.

The twentieth century has seen tremendous grand-scale conflicts, most notably the two world wars in which multiple nations participated. The Korean peninsula is one region that has

witnessed enormous political upheaval during and even before this time. The turn of the first decade of the twentieth century saw the start of the Japanese occupation which led the region towards further political turmoil as the world headed into the world wars.

The Island of Sea Women by Lisa See is a historical fiction novel published in 2019 that centers around the violent events that jarred Korea in the twentieth century. The novel is set in Jeju Island and tells the story of women belonging to the haenyeo – a matriarchal community that survives by sea diving. The novel is told in two voices – a third-person narrator for the timeline in the present and the voice of the protagonist Young-sook who is a haenyeo living in mid-twentieth century Jeju Island. The story details how the lives of the women of Jeju were affected by a climate of constant violence and political turmoil.

The paper presents an analysis of gender-based violence in conflicts, taking Lisa See's portrayal of conflicts in twentieth-century Korean peninsula as the primary source. The research dwells exclusively on the female civilian experience of war. Johan Galtung (1969) defines violence as a phenomenon that hinders the self-realization of an individual and renders their potential less than what it would be otherwise. The research examines various forms of violence that women encounter in See's *The Island of Sea Women*, highlighting the dangers that exist for women in war zones solely because of their gender.

Literature Review

Johan Galtung (1969, p.168) believes that violence exists anywhere human beings are suffering and that suffering is essentially “avoidable”. Violence takes away a human being's ability to realize their potential to the fullest. Galtung (1969, p.168) recognizes that wars and conflicts are inherently violent by nature because they take away from a person's ability to reach their full potential. They hinder the physical ability of a person by causing “somatic harm.” Additionally, wars also take away precious monetary resources from individuals. Money that may be used for the betterment of society is instead channeled towards war efforts. Furthermore, conflicts cause significant mental trauma to individuals living in conflicted areas.

The relationship between war and literature is a very old one, traceable to the advent of modern civilized history according to Brosman (1992). War literature has a higher purpose than simply presenting a fictional story set against the backdrop of a real or imagined war. According to Heidarizadeha (2015), literary language can easily articulate the most intimate feelings of

human beings. Thus, the brutal reality of war becomes articulable by presenting it in the form of a literary narrative.

Literary works about war highlight the human aspects of war, relying on stories of human experiences and trauma instead of stark facts and figures to convey the effects of war and conflicts. Phil Klay (2022) asserts that even today, soldiers reading Homer's *Iliad* "find their own wars described within it" even though Homer did not have any direct experience of war and his literary work was written centuries ago. Furthermore, another important function of war literature is that it serves as a picture of the devastation of war without invoking any of the trauma associated with it. (McGuire, 2014). Macmillan (2020) believes that war should not be dismissed as an "aberration". Instead, it should be documented and studied to better understand the workings of the world. Thus, war literature has many functions within global academia. It captures the human dimension of war by incorporating stories encapsulating war experiences for humans. Additionally, it provides an avenue for war to be studied without inviting any of its trauma and hardships.

War as an institution has always been gendered due to traditional notions of masculinity and femininity. According to Ferguson (2021), the sex-based division of labor in society was an antecedent to the concept of masculinity and femininity. Some theorists also take a more Darwinian approach towards the gendering of war by relying on studies that show male chimpanzees having vastly greater tendencies of violence and aggression than females (Ferguson, 2021). Socially, the physiological differences between the two sexes relegated war exclusively towards the masculine domain while discounting the intersection of war and femininity. Ritchie (2011, 17) defines war as a construct that in turn constructs the meaning of gender by "sex[ing] its subjects". Male bodies are deemed as killers whereas female bodies are restricted to the role of reproducers. This social construction of war and gender has served to marginalize the female experience of war and remove them from wider war-related discourses.

A binary well-recognized in war terminology is the "soldier" and the "civilian". Usually, this binary is synonymous with the binary of gender with male soldiers occupying the "war front" and civilian women occupying the "home front" (Grayzel, 1999, p.11). Many war narratives center on the war experiences of soldiers in battles. While it is an important lens to look at war, war is not only restricted to battlefields. It permeates every sphere of life for people living in warring regions. In case of violent occupation from opposing armies, the home front becomes a

battle zone as well, endangering women as historically women form the largest population in occupied territories (Knežević, 2017). Despite being excluded from powerful, decision-making roles in events of war, women have been victims of the violence that comes with it. For women, warfare has meant physical and sexual violence as well as extensive psychological trauma (Cook, 2006). Furthermore, already politically and socially disadvantaged women suffer turmoil in the domestic sphere as well due to upheaval caused by war (Sarraj, 2001).

Despite their distance from traditional battle zones, women suffer extensive physical violence in times of war. Although mortality rates remain high for men in conflicts, the rate of physical displacement is higher for women (Buvinic, Gupta, Casabonne & Verwimp, 2012). Additionally, sexual violence has been a lived truth for women in war. In some cases, widespread rape of women has been considered a war strategy (Chemaly, 2012). For Kesic (2001, p.34), conflicts become a reason for endangering women by otherizing and objectifying them. In such cases, women belonging to the opposing side are treated as objects, becoming “their women” with their bodies deemed as “battlefields” for men to exert their control over. In certain cases, raping women from the opposing group is not considered personal suffering but an antagonizing statement to taunt the enemy (Gerami and Lehnerer, 2007). This shows the extent to which women are dehumanized during war. Their sufferings are disregarded in favor of making a political statement. The United Nations Development Fund for Women (n.d.) recognizes that wartime sexual violence can lead to immense implications for women including displacement, physical injury, mental trauma, stigmatization, undesired pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases. Moyd (2017) finds that all these damages caused by one instance of rape can lead to long-term victimization that may affect women for their entire life terms. Women are not merely in danger of physical or sexual violence by men from enemy forces. According to Sarraj (2001), the combat experiences of men and the trauma associated with it may act as an instigator of domestic violence. Women, thus, are in danger of domestic violence by their own male family members as a direct result of war. The scope of physical violence is immense for women in wartime even with their absence from battlefields and their experiences may have long-term effects that interfere with the normal course of their lives.

Psychological trauma is another necessary side-effect of war for civilian women albeit its nature is different from that of male soldiers returning from war. Since women are usually away from battle themselves, they have to part with their loved ones (usually male family members) in

instances of war. Cook (2006) explains that for women left behind in times of war, mourning their lost loved ones is a cause of immense mental turmoil. Moreover, the threat of constant violence may also cause significant psychological turmoil to the people, mostly women, left in occupied territories.

Structural violence or social injustice may also be a direct result of war whereby there is an uneven distribution of resources among the general population. According to a 2022 UN Women's report, militarization of an area may result in increased disadvantages for women when it comes to resources due to the reinforcement of patriarchal values that denigrate femininity. Secondly, wars channel monetary resources away from social spending (which benefits women mostly) and direct it towards war efforts causing significant inequality in resources (UN Women, 2022). Buvinic et al. (2012) find that even though violent conflicts may cause some level of gender equality due to the blurring of traditional gender roles, they may also cause increased poverty by leaving widows as heads of households, a section of society particularly vulnerable to poverty. Moreover, the social stigmatization of rape also puts affected women at a social disadvantage.

The Korean peninsula is still a region of political turmoil due to the events of the twentieth century. Though the war caused immense loss of life, the Korean War remains largely "forgotten" due to political censorship (Stack, 2018). The literature about the war produced in the 1950s and 60s was written mostly by white male American authors that furthered the narrative of the US vs communism, underplaying the human dimension of the war (Belletto). This wave of literature did not present a fair depiction of Korean women, often objectifying them as sexual beings rather than capable human beings (Paio, 2017). It was only when Korean writers began producing literature around the war that female experiences of war in Korea found voices, marking a rebellion from the sexualized portrayal by Western authors (Paio, 2017).

The traditional notions of "masculinity" and "femininity" need to be reconsidered when referring to war (Moyd, 2017). In today's world, it is necessary to recognize that war is not simply a male preoccupation. Conflicts, if instigated, cause great distress to women whose stories are often overlooked or minimized when compared to male combatants. Gender-based violence during the war has been expansively documented in history. However, literature provides a medium for it to be explored further by adding an indisputable human element to it.

Research Methodology

The research is literary and of qualitative type. The method of analysis employed is textual analysis after closing reading of the sample text. The primary text for the research is the 2019 novel *The Island of Sea Women* by Lisa See. Johan Galtung’s theory of violence provides the theoretical background for the analysis.

3.1. Theoretical Framework

The research presents a gendered analysis of violence in See’s novel by adapting Johan Galtung’s (1969) definition and various dimensions of violence. Galtung defined peace as the absence of all kinds of violence in society. Galtung’s definition of violence is not restricted to simply physical harm. Rather, Galtung’s (1969) definition of violence is all-encompassing as it includes physical, psychological and structural aspects of violence.

According to Johan Galtung (1969, p.168), violence exists in circumstances that hinder the realization of the full “somatic and mental realizations” of an individual. Using the categories of violence defined by Galtung, the paper analyzes how female characters specifically are victims of violence due to their gender in the sample novel. Figure 3a illustrates the main analytical categories established in view of Galtung’s (1969) prescribed dimensions of violence.

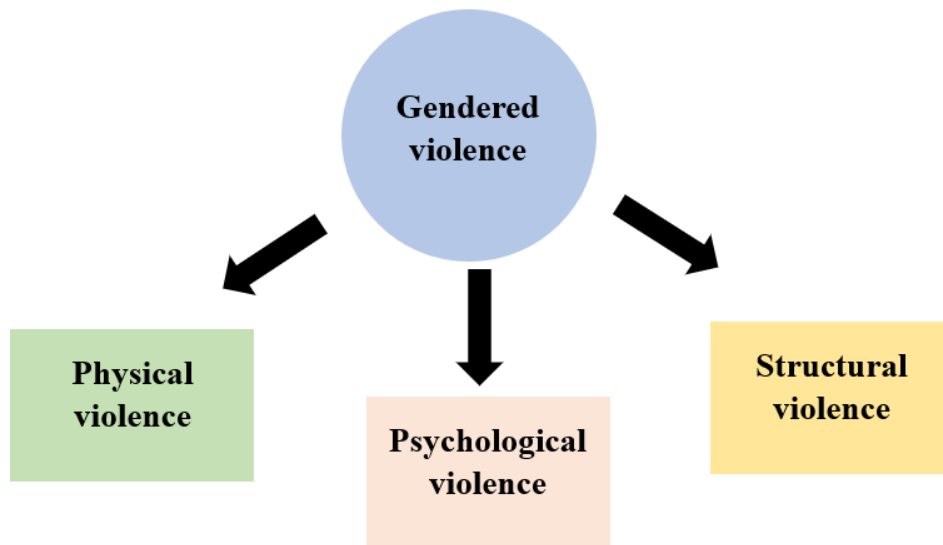


Figure 3a: Established analytical categories for analysis.

Physical violence entails harm to the physical self of the individual by any means (Galtung, 1969). It may entail instances of somatic or biological harm, physical displacement,

imprisonment and forced labour. The research studies instances in the novel where women are affected physically by war-related violence.

Psychological violence is different from physical violence in that it does not entail overtly visible aggression. Galtung (1969, p.169) describes psychological violence as harm “to the soul” instead of to the body that “decrease[s] mental potentialities” of the individual. In war zones, psychological violence may be present in the form of threats of violence and the presence of weaponry near a population. The research studies how female characters in the novel suffer psychologically in war-afflicted Korea due to their gender.

Lastly, structural violence entails an inequality in the distribution of resources. The study explores how women in See’s novel suffer inaccessibility to resources due to their gender in times of war.

The main analytical categories are guided by Johan Galtung’s ideas about violence. As the research is concerned with female experiences of wartime violence, the analysis focuses on instances of violence motivated by gender.

Analysis

The analysis is divided into three major parts as per the defined analytical categories presented in the theoretical framework. The first analytical category is concerned with instances of physical violence against women in the novel. The second deals with aspects of psychological violence and the third deals with structural violence. These analytical categories help in creating a comprehensive picture of the different aspects of violence women are vulnerable to in violent settings.

The story is set in the matrifocal haenyeo community where women are the breadwinners while men are largely in charge of domestic affairs. *The Island of Sea Women* is narrated mostly in the voice of protagonist Young-sook. As a young Korean woman living under the Japanese occupation who grows up to be a woman living through the Korean War, her voice provides important insights into the female experience of war.

4.1. Physical violence

For a young Young-sook, the feeling of becoming a “woman” comes from stepping outside the house to dive and contribute towards the family income (See, 2019, p.14). The reason that women are the breadwinner in this society is also significantly related to war and gender. Women

took over the diving duties from because they were “taxed at a lower rate” under the Korean kings (See, 2019, p.36). When the Japanese took over the island, they introduced sanctions for men so that they would be forced to find work in the Japanese fishing boats and canneries to make a living (See, 2019, p.36). Thus, women are essentially forced due to the created circumstances to take over the money-earning matters. Importantly, the sea-diving job is quite dangerous. In the novel, there are accidents during sea-diving that cause physical harm to the haenyeo women. Young-sook describes it as “physical torment” to work as a sea diver in the frigid Russian temperatures (See, 2019, p.84). Yu-ri suffers an accident while diving for a highly prized octopus that leaves her mentally handicapped for the rest of her life. Sun-sil, Young-sook’s mother, also dies at the age of thirty-eight while working in the sea. Young-sook acknowledges that she has “seen haenyeo die the moment they hit cold water” because the temperature stops their heart (See, 2019, p.78). Moreover, the sea-diving has life-long medical complications like strokes for haenyeo women (See, 2019, p.78). As an old woman, Young-sook suffers from “headaches, vertigo, dizziness, and nausea” because of the constant water pressure from a life time of diving under the sea for a living (See, 2019, p.73). According to Galtung (1969), the physical hampering of an individual by any means is physical violence. Throughout the novel, women suffer physical ailments, handicaps and even death due to their diving jobs that the political conflict of the time forces them into doing to feed their families.

The novel starts during the Japanese occupation of Korea. Consequently, there is a large physical presence of male enemy soldiers on the island. These soldiers resort to physical violence against women to ensure obedience and to assert their control. One Japanese soldier beats Mi-ja so hard that she is delirious with pain to the point of being “unaware” of her surroundings because she tries to protect Young-sook’s family field from being ransacked (See, 2019, p.54). The Japanese authorities also extort labour from the “grandmothers” who have retired from diving duties due to advanced age by assigning “compulsory quotas of seaweed to collect and dry” which is then used in gunpowder by the Japanese army (See, 2019, p.83). These instances of violence cause significant bodily harm to the women involved and exemplify how war or occupation can cause physical violence towards women.

With the presence of so many enemy soldiers in their midst, sexual violence against women is an unavoidable problem in Jeju and has many long-term effects on the victims. As a very young girl, Sun-sil warns Young-sook about staying away from the soldiers as “they [ruined]

many girls on Jeju”, hinting towards sexual violence (See, 2019, p.15). Mi-ja is raped by Sang-mun, a Japanese collaborator, on the journey back from Russia and is eventually forced to marry him. After the American occupation of South Korea, a new group of Korean men called the Northwest Young Men’s Association formed to keep law and order in the country. Instead of protecting their people, these men are known to commit atrocious acts against women. To protect the girls from rape, the people start marrying them out “as young as thirteen” (See, 2019, p.180). Young-sook relates the story of a soldier who puts a heated revolver inside a pregnant woman “just to see what would happen” (See, 2019, p.202). Furthermore, women also suffer physical displacement for the purpose of sexual slavery. There is a constant fear of the Japanese because they are known among the Korean people to “steal young women and take them to special camps to be used by their soldiers as comfort women”, referring to the sexual slavery which was a reality for many Korean women during the Japanese occupation (See, 2019, p.86). Sexual violence against women in the story speaks of how vulnerable women are in times of war, especially if there is an occupation by the enemy forces. In addition to the physical element of rape, it has longstanding manifested and mental consequences for the victims. They suffer from stigmatization and homelessness as a result.

Sarraj (2001) asserts that the experience of combat for men can serve as an instigator of domestic violence. There is an instance of this phenomenon in the novel. After the World War ends and Korea is divided into two parts, Sang-mun is captured in the northern territory because of his associations with the Japanese. On returning, he is visibly different. Young-sook describes him as “skin and bones” with sunken “eyes and cheeks” (See, 2019, p.159). Sang-mun’s experience of combat violence plays a significant part in his turning into a perpetrator of domestic violence against Mi-ja. Mi-ja herself creates a connection between “his violence and cruelty” and “the way of the island [in those] days” reiterating the aggravating effect of war as a catalyst for violence against women. In the aftermath of the Bukchon massacre, Sang-mun beats Mi-ja so violently that she has a limp for the rest of her life. The domestic violence suffered by Mi-ja highlights the fact that violence inherent in conflict zones seeps into every aspect of a woman’s life. The domestic life of women is also influenced, negating the presence of a haven in such turbulent times.

4.2. Psychological Violence

At an event commemorating the 4.3 Incident decades after it happened, a speaker acknowledges that the persisting problems of contemporary Korean society can be traced back to the decades of war that the region saw in the twentieth century. He notes that modern Korea has “the highest rates of alcoholism, domestic violence, suicide, and divorce” and that “women, including haenyeo, are the greatest victims of these problems” (See, 2019, p.242). This statement from the novel shows the longstanding effects of war that can affect women across generations.

A major source of psychological violence for women in the novel comes with the conscription of the male members of their family being conscripted into the Japanese army as the world plunges into the Second World War. Cook (2006) believes that mourning loved ones forms a major part of the female war experience. Young-sook returns from overseas working to discover that two of her brothers, aged nineteen and seventeen, have been conscripted to the Japanese army. Even nine months after their departure, the family does not hear any news of them. Young-sook explains that the news makes her “insides blackened by sadness,” explaining the despair she feels at her brother’s forceful inclusion into the army (See, 2019, p.105). The number of men and boys murdered during the conflicts is so high that there are “entire posterity lines wiped out” leaving mostly women on the island (See, 2019, p.248). The bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, although distant from Jeju Island, still brings about psychological violence for Young-sook and her family, especially since Young-sook’s father-in-law is employed in a factory in Japan. Young-sook describes her father-in-law as a “hungry ghost, roaming the shattered ruins of Hiroshima” (See, 2019, p.152). The women who are thus affected by the death of their loved ones suffer significant psychological wounds. Young-sook explains that “widows and mothers of sons who’d been killed often went mad and threw themselves off cliffs” (See, 2019, p.202). The mental trauma of losing loved ones to particularly violent fates forms a significant portion of psychological violence for women in the novel.

There is a constant threat of violence to women during the war because of the presence of enemy soldiers and deadly weapons in Jeju. Even away from their country, Young-sook and Mi-ja worry about their island being “bombed or invaded” because of the unstable political climate (See, 2019, p.94). Young-sook calls the Japanese airplanes “birds of death” because of the devastation she knows they may cause. As the events progressed toward the end of World War II, the presence of Japanese soldiers in Jeju increased. At one point, there are “ten Japanese army divisions” on the island (See, 2019, p.143). The intensifying threat of violence to her hometown

feels “personal and immediate” to Young-sook due to fear of harm to her family (See, 2019, p.145). At one point, the scale of death on the island becomes so great that the sky becomes “black with crows, who flew from one scene of death to the next” (See, 2019, p.201). The presence of death on the island is so persistent that the mothers “[see] and [smell] death” while going about their daily life of trying to “feed, clothe, and comfort their children” (See, 2019, p.236). Being surrounded by threats of violence and imagery of death is a cause of constant mental strife for the women. In the absence of most men from the island and without any way to defend themselves, the women suffer mentally due to the fear of violence.

Even when the women are not targeted by physical violence themselves, they are witnesses to gruesome violence on others. Young-sook calls it “suffer[ing] from memories” (See, 2019, p.254). A haenyeo Young-sook and Mi-ja meet confides that her collective came across “bloated bodies” while they were diving in the sea, causing the haenyeo to flee Korea and seek work elsewhere (See, 2019, p.138). Once at a rally, she witnesses a mother and child being trampled by an American mounted soldier, an event that leads to the American soldiers shooting at the gathered people. At another point in the novel, Young-sook witnesses the young daughter of her haenyeo colleague being shot when a young man hands them a leftist leaflet that they cannot even read because they are illiterate. The events “confused and scared” Young-sook who “couldn’t stop shaking from fear” (See, 2019, p.185-186). After the maimed body of a young protestor is pulled from the river, Young-sook notes that “there could not have been a mother on the island who did not imagine the grief she would feel if this boy had been her son” (See, 2019, p.189). Young-sook and her young daughter Min-lee also directly witness the deaths of their family members in the Bukchon massacre which leaves them “paralyzed by what [they] [witness]” (See, 2019, p.218). Most of the survivors of the massacre are women. Young-sook notes that so many of the men were “killed in Bukchon that it was... called the Village of Widows” (See, 2019, p.219). The surviving women are also “forced” to bury the dead bodies of their family members before they are released by the authorities (See, 2019, p.218). The event is so traumatizing that Young-sook suffers from sleeplessness “for fear of what [she would] see on the backs of [her] lids” (See, 2019, p.220). Furthermore, when she discovers her pregnancy, she fears that her unborn child “has been traumatized by [her] anguish” (See, 2019, p.220). In addition to the trauma of witnessing the massacre, Young-sook and the other women suffer “blame and guilt...for being survivors” (See, 2019, p.248). The event causes her to contemplate

suicide and she references times when she “thought about dying” due to the violence she witnessed (See, 2019, p.225).

Mi-ja is one character who faces a lot of psychological violence in the novel. While still a child, she is stigmatized for being the daughter of a “collaborator” and is neglected by her aunt and uncle who are supposed to raise her after her parents’ death. At their first meeting, Young-sook notes that Mi-ja is “filthy”, “her hair looked matted, as though no one had put a comb through it in weeks” and that she is very “thin” indicating the neglect that she suffers (See, 2019, p.39). Contrastively, Mi-ja’s husband Sang-mun is also the son of a collaborator. Unlike, Mi-ja, Sang-mun works for the Japanese military (and later with the American authorities) and enjoys the influence and luxury such a position entails. Moreover, being raped by Sang-mun also brings about significant mental trauma for Mi-ja. While she looks forward to being married and having a family before the rape, her thoughts about marriage and men change significantly in the aftermath. She feels immense dread at the thought of marrying Sang-mun. After her marriage, her psychological trauma persists with Young-sook noting that “her eyes had the bottomless blackness of those of a dying octopus” (See, 2019, p.130). In her husband’s presence, there is a “humbling change” in Mi-ja and it is evident that she is terrified of him (See, 2019, p.134). Later in the novel, her great-granddaughter reveals that “he had total control over her” (See, 2019, p.288). Furthermore, due to an internalized sense of shame after her rape, Mi-ja does not tell anyone about it. Young-sook explains that “the loss of face and the depth of shame” for rape victims is so extensive that the victim “would never be able to return to her island home” (See, 2019, p.138). Mi-ja believes that Young-sook would be “disgusted with [her]” if she knows about her rape (See, 2019, p.332). The events of her life distort Mi-ja’s image of herself. She refers to herself as a “bad person”, even asserting that she deserves her husband’s mistreatment (See, 2019, p.331). The circumstances created due to war ostracize Mi-ja from society, not because of her actions but because of those of her male counterparts: her father and her husband. Sang-mun’s acts of sexual and domestic violence against Mi-ja cause her to develop a distorted sense of self that affects her deeply.

At the center of the story is Young-sook and Mi-ja’s friendship. Sun-sil describes their bond as “closer than friends” and “like sisters” (See, 2019, p.15). The relationship between the two girls is a very significant part of their identities and they vow to be “together always” (See, 2019, p.96). They meet when they are seven and develop an instant bond. Young-sook even teaches

Mi-ja to swim which allows her to join the haenyeo collective, making her feel like “part of something much larger” when she has previously been alone most of her life (See, 2019, p.49).

War causes a breakdown in this relationship and it affects both Young-sook and Mi-ja significantly for the rest of their lives. The idea of their separation starts with Mi-ja’s engagement with Sang-mun which is a direct result of Mi-ja’s rape. Their anguish at their impending separation is described by Young-sook as them being “two brides filled with sorrow” (See, 2019, p.121). As their marriages progress the distance between the two friends increases because their husbands believe in completely different political ideologies. Sang-mun is a collaborator and Young-sook fears him reporting her husband Jun-bu who has distinctly leftist opinions.

The complete breakdown of their friendship comes with the events of the Bukchon massacre. Mi-ja, being the wife of a collaborator, is protected by her husband’s status. During the massacre when Young-sook begs her to take her children to safety, Mi-ja refuses. She asks Young-sook to choose one of her children to save and after painful indecision, Young-sook chooses her firstborn son due to the cultural concept of males being able to perform ancestral worship for their dead ancestors. However, Mi-ja is unable to bring any of Young-sook’s children to safety out of fear of her husband. Young-sook holds Mi-ja responsible for “destroy[ing] [her] family” and it taints her memories of her friend from their childhood, causing her immense grief and pain (See, 2019, p.231). The souring of their relationship affects both Young-sook and Mi-ja dramatically. Even though they are not in contact, they constantly think of one another, a relationship that Mi-ja summarizes with the aphorism “deep roots remain tangled underground” (See, 2019, p.306). At difficult points in her life, Young-sook feels bereft because she cannot look to Mi-ja any longer for “advice or consolation” (See, 2019, p.278). In turn, Mi-ja “tortured herself” for her part in the demise of Young-sook’s family and suffered “nightmares” for the rest of her life (See, 2019, p.290). When Young-sook’s youngest daughter, Joon-lee, marries Mi-ja’s son Yo-chan, Young-sook does not attend the wedding ceremony feeling that it would be “disrespectful” to her deceased family (See, 2019, p.320). Shortly afterwards Joon-lee moves to America and dies of breast cancer. Young-sook does not receive the news because letters from America are heavily censored and the news once revealed to her causes her considerable agony.

4.3. Structural Violence

According to Galtung (1969, p.171), structural violence is operational in instances where there is injustice in society that deprives a section of the population of necessary resources. War-induced poverty is an example of structural violence as per Galtung because resources are taken away from efforts to improve human life and channeled into war efforts. Poverty is widespread in Jeju due to the war. Women feed their families simple meals like “millet, cabbage, and sweet potatoes” while the nutritious food they harvest from the sea is sold to the “wealthier—people on the mainland, or in Japan, China, and the USSR” (See, 2019, p.36). The effects of poverty hence caused are more apparent for women because the scarce war-depleted resources are channeled towards the male members rather than the female members. During Sun-sil’s funeral, food is distributed “first to the older men, then the younger men, then the little boys” and after that to the women in the same order so that many of the younger girls do not receive any food at all (See, 2019, p.66). Young-sook describes herself as being “always hungry” while working in Russia because she needs to save her earnings for her family (See, 2019, p.81). The structural violence operating here explains how in the case of scarcity, resources are channeled away from women and towards the male members.

Even though the females of the community contribute towards the finances of the household, money is only invested in the education of male family members since there are no “schools for girls” in Hado (See, 2019, p.41). Because they are raised with the awareness that they would have to start earning as soon as possible, the girls in Jeju are deprived of a carefree childhood. Young-sook listens in amazement to Mi-ja’s stories of playing “tag and hide and go seek” when she grew up playing games that taught her “something practical like how to dive for top shell or gather seaweed” (See, 2019, p.45). The girls of the family are expected to be breadwinners, to take over sea-diving duties as soon as they are old enough to “contribute to sending [their] brothers to school” (See, 2019, p.37). It is decided that after her marriage to Jun-bu, Young-sook is to contribute towards the education of her husband despite being uneducated herself (See, 2019, p.118). The disparity in their educational background causes Young-sook to feel a sense of inferiority, noting that she is “beneath” her educated husband (See, 2019, p.120). Due to the lack of education, it is also easy for the haenyeo women to be cheated out of their due earnings by the Japanese who take “forty percent” of the money they earn (See, 2019, p.46). It is not until Sun-sil, Young-sook’s mother, is a married woman with five children that she begins to attend Hado Night School and learns about her rights and how to “weigh [her] catches” (See, 2019, p.46). The

lack of education for women not only serves as a means of keeping the female population illiterate but also serves to create a sense of inferiority and ignorance of their rightful due.

The work that women do to support their families does not absolve them from domestic duties and they are doubly burdened. Young-sook notes that her mother “never had a chance to rest, because when [they] went home after [their] wet- or dry-field work, she still had much to do” (See, 2019, p.58). After her mother’s death, Young-sook takes over her mother’s duties both financially and domestically. Even the biological needs of the women are ignored in their efforts to earn money for their families. Mi-ja goes into labour while working in Vladivostok and continues to dive into the sea “until the final hour”, giving birth to her son on the deck of the diving boat (See, 2019, p.141). The double duties of the women as breadwinners and as caregivers mean that they do not have time for their own needs which may interfere with the process of self-actualization.

The novel recounts stories of active thefts of resources belonging to women in the aftermath of the division of the country. Young-sook recounts stories of women being “forced to marry policemen and soldiers” who seize their property legally in this way as bribes to “buy a husband or son out of jail” (See, 2019, p.202). These instances provide insight into the vulnerability of women to financial exploitation in war zones.

1. Findings

Johan Galtung’s theory of violence, although encompassing many different aspects does not take into account the dimension of gender. The research finds that gender is an important aspect when researching violence and conflict. The female experience of violence is unique. War experiences of civilian women are markedly different from those of men or soldiers. The research finds that distance from a battlefield does not protect civilian women from violence. Rather, women are victims of physical, psychological and structural violence during war.

Even though the characters in the novel are fictional, the historical background of the story is rooted in real events. The Bukchon massacre that resulted in the devastation of Young-sook’s family is a real event among the many that occurred during seven years of violence in Korea characterizing the 4.3 Incident towards the end of the Second World War. Heidarizadeha (2015) finds that literature is an important tool for the representation of human experience. Thus, war literature can be an effective avenue to initiate discussions about the institution of war. It can also

provide a platform for the voices that have traditionally been silent. The research finds that Lisa See's *The Island of Sea Women* gives voice to the women of Jeju Island who suffered immense violence during the various conflicts afflicting their region in the twentieth century.

The research finds that women are subjected to extensive amounts of violence in the event of war and/or occupation. The physical atrocities against them include bodily harm, forced labor and sexual violence that can extend to physical displacement and sexual slavery. The women of the haeyeo community take jobs that are dangerous and that can lead to permanent physical and/or biological harm to feed their families. The policies made due to war directly led to such jobs being taken by women. While the political disturbances caused by war can be anticipated, the research finds that conflict can also cause physical violence within the domestic sphere for women. Mi-ja's experience of rape and domestic violence by her husband attests to the fact that physical violence can seep into every aspect of a woman's life. Women are vulnerable to physical violence not only by enemy forces but also by their spouses in times of war.

The research finds that women are psychologically affected in several ways in the event of war. Foremost is the fear of the male members of the family being conscripted into armies as it entails immediate danger to their loved ones. Women also suffer from the threats of violence that become apparent in the presence of enemy soldiers or deadly weapons in their vicinity. Moreover, being witnesses of violence especially that perpetuated against their family members, causes significant mental distress to the surviving female members. Young-sook is so devastated by witnessing the murders of her son, husband and sister-in-law that she contemplates suicide. The effect of the violence on her is so profound that she worries it has seeped through her body to her unborn child. This illustrates the depth to which women are mentally affected by violence even if it does not affect them physically. Women also suffer psychological violence in the form of stigmatization. In Mi-ja's case, she faces the stigma of being a collaborator's daughter (later also wife when she marries Sang-mun) and she fears the stigma of being a raped woman. Even though no one knows about her rape, Mi-ja's perception of herself changes in the aftermath because she believes people, even her closest friend, would be disgusted with her after knowing about it. Women, thus, suffer the consequences of the actions of male members of their family. In the case of rape, victims suffer not only physical injuries but long-term psychological effects that may change their self-perception. Additionally, war is also a catalyst for breaking down the relationships women hold dear. Young-sook and Mi-ja's friendship is at the forefront of the story

but war causes a deep chasm between them when the two are wed to men who hold drastically different political ideologies.

It has been discovered that women in the novel suffer immense structural violence that creates a divide whereby resources are limited due to war and channeled towards the development of male members rather than the female members of society. Women live in war-induced poverty even when they are the ones earning money to provide for their families. They must perform the roles of both provider and care taker in times of war but resources like food and education are limited to the male family members. Moreover, women are also vulnerable to financial exploitation that can lead to further deterioration in their living conditions.

Conclusion

The purpose of the present research is to provide an analysis of gendered violence against women in conflict-ridden regions. The research uses one work from war literature written about the conflicts of the Korean peninsula as the primary sample. The different dimensions of violence prescribed by Johan Galtung serve as the basis of the theoretical background for the study. Using *The Island of Sea Women* by Lisa See, published in 2019, as a representative of war literature written around conflicts in Korea in the twentieth century, the research provides a gendered analysis of violence against women in conflicted areas.

Through a gendered analysis of the violence faced by women in twentieth-century Korea, the research concludes that women are vulnerable to physical, psychological and structural violence in war zones. The research finds that physical violence against women can entail bodily and biological harm which can result from physical torment by enemy soldiers and by dangerous working conditions as seen in the novel through the stories of the haenyeos. Women are also susceptible to sexual violence, physical displacement for the sake of sexual slavery and domestic violence by male partners. Women also suffer from psychological trauma due to war. They are surrounded by threats of violence by enemy soldiers and weapons in their vicinity. Also, the conscription of male family members and being witnesses to physical violence against their families can cause significant mental wounds, including feelings of survivor's guilt, for women. Social stigmatization is a source of psychological violence for women. The breakdown of female friendships due to war can also cause mental distress. Lastly, women suffer social and economic inequality in wartime which constitutes structural violence. Resources like food and education are reserved for male members of the family. A lack of education makes women susceptible to further exploitation of their rights. Furthermore, women are also vulnerable to financial exploitation whereby their monetary resources are either actively stolen or exchanged in exchange of promises that often do not materialize. Thus, women suffer at multiple levels in a warzone. Their physical and mental selves are affected and they are deprived of necessary resources.

The research concludes that war literature centered around women provides a voice to female experiences of war. Moreover, the study concludes that gender is an important dimension to consider when studying war. The experiences of soldiers and the violence they suffer as a consequence of war are well documented. The experiences of women are equally significant but

vastly different. Since women form such a large population of the world, their experiences must be represented and researched.

The research invites scholarships in conflict studies through the lens of gender. Female writers writing stories about women in times of war should be recognized as legitimate voices in the genres of historical fiction and war literature. Researching female experiences of war lends visibility to the narratives that are often overlooked due to their gender. It is hoped that the present research contributes towards the visibility of feminine voices which might influence global policies regarding war and gender.

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