

Narrating Trauma as Victims of Human Trafficking in China: A Study on Select North Korean Memoirs

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Abstract

The memoirs titled *In Order to Live; A North Korean Girl's Journey, to Freedom* and *A Thousand Miles to Freedom: My Escape from North Korea* are written by Yeonmi Park and Eunsun Kim two women who managed to escape from North Korea. They went through an experience of being forced into labour in China as victims of trafficking. In their memoirs these authors vividly depict the pain that comes with being exploited. The main aim of this study is to analyse how memoirs can effectively address the issue of trafficking. These remarkable women skilfully use the memoir genre to make a personal plea for action. They strategically make choices appeal to readers emotions openly share their distressing experiences and support their stories with research and evidence that connect their experiences with the broader problem of human trafficking in China. This study clearly shows that both these memoirs emphasize the importance of the memoir genre in advocating for rights. It also highlights how survivor memoirs have the potential to inspire advocacy and involvement, in combating trafficking.

Keywords: North Korea, Women, Trafficking, China, Memoirs, Human Rights

1. Introduction

1.1 Human Trafficking

Although the underlying essence of slavery remains unchanged, Frederick Douglass argued that it has assumed several manifestations to assimilate into contemporary culture, so mitigating scrutiny and prejudice by seeming less overt. "Slavery has been fruitful in giving itself names ... and it will call itself by yet another name; and you and I and all of us had better wait and see what new form this old master will assume, in what new skin this old snake will come forth next" (*Frederick Douglass Quote*, n.d.). Douglass might be characterized as a visionary or, more significantly, as a pragmatic person. In present times, the phrase "human trafficking" is used to denote individuals who are subjected to enslavement by unscrupulous individuals profiting from the utilization of forced labor, particularly in cases when forceful sexual activities are involved. As anticipated by Douglass, the institution of slavery has undergone transformation in response to the shifting economic emphasis towards service-oriented industries. In contemporary society, human trafficking has emerged as a particularly pernicious manifestation of an ongoing historical injustice. The topic of human trafficking elicits intense emotions and involves very distressing occurrences. Human trafficking is a rapidly expanding criminal activity on a global scale. "Transnational criminals have been major beneficiaries of globalization. Human smuggling and trafficking have been among the fastest growing forms of transnational crime because current world conditions have created increased demand and supply" (Shelley, 2010, p. 2).

Human trafficking is a very lucrative enterprise that earns billions of euros every year (Braun, 2017). Human trafficking is a widespread occurrence that takes place in both remote areas of tiny nations like Bangladesh and in major regions of big countries like the United States. This problem transcends national boundaries and is characterised by the exploitation, pursuit of financial gain, and insatiable desire for wealth. The third biggest domain of organised crime on a worldwide scale is the trafficking of human beings, particularly women for the purpose of forcing them into prostitution. Human trafficking is a grave offence that strips victims of their humanity and infringes against their fundamental human rights. Trafficking often takes place from underdeveloped nations, where individuals endure poverty, violent wars, or natural catastrophes, to comparatively more developed nations. China, being the most populated country, has one of the highest numbers of trafficking victims globally (Human Rights Watch, 2019). Chinese farmers make up the majority of North Korean female customers because to the difficulty these women have in finding suitable mates due to their low social position. The primary catalyst for North Koreans leaving their nation is poverty and hardship. There is a strong correlation between human trafficking and poverty. At first, buyers provided aid in the shape of food and lodging. Subsequently, the women experienced fear and were subjected to the menacing prospect of being repatriated to North Korea in the event that the Chinese authorities apprehended them. Once the trafficker gained the women's confidence by providing financial support and housing, they subjected them to mental manipulation and sexual assault, ultimately forcing them into a life of sexual slavery (Kim et al., 2009). North Korea has a limited number of economic

partners and has faced U.N. sanctions for an extended period. Among these partners, China stands out as the most crucial, continuously offering assistance to avoid further escalation of the sensitive situation on the Korean Peninsula. The Chinese government considers North Korean defectors to be illegal economic migrants and does not provide them with refugee status. Defectors apprehended in China are repatriated to North Korea, where they face the grim prospects of enduring torture, lengthy incarcerations, or even capital punishment inside prison facilities or re-education camps (Davis, 2006).

1.2 Life Writing Genre- Memoirs

This comprehensive study focuses on two North Korean memoirs *In Order to Live: North Korean Girl Journey to Freedom* and *A Thousand Miles to Freedom: My Escape from North Korea* authored by courageous North Korean women Yeonmi Park and Eunsun Kim respectively who successfully fled North Korea and afterwards endured enslavement in China due to human trafficking. This study aims to conduct a rhetorical analysis of memoirs as potent instruments in the fight against human trafficking. The focus of life writing, a literary genre derived from autobiography, is an accurate chronicle of the author's life events. The authors were able to convey their innermost thoughts, feelings, and experiences via this potent medium. Memoirs, in contrast to other literary forms, is based on the author's own experiences rather than the imagined past or future of a fictional character. Many people who have suffered severe emotional, mental, and spiritual traumas go silent as a result. The combination of being already voiceless in a particular community, together with the weight of enduring psychological distress, generates a significant dilemma where the primary struggle is in articulating the trauma. Hence, it is crucial for individuals who have had traumatic situations to discover a means of expressing the impact of their trauma. Writing the self serves as a means for these individuals without a voice to regain control over their expression. Therefore, this individual and close act of narrating transforms into a means of establishing one's sense of self. This study specifically examines autobiographical materials authored by victims themselves, with a particular emphasis on the topic of human trafficking in China, despite the existence of prior research on the subject. Instead of relying on indirect sources such as court records, reports, and anonymous interviews, this approach directly presents the personal experiences of women. It vividly recounts the human rights violations they endured. Women's statements are vital in cases of sexual assault, since they provide valuable insight into otherwise unreported occurrences, sometimes owing to the inherent shame associated with such horrific experiences (García, 2019, p. 63). Each of these memoirists presents their story in a unique manner, drawing the reader in on an emotional level before placing it in the broader context of human trafficking. The memoir as a genre is vital to the human rights movement, as seen in the selected text *In Order to Live: A North Korean Girl Journey to Freedom* and *A Thousand Miles to Freedom: My Escape from North Korea*. Specifically, these memoirs of survivors may motivate advocacy and engagement in the battle against the trafficking of North Korean women in China.

Yeonmi Park and Eunsun Kim use the genre well by crafting a powerful and personal plea for action. They make challenging decisions by appealing to emotions and revealing distressing details to establish a connection between their experiences and a broader problem. When traumatic events are narrated, the language, tone, degree of information, timing, and structure influence the emotionality and, therefore, the closeness with the audience. This personalizes a terrible societal issue for the otherwise shielded reader. Park and Kim's use of globalising techniques—including the stories of other victims, and discussions of economic and political context—puts the survivor-audience dynamic on a larger stage, helping readers to understand the scope of the problem and how they can contribute to its resolution. The authors, Yeonmi Park and Eunsun Kim, do an excellent job of using context to build a whole picture of the commercial sexual exploitation of North Korean women in China, and they also do an excellent job of using traumatic details and making the reader feel intimately connected to the narrative. Both memoirs provide strong arguments for the North Korean human rights movement.

Each of these memoirs exemplifies the genre's centrality to the human rights movement by sharing the stories of survivors and how their stories might inspire others to take action against human trafficking. One of the most powerful ways for victims of social injustice to express themselves is via memoirs. Historical accounts from individuals like Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass are crucial for bringing attention to this social injustice and inspiring others to act just as they were in their day. Collectively, the memoirs of Yeonmi Park and Eunsun Kim demonstrate how the memoir can serve as a powerful tool for social change through its ability to establish a personal connection between reader and survivor, which evokes empathy, and by linking the survivor's story to the broader problem of human trafficking, which calls for action. Park and Kim's memoirs candidly depict challenging circumstances, including physical assaults, sexual violence, psychological anguish, and brushes with mortality, but with varying levels of detail. However, the purpose of these details is not to arouse interest but to provide information and establish a genuine and personal connection between the reader and the situation. Otherwise, their narratives would only consist of factual accounts from a subjective viewpoint; nonetheless, memoirs serve the purpose of offering readers intimate details and emotional depth. Ellerby states that "effective memoirists understand how to be the 'sieve' that lets just the right amount of detail through in order to build intimacy rather than contempt" (2001, p. 188). Therefore, authors of trafficking memoirs are faced with the task of selecting and determining the appropriate level of information to include, as well as strategically organizing and presenting these facts in terms of language and structure. These decisions manifest in distinct ways throughout each memoir. Both Park and Kim's tactics elicit an emotional connection with the reader, offering an honest depiction of the atrocities of sexual slavery in China rather than providing just entertainment.

Yeonmi Park, a defector and renowned human rights activist, hails from North Korea. She advocates for the rights of oppressed individuals. Her insightful piece in 2014 delving into the phenomenon of North Korea's "Black Market Generation" has garnered attention. Moreover, her memoir titled *In Order to Live: A North Korean Girl's Journey to Freedom* recounts her daring escape from North Korea. It has been published in 18 countries and translated more than 20 languages. Ms. Park rose to prominence through her

poignant and introspective speeches denouncing the brutality and oppression of the Korean regime at prestigious events like the 2014 Oslo Freedom Forum and the One Young World Summit in Dublin. Through this one person's perilous escape, people worldwide have gained insights into the lives of North Koreans. Her inclusion as one of BBC's "Top100 Global Women" is a testament to her extraordinary bravery, resilience and compelling story. In her narrative, Park sheds light on the conditions endured by individuals under Kim Jong Un's dictatorship. She began her connection with trafficking when she was only thirteen years old, making her a very vulnerable child and highlighting the need for legislative protections. She firmly believes that change lies with the generation, including herself since they are more exposed to speech and free markets.

Eunsun Kim's memoir is entitled *A Thousand Miles to Freedom: My Escape from North Korea*. She was born in North Korea, an oppressive nation in the present era. Throughout her childhood, Eunsun had a love for her country despite having to experience school trips, witnessing executions, participating in daily self-criticism sessions and facing the devastating effects of a nationwide famine. When Eunsun was eleven years old her father and grandmother tragically passed away due to poverty, and Eunsun herself faced the threat of starvation. Ultimately, Eunsun's mother decided to escape North Korea with Eunsun and her sister, unaware that this journey would take nine years to complete. Her story is eloquently told with bravery. It serves as a captivating revelation of North Korean regime while also standing as a testament, to human resilience and perseverance. In her current role, Eunsun advocates for human rights in North Korea on behalf of an NGO.

2. Human Trafficking of North Korean Women in China

2.1 Exposition on Political and Economic Influences

The fundamental impetus behind the choice of the two memoirists to seek refuge in China was the paucity of sustenance. Despite their disadvantaged social status, they consistently shown deep respect for their leader and displayed steadfast allegiance to the authoritarian regime. Subsequent to the famine in the 1990s, the country saw significant changes. It faced economic turbulence and witnessed a noticeable decrease in food rations, especially in the northeastern areas (Davis, 2006, p. 131). The northeastern area, where Yeonmi Park and Eunsun Kim hail from, was hit hard by the famine. Given the precarious situation their family members were in, the two of them decided to go to China primarily to get food. Their last hope for continued existence lay with China. During her time in North Korea, Eunsun Kim recounts in her memoir how she was in dire need of food. "I no longer even had enough energy to go out and beg or steal. Little by little, my body started to get used to the stabbing hunger in my stomach, but I lost all of my strength. Overcome by my weakness, I tried to sleep. I felt like the ground was going to open up and swallow me, like I was going to get sucked into the depths of the Earth" (Kim & Falletti, 2015, p. 5). All her family members, including her father, passed away in famine. Yeonmi Park also recollects a similar incident when their family was desperate for food and they no longer dreamed of a good education or eating delicious food rather they were constantly worried whether they would be getting their next meal, "You eat only with an animal instinct to survive, unconsciously calculating how much longer each bite of food will keep your body going. My parents couldn't sleep. They were afraid they might not wake up, and then their children would starve to death" (Park & Vollers, 2015, p. 104). A striking feature of the regime's educational programme is the heavy emphasis on "propaganda" within it. Along with the current administration, people also lack understanding of the outside world and its workings. As a result, this became the main reason why they were vulnerable to exploitation and trafficking in China.

Human trafficking, like any other social problem, is enabled by a myriad of underlying socioeconomic issues. Social issues, especially those pertaining to women, have been heightened by the mass migration of North Koreans into China during the 1990s, when the country's economy began to stagnate and starvation became rampant (Davis, 2006, p. 131). Human trafficking networks that operate on both sides of the border emerged as a result of this migration (Seth, 2010, p. 227). Although analysts point out a variety of push and pull factors, most notably economic ones, motivating North Koreans' exodus, the influx of North Koreans into China has not ceased and is still going unabated (Haggard & Noland, 2010, pp. 27–32). As discussed by Markus Bell, "Brokers and people smugglers are now a well-entrenched part of the migration process out of North Korea and through China. Dependency on these informal migration strategies leaves North Koreans, especially women, vulnerable to exploitation and abuse" (2014, p. 106).

Human trafficking is the transportation of individuals from their native regions by the use of violence, deceit, or compulsion, with the purpose of exploiting them. Due to its concealed nature, obtaining precise global information on the quantities involved is challenging. The 2005 Global Report by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) reveals that around 9,490,000 individuals in the Asia and Pacific area are victims of forced labour, with 1,360,000 of them being victims of human trafficking (Kang Muico, 2005, p. 3). The exact number of North Korean women trafficked in China is unknown, but it is an enormous issue regardless. Due to the persistent economic and food crises in the DPRK, several women have sought refuge in China.

Yeonmi Park and Vollers in the memoir gives a detail information of why North Korean women are in demand in China, "North Korean women were in demand in the rural areas of China because there were not enough Chinese women to go around. The government's population control strategy prohibited most couples from having more than one child – and in Chinese culture, a male child is more valued. Tragically, many female babies were aborted or, according to human rights groups, secretly killed at birth. China ended up with too many boys, and not enough women to marry them when they grew up. The ratio of male to female was especially unbalanced in the rural areas, where many local young women were lured into big cities for jobs and better life. Men with physical or mental disabilities were particularly unlikely to find wives, and these men and their families created the market for North Korean slave- brides" (2015, pp.

131–132). Like instances of human trafficking the two authors of the book experienced both physical and mental abuse, as well as sexual exploitation from both traffickers and customers. The traffickers often resort to violence as a means of punishing their captives for any perceived dishonesty, attempts to escape or simply to assert power and control over them to ensure compliance. Once people find themselves caught up in the web of trafficking upon arriving in China, the real challenges begin.

2.2 Physical and Sexual Exploitation in China

Park and her mother were taken captive by traffickers in China who preyed on their vulnerability by subjecting them to exploitative situations such as forced marriages and labour. Parks account delves into the circumstances where she and her mother were treated like commodities and sold off as spouses to individuals. In China some men have the option to purchase women as their spouses subjecting them to exploitation and suffering (Davis, 2006, p. 134). She discusses it in her memoir, “We were stunned. What did she mean, “sold”? I could not imagine how one human could sell another. I thought people could sell only dogs, chickens, or other animal- not people. And what did she mean, “get married”? I could not believe what was happening” (Park & Vollers, 2015, p. 127). Her mother has to undergo a lot of humiliation in the place where she was sold, “The family locked up their cell phone, their money, even their food. She discovered that she was expected to be not just a wife to this Chinese farmer but a slave to his whole family. She had to cook and clean and work in the fields... To them, she was like one of their farm animals, not a human being at all” (Park & Vollers, 2015, p. 138). Park and her mother are among the many victims of human trafficking who, because of their illegal status and fear of deportation, endure severe emotional pain and social isolation. “I felt as trapped as I had ever been in my life. Just like North Korea, I lived with fear so deep and heavy that it could fill up the night sky and pin my soul to the ground with its weight. I could see no way out” (Park & Vollers, 2015, pp. 176–177).

Traffickers can exercise influence over and manipulate their victims because of this isolation just like they did initially when they arrived “If you’re going to be trouble, we’ll just send you back to North Korea and they’ll arrest you” (Park & Vollers, 2015, p. 126). Yeonmi Park shares her horrifying experience of how her mother was raped in front of her, “Then he threw my mother to the ground and raped her right in front of me, like an animal. I saw such fear in her eyes, but there was nothing I could do except stand there and shiver, begging silently for it to end” (Park & Vollers, 2015, p. 130). And as the memoir progresses, she also talks about her experience with rape by Hongwei, “I was only six months past my thirteenth birthday, and small for my age. When Hongwei pressed himself on top of me, I thought I would spilt in two. I was so scared, and the act was so painful and disgusting and I violent that I thought it couldn’t really be happening to me. After a while I actually felt like I had left my body and was sitting on floor next to bed. I was watching myself, but it wasn’t me” (Park & Vollers, 2015, p. 146).

Eunsun Kim delves into the circumstances that led to her, her sister Keumsun and their mother being sold to a struggling farmer. They were subjected to a scheme that distorted their thoughts and perceptions ultimately convincing them that marrying a man was their only viable option, for obtaining sustenance and shelter in China. Failure to comply with this path would result in their forced return, to North Korea accompanied by denouncement. “We wanted to Ensure our safety at any cost. In China, we felt like we were being watched at every second. How are we supposed to leave this country without help? The solution proposed by our “savior” seemed to me the only possible option. It was either get married, or get arrested and be repatriated to North Korea, where prison or worse awaited us” (Kim & Falletti, 2015, pp. 79–80). Their initial host, a kind woman who took it upon herself to provide them with food and shelter, believed she was acting as a guardian angel. However, it was later revealed that their true motivation, for their actions was selling them for profit through trafficking. The demand for women had increased due to China’s one-child policy, particularly in rural agricultural areas where women could contribute to physically demanding work. The individual who married their mother brought them to a place called Yang Chang Chon, where he resided with his family of six members. They were mainly used to work in fields all day, “we were merely three bodies to toil away in the fields every day under the careful watch of the farmer’s old mother” (Kim & Falletti, 2015, p. 87). Every day, they lived in debasement and disgrace since they didn’t have the means to escape their situation. They face much worse punishments when they try to escape. During the time when they decided to leave because they could no longer bear the pain imposed upon them by the Chinese farmer, Kim relates an incident that happened. They have no choice but to withdraw since the great danger of being discovered severely restricts their mobility. When they returned, they were punished severely, “He hit my mother, and then he tried to tie a chain around her neck, like a dog, to prevent her from trying to escape again. Oh how I hated this barbarian” (Kim & Falletti, 2015, p. 96). The worst scenarios are when they are captured and deported back to North Korea. Eunsun Kim and Falletti in their memoir also talks about the gruesome experience when she and her family was caught and deported back to North Korea, “I was completely naked and being subjected to humiliating torment. I bent my knees, crouched down, and then got back up again. I did this repeatedly until I was out of breath. Nothing was to be hidden, not even the most intimate areas of our bodies” (2015, p. 111). These women find themselves trapped in situations of trafficking due, to forced marriages, which subject them to objectification and physical and sexual assault. They experience limitations and often lack legal safeguards. Unfortunately, due to their status and inadequate protection, they encounter difficulties when attempting to escape such circumstances.

Both authors skilfully weave stories about their experiences of abuse as well as those of present-day victims. Their approach, to discussing trauma is not overly specific which aligns with the authors goal of highlighting the nature of her own experience and this calls for empathy, raising awareness about a phenomenon that is often overlooked. Moreover, it delves into the ranging impact of sex trafficking, encompassing its emotional, cultural, social and relational consequences. Additionally, the immense agony and sheer brutality endured during their torment are evident. The different perspectives and influences presented in these two memoirs together provide a

portrayal of the harsh reality of human sex trafficking. Both of these memoirs demonstrate a dedication to using the first-person narrative to foster empathy among readers towards victims of human trafficking.

2.3 *Stories of Other Victims*

The memoirs written by Yeonmi Park and Eunsun Kim include stories, from individuals who have also been victims of trafficking. Despite the nature of these memoirs the authors emphasize that they are not alone in their experiences and that many others continue to endure similar abuse and trauma, in our world. Helen M. Buss highlights how these women's memoirs skilfully navigate the balance of sharing narratives while also connecting them to the collective experiences of others. She states that "an 'I' is at work through the writer's emphasis on the specificity of the quotidian, reiterative, and ritualistic details of lived life", but that these memoirs are also "about fitting in, finding a community, and suppressing any separate, distinctive identity," which is crucial for human trafficking survivors to assist other victims (Buss, 2006, p. 63). The inclusion of these accounts by Park and Kim seems to be an effort to broaden her narrow perspective and highlight the severity of certain occurrences. Instead of differentiating from her experience, they use accounts of other women defectors to demonstrate how prevalent it is. Yeonmi Park for instance briefly mention about Young Sun who is a smuggler in North Korea, ran into debt and escaped to China. She highlights her situation as "She was living with him like a wife, but they are not married. She has no rights and no identification papers, so she could be arrested at any time and sent back to North Korea" (Park & Vollers, 2015, p. 131). She also briefly details a young woman who is twenty-five years old who is paralysed from the waist below, was raped by Hongwei and was still sold to a farmer, she goes on to collectively describe their experience in her memoir as, "It makes me sick to think about what I and so many girls and women had to do to survive in China. I wish it had all never happened, and that I never had to talk about it again. But I want everyone to know the shocking truth about human trafficking" (Park & Vollers, 2015, p. 154). She also details about Myung Ok, who is also a defector from North Korea who was sold to a handicapped farmer who constantly abused her, "The man was so nervous about her running away that he followed her everywhere, even into the bathroom" (Park & Vollers, 2015, p. 157). Eunsun Kim on the other hand does not give incidents detailing other North Korean women. Yet, she collectively represents them for her purpose for writing her memoir, "I want to help the world understand the situation on the Korean peninsula, so that the sufferings of my people are not forgotten" (Kim & Falletti, 2015, p. 224).

3. **Healing, Resistance and Social Action**

Although escaping from slavery offers individuals their freedom, it does not indicate the end of their difficulties. The rehabilitation process is intrinsically difficult, and the effort to recover after a traumatic incident presents substantial obstacles. Victims of human trafficking may face a lengthy and continuous process of recovery throughout their lives. As Judith Herman states, "Resolution of the trauma is never final; recovery is never complete. The impact of a traumatic event continues to reverberate throughout the survivor's life cycle" (1997, p. 211). But healing does take place. He elaborates on this as, "The course of recovery does not follow a simple progression, but also detours and double backs. Double backs, reviewing issues that have already been addressed many times in order to deepen and expend the survivor's integration of the meaning of the experience" (1997, p. 213). As Yeonmi Park and Vollers in their memoir highlights it in her prologue, "I am most grateful for two things: that I was born in North Korea and that I escaped from North Korea. Both of these events shaped me, and I would not trade them for an ordinary and peaceful life. But there is more to the story of how I became who I am today" (2015, p. 3). Janet Mason Ellerby argues that "those people who can take the opportunity to move toward self-realization often begin by writing and their memoir becomes a functional and salvational vehicle for that process" (2001, p. 193). The survivors choose to engage in the act of writing, despite the inherent distress it inflicts upon them. Their objective is to convert their own challenges into valuable assets for others. The magnitude of their decision to document their memoirs is accentuated by this circumstance. "I would write my story fully and completely, holding nothing back about my own trafficking. If my life was to mean anything, it was my only choice" (Park & Vollers, 2015, p. 264). Ellerby elucidates this as "When memoirists move from silence into speech, they make new life and new growth possible for themselves and their readers...by pressing towards self-awareness, the memoirist locates the fresh air of change" (2001, p. 194). When writing memoirs authors aim to bring awareness of the regime North Korea and shed light on the stories of women who escape to China. Through their narratives they reveal the truth of trafficking and various other forms of abuse. Yeonmi Park highlights it in her memoir about how her mother urged her to represent North Korean women and their sufferings in China. "'You have to tell the world that North Korea is like one bug prison camp", she said. She wanted people to know why we had to escape, and what happened to North Korean women who were sold in China. "If you don't speak up for them, Yeonmi-ya, who will?" she said" (Park & Vollers, 2015, p. 264). In the same way Eunsun Kim also echoes the same cause for penning down her memoir, "I undertook the writing of this book with a mission that i hold dear to my heart: providing witness testimony to the situation in North Korea, and helping to alleviate the burdens of my people, who are oppressed by a totalitarian dictatorship" Kim and Falletti (2015, p. 226). Yeonmi Park and Eunsun Kim might be regarded as paragons of empathy since they have written memoirs, while facing personal adversities, with the aim of inspiring hope in other survivors. Both authors of the memoirs have experienced very traumatic circumstances. In their memoirs, the author describes the catastrophic occurrences they have experienced, while also describing their path to recovery and eventual personal change. The purpose of these testimonies is to inspire and enlighten people, while motivating a broader audience using narratives that cover a wide spectrum of experiences, from captivity to freedom.

The memoirs written by Park and Kim and their reliving of their terrible experience, might be seen as forms of social activism and defiance. Resistance narratives often combine a series of visual representations with an accurate portrayal of reality, eliciting more contemplation over the author's personal experiences, sense of self, and dedication. They have given a platform to women bringing

attention to their daily struggle, for survival in North Korea and China where their lives are constantly, at risk.

4. Connecting to a Global Issue

Memoir is derived from personal recollection; it is a very subjective and unique kind of narrative; nonetheless, it is also situated within a social context, holding importance within a wider readership and societal concerns. Helen M. Buss describes in *Repossessing the World: Reading Memoirs by Contemporary Women*, the memoir genre “bridges the typical strategies of historical and literary discourses in order to establish necessary connections between the private and the public, the personal and the political” (2006, p. 3). Park and Kim’s human trafficking survivor memoirs illustrate the importance of this bridge for life narratives that aim to inspire social action responses as they recount their own experiences while simultaneously drawing attention to the broader societal problem. Janet Ellerby argues that, “If there is a larger social purpose to be served by way of the memoir’s revelations and accusations, the memoir . . . becomes a testimony to the betterment of a particular social ill. The individual memoirist serves then as a metonym for a larger social enterprise, and the memoir achieves a more culturally emblematic and ethical dimension” (2001, p. 210).

Writing a memoir with the intention of making a difference and advancing social justice requires situating the tale within a larger framework. Yeonmi Park and Eunsun Kim both state unequivocally that they want to highlight the issue of human trafficking and encourage readers to do something about it. Therefore, in order to justify the need for readers to take action, both memoirs include sections that allude to the pervasive and common character of their experience. These memoirs highlights details of other victims, and expository discussion of the economic and political causes of human trafficking. These different approaches highlight the problem’s global scope and provide potential avenues for resolution. Memoirists use these globalizing strategies in various ways: sometimes to ethos, sometimes to support the case for social action, and sometimes as a means of justifying their own experiences.

The memoir follows the statement made by critic Helen M. Buss that “a genre arises from particular social needs... and becomes a cultural practice with the power to remake ideology” (2006, pp. 6–7). The narrative of survivors of trafficking which incorporates both research and personal experiences underscores the pressing need to take action in order to prevent, rescue and rehabilitate those individuals who are still enduring the harrowing ordeals described in these memoirs. By sharing their stories on a scale Yeonmi Park and Eunsun Kim bring attention to the larger issue of human trafficking in China exposing the existence of numerous other victims, like themselves. Through their experiences readers gain insight into the causes, impacts and repercussions of this pervasive form of abuse.

To “establish empathy, seek truth, discover compassion”, as Janet Ellerby puts it, we need to listen “carefully to each other’s tentative, groping sentences, the details of our lives, the stories” (2001, p. 211). Listening, Ellerby says, “thwarts dehumanisation, fosters intimacy, and extends the possibility for peaceful coexistence among us” (2001, p. 211). Eunsun Kim *A Thousand Miles, to Freedom; My Escape from North Korea* and Yeonmi Park *In Order to Live; A North Korean Girls Journey to Freedom* provide a connection for readers to empathize with the memoirists and their remarkable journeys. Both authors emphasize the experiences they faced due to trafficking in China. Through their stories, they aim to inspire compassion, understanding and action. By depicting the abuse they endured and expanding upon the issue of trafficking these memoirists create an intimate yet enlightening bond with readers that goes beyond mere observation. Their goal is to connect, empathise, understand and ultimately motivate readers towards action.

5. Conclusion

The authors of these memoirs establish a connection with their readers by employing a narrative technique that incorporates anecdotes, observations and the experiences of others. Through expressing their personal hardships these writers successfully forge a deep and intellectual bond with their readers. They include details about the events they recount in their memoirs. They are not afraid to tackle challenging subjects such as sexual and physical assaults, mental illness and death. It is important to provide these details as they offer information to the reader and foster genuine interest in the topic. The primary aim of these memoirs is to offer readers perspectives and evoke responses; without this approach, the narratives would adopt a more factual tone akin to mere first-person accounts. Ellerby argues that “effective memoirists understand how to be the ‘sieve’ that lets just the right amount of detail through in order to build intimacy rather than contempt” (2001, p. 188). Consequently, readers are motivated to experience and perceive, establish connections, identify shared aspects, acquire information, and, ideally, engage in proactive measures. The two authors skilfully immerse readers in their accounts of human trafficking with intricate depictions. As Buss argues “such text speaks for the survival of others who do not have the linguistic opportunities” (2006, p. 161). While it is often expected that memoirs primarily focus on the experiences of a single individual, human rights memoirs diverge from this convention by advocating for and extending support to others. Ellerby argues “Memoirist who make a commitment to the concept of integrity and risk of disclosure are working against isolation” (2001, p. 211). Consequently, the North Korean women memoirs serve as a testament to the advocacy for individuals’ entitlement to attain prosperity and rehabilitation, alongside preserving their liberties pertaining to verbal communication and self-representation. The memoir genre serves as a natural convergence point for artistic expression, true experiences, emotions, and intricate facts. In this context, the genre of human rights memoir, particularly survivor narratives, is notable for its unique ability to advocate for a specific social justice agenda, compelling readers to take action, so setting it apart from other forms of literature. Activists assume the role of resilient individuals who have triumphed over past tragedies while advocating for the legal rights of girls and women in North Korea.

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Authors contributions

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