



**WRITING WITNESSING, WITNESSING WRITING:
WORKING THROUGH TRAUMA USING
PERFORMATIVE AUTOETHNOGRAPHY**

HYUNJI KWON

Abstract

Centering on my transformation from a victim of sexual assault to a subject with sexual trauma, I examine how performative autoethnography differently addresses, responds to, and witnesses my own trauma. Kelly Oliver's (2001) theory of witnessing provides a theoretical framework to witness through infinite address-ability and response-ability of subjectivity. In order to witness my trauma through increased subjectivity resulting from enhanced address-ability and response-ability, I use performative autoethnography as my methodology followed by Della Pollock's (1998) six prompts for performative writing and Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's (1982) experimental narrative style that intertwines multiple accounts, media, and genres of writing. I first create my multiple trauma subjects by intertwining myself with those who formerly worked through their trauma: My maternal grandmother Wonhwa Choi, who was subjected to ethnic abuse as a Northerner in postwar South Korea and dealt with her impending death, and a Korean comfort woman Duk-kyung Kang, who was an enforced sexual slave for the Japanese military during WWII. Second, in an attempt to increase address-ability to intertwined trauma, I include visual materials, such as my grandmother's artifact, *Hemp Shrouds* (2012), and Kang's painting, *Lost Virginity* (1995), that are used for their own witnessing. My performative autoethnography becomes a site where the contingent, shifting, and emergent subjectivity of my trauma subjects are constructed for bearing witness. Therefore, the affective force of performative autoethnography enables writing to become witnessing itself, *writing as witnessing* and *witnessing writing*.

Keywords: Witnessing, performative autoethnography, subjectivity, sexual trauma, trauma art

**Introduction to Becoming a Witness to the
Process of Witnessing Myself**

In recent years, my subject position as a victim of sexual assault has shifted into a subject with sexual trauma. Having experienced both child molestation and sexual assault as an adult, I had inevitably been named, positioned, and treated as a victim. Before I engaged with these experiences as defining traumas, the repetitive pattern of emotional instability and a subtle destructive drive had often visited me. Despite this internal crisis, my artistic and performative examination of this trauma enabled my transformation from a victim of sexual assault into a subject of sexual trauma. I became a witness to the process of witnessing myself.

The feminist philosopher Kelly Oliver (2001) argues that the atrocity of trauma cannot be recognized because the structure of recognition between the recognizer and recognized, and non-victim and trauma victim, is hierarchical. Instead, she suggests *witnessing* as an alternative to recognition as based on the reciprocal dialogue of address and response. Witnessing encompasses being an eyewitness and bearing witness. An eyewitness is when a "spectator is present and observes the event with one's own eyes and bearing witness asks a spectator to testify to that which cannot be seen" (p. 16). Witnessing has tension in that eyewitness testimony positions the subject in a finite moment as a victim of trauma, while bearing witness requires a trauma subject's infinite response-ability of subjectivity to witness one's own and others' trauma. While my eyewitness testimony is destructive and limitedly repeats trauma, since trauma defies its full identification, Oliver's performative ability to address trauma suggests possible resistance against trauma's destructive and compulsory repetition.

In the tensions between the eyewitness and bearing witness, subject position and subjectivity, and trauma repetition and resistance to repetition, a cultural historian Dominick LaCapra (2001) suggests *working through* to overcome the foreclosed condition of trauma. In *working through*, a subject critically engages with the past, works it over, and transforms the understanding of trauma. Following LaCapra, the process of *working through* is "not linear or straightforwardly developmental,

but involves the repetition of trauma with significant difference” (p. 148). Adjacent with Oliver’s bearing witness, LaCapra’s idea of *working through* advocates consistent engagement with one’s own trauma but with a different performativity. Then, what are the different, performative, and non-compulsory ways of bearing witness to trauma? How can *working through* as a process of bearing witness also be responsive to one’s own and also others’ trauma?

In order to answer the questions above, I use autoethnography as a methodology that provides various modes of involvement with my traumatic past. Autoethnography, connecting my autobiographical experiences to wider social, cultural, and political meanings and understandings, can accordingly allow my critical comprehension of trauma within a broader context (Ellis, 2004). Although autoethnography is often used to claim something new and provocative, I use performative autoethnography to perform witnessing (Ellingson & Ellis, 2008). The performance theorist Della Pollock’s (1998) six prompts for performative writing (evocative, metonymic, subjective, nervous, citational, and consequential) suggest theoretical insights into how to write performatively. As an example of *practicing* what Pollock describes, I follow Korean-born American artist Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s (1951-1982) performative narrative style as practiced in her novel *Dictée* (1982). In particular, Cha intertwines multiple trauma subjects (herself, her mother, and female historical figures of liberation) in an autobiographical account by juxtaposing various media (a photograph, map, and anatomical diagram) and multiple genres of writing (poetry, an epistolary narrative to her mother, and fiction about bundles).

Following Pollock’s theory and Cha’s practice of performative autoethnography, my accounts of trauma subjects are multiple, imaginary, and intertwined. These subjects include myself, my maternal grandmother Wonhwa Choi, who was forcefully displaced during the Korean War, discriminated as a Northerner in the post-War era of South Korea, and prepared to meet her impending death, and a former Korean comfort woman Duk-kyung Kang, who was an enforced sexual slave for the Japanese military during WWII.¹ Additionally, visual forms that are used for

1. “Comfort woman” is a translated term for the Japanese and Korean euphemism *ianfu* that means a woman who comforts [men by providing for their sexual needs].

their own witnessing, such as my grandmother’s artifact *Hemp Shrouds* (2012) and Kang’s painting *Lost Virginity* (1995), are included within various genres of writing. The multivocality in my performative autoethnography is not merely derived from my multiple social roles or interactions with others, but instead evokes and involves those traumatized in one body – whether from sexual or other trauma.²

Metonymic: Deaths of My Grandmother Choi, Her Brother, Comfort Woman Kang, and Her Son

Metonymic in Pollock’s (1998) performative writing emphasizes differences rather than identity through linguistic representation. Following Pollock, writing “displaces others and other-worlds ... by securing absence with the presence of words” (p. 83). The substitutive presence of *what is not* in print-based temporality enacts a sense of loss in the desire for lost objects. In this story, the presence of the deaths of my grandmother and her brother along with those of Duk-kyung Kang and her son reflect my longing for all four people.

The socially ingrained expectations of women in Korea to be dutiful to the men, elders, and nation, provided the social mechanisms to traffic 20,000-70,000 women to provide sex for Japanese military men during WWII (Kim, 1970). From this systematic human trafficking and coerced prostitution, the Indo-Pacific area occupied by the Japanese military had networks of comfort stations. The diverse racial and sexualized victims that filled comfort stations were killed, abandoned, and remained invisible even after WWII ended. For Kang’s autoethnographical stances, I excerpt Kang’s testimony from the Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan.

2. When reading my stories, the reader becomes a witness to my trauma. Although my stories are divided according to Pollock’s (1998) characteristics of performative writing, I encourage readers to become engaged with all the stories without a top-to-bottom linear reading by reading and re-reading in different sequences. By doing so, first, readers can experience more than one way of witnessing my trauma. Second, and more importantly, I intend for multiple ways of witnessing to help readers acknowledge their own traumas and experience so that the reader can become a witness to the process of witnessing of their own trauma.

Halmoni, bogoshipa [Grandma, miss you].³ Pyongyang, where you were born, is very cold and deep in the forest. It is where I am forbidden to go. It was nowhere but everywhere to you. There was no one else but your people were everyone. Your father cut the wood for days and days to keep you warm. In a shadowy afternoon, your father came back carrying wood on his back, woke you up, and then carried you on his⁴ back. It was a warm back from endless labor, warm back everything he could give, and warm back everything you wanted. Grandma, while you were bare foot, your father still kept his shoes on. He didn't want his back to get cold while taking his shoes off. You remembered this until you could not eat or move.

Your beloved brother, a laborer like your dad, was left to your father as a corpse. In the deep mountain, they had made your father drunk, day and night for days and suddenly gave him his son's corpse with no explanation. No questions could be asked from your drunken father. Your father jumps into the icy water to cool down the ever-present grief burning inside him. He wanted to make his body like your brother, but he couldn't. At your age of 18 years old, the cold and deep North is no longer yours. During the Korean War, Chinese, whose people are more and more, come to you, your father, and your mother. You are still a child but your back is warmed for your daughter. From then, your mother North tongue is called refugee. You are less meaningful than Southerners because you are not a Southerner; you are different. *Halmoni* [Grandma], you are a child since you are weak and smaller than everyone. At 84 years old, you are on your bed being fed, washed, brushed, and changed. They have sheltered you with other old children. Those children mutter and yell constantly, on all fours, and call you mother. You answered to those children, with the Northern tongue but softly, "Yes dear, I am your mother."

When the comfort woman Kang was 13 years old, there came

3. *Halmoni* is a Korean term for grandmother. This term can be used both for calling biological maternal and paternal grandmother and also all elders. Because of its affectionate connotation, survivors of Korean comfort women are often called *ianfu halmoni* [comfort women grandmother].

the second Sino-Japanese War. She said, "I will join the Volunteer Labor Corps to study and earn money in Japan," to her mother, who married for the second time after her first husband died, and to her Japanese teacher, who persuaded her to join because she was the smartest one in class:

*Ah, across mountains and seas,
We have come thousands of miles from home.
The Korean peninsula, far away on the horizon,
There our mothers' faces shine.
But I got captured,
My body is torn asunder.*

Military, warfare, absence, desire and despair, and her memories come along with the words Kang sets onto the martial song. The absence of hope and pain hurts too much; at least she feels nothing. Kang sings as if it releases her from pain and as if it appeases people not to deform her. Kang sings as if she continues to live.

At Kang's age of fourteen, she overheard that the war ended. The Korean flags floated over the horizon, the horizon that she dreamed to cross. Her body is no longer a comfort woman, but her memories keep her as a comfort woman. *No, you can't die.* Kang can't throw her body onto the sea because she is with child. The child with child means no virginity, no honor, and because of that, her mother *again* abandons her. Her child in a Catholic orphanage wears the same clothes for days, weeks, and months. When this child was not breathing any longer, benevolent nuns dress another child in her child's clothes. *Here, come my baby.* The child is nowhere. Only another child is in her child's clothes.

In 1992, Kang decided to report that she is a former comfort woman. She has nothing, no house and family. They have housed her with others. She brings one small nickel bowl. Others bring bags and bags in trucks. She is no bigger than others, like her nickel bowl. She crouches in a corner of the room, she is a margin, and *margin makes other women centered.* She is quiet, but not speechless, she speaks softly and strongly. From the moment she reports, she is named and called comfort woman.

In 1994, at the age of 67, Kang is with others called comfort women. She touches, hugs, and begs others not to leave her. *This is my last time, the last time*. And she sings (Pyon, 1995):

*Always, always let us never apart.
Didn't you and I swear, promise to never be apart.
Love left me, and you left me, here by myself all alone.
I cry, and cry because I can't forget those days.*

Nervous: Intertwining Wartime Rape of Kang (1944-1945) and Sexual Assault of Myself (early 1990s, 2005)

Nervous in Pollock's (1998) performative writing is based on Foucaudian genealogy and travels across various stories, texts, theories, and practices in unsettling ways. Foucaudian genealogy "opposes itself to the search for origins" and remarks that discontinuity, contingency, and accidents lead to new concepts and history (Foucault, 1977, p. 140). In opposition to the linearity of modern history, Foucaudian genealogy argues how "any given system of thought is the result of chance and historical contingency ... instead of the origin and development of an identical subject" (Gutting, 2013).

In this regard, history is neither fixed nor linear and narratives about history that exclude discontinuities are always and already contested. In order for my narrative to expose chance and contingency at play in history, I deploy multiple selves: The historically charged rape of Kang and the ahistorically individualized experience of my sexual assault. By tracing the genealogy of Kang's historicized story and my non-historicized story, the elements of discontinuity and rupture between stories of sexual assault can create new epochs and histories of sexual assault.

Korea used to be a nation of our own. It was small, but whole. It is everything we have and everything belongs to it. But we are claimed because we are labeled barbaric and less civilized than *Other*, Japan. Each and every law to civilize barbaric Korea makes the Korean name, language, gourmet, religion, forests, land, rice, resources, and women

absent. More civilized, more absent. The women's bodies belonging to an inferior nation are used, violated, and disposed of for the sake of superior men, nation, and the war. These profoundly *othered* women are called comfort women. Women who comfort men's pain and fear became ever uncomfortable and fearful. I have never been comfortable ever since it happened. They did that to me to feel at ease? Who comforts whom ... does this make me a comfort woman too?

Comfort woman Kang, December 1944, Matsushiro, Japan

Mother, it has been two years since I left. I am called *Harue* and speak in Japanese tongue. I should not have said: *I will join*. It was a dark night when I ran away from the factory and then was caught. It was a dark night when I was raped. I should have stayed with the fainting and deranged girls at work. When a soldier calls my name, I have to follow. When I cannot walk, they drag me. Mother, is it because I am a woman or Korean? Is it because it is wartime?

Comfort woman Kang, October 1946, Busan, South Korea

Mother, last month, my son died. My son with no father died. You said you couldn't be with me because I have a past and you have a present with your second husband. If a woman can't live by herself, why doesn't your protector protect me? Protector protects woman only because of sex? Then, I decided to live by myself. I don't want to be protected.

Myself, May 2004, Daegu, South Korea

Mother, I still think about it but can't remember details. I don't remember how old I was, what he looks like, which friend's house he told me he would bring me to, and what exactly he did to me. He held me in his arms, touched me, and rubbed my body against his body. I begged him to let me go, let me go...

I can't talk about this because you look pained. It makes me feel shame; it makes me feel guilty. I am ashamed because I am a bad daughter.

ter and a bad girlfriend with a dirty past. Does he, who did that to me, feel shame and guilt too?

Myself, August 2005, Daegu, South Korea

Mother, it happened again. I might not have locked the door. It's my fault. When I heard the noise and opened my eyes, I saw a man standing in front of my bed. The moment was horrible but I felt that I was lucky because I wasn't raped just like the first one. I tell this story like an epic story, like I am a heroine. But, people who heard this don't believe me. I know it from their changed eyes. Even one boyfriend told me, "I don't believe you. But if the *real thing* happened, I would decide to keep loving you." After that, I shut my mouth.

Subjective: My Multiple Selves as a Patient, Researcher, and a Trauma Subject

Subjective in Pollock's (1998) performative writing articulates the writer's multiple selves across time in a larger context. This does not provide a coherent or continuous self across time, but *performs* self as the relation between multiple selves in one body. The dynamic and contingent relation between the writer and her subject(s) further engages readers with the writer's reflexivity, while increasing the reciprocity between selves and between the writer and readers. In this story, my multiple selves include a gynecology patient, a researcher on comfort women, and a subject of sexual trauma. My diverse selves can both coexist within a single body and act in an interconnected manner.

A nurse feels the pulse of my right wrist with her watch. Her cold finger on my wrist, tacky watch, long and artificial nails and strong floral perfume bother me. The room where we sit is confined, with no window, and I wish her to be done soon. She asks me to undress my bottom and covers my legs with a sheet. She leaves the room. I can barely breathe. I close my eyes, inhale, and exhale deeply. I sit alone and my uncovered bottom is getting cold. Another woman walked in. Big eyes,

short hair, no makeup; she seems nice. She asks me to spread my legs wider. Her head is now in-between my legs. She sees me, she sees me as my vagina, and she sees me through the symptoms of my vagina that I cannot see. "You look fine, but I just took out a little piece of polyp to be checked. It is just protocol." Her hearty smile warms me up. *Pre-cancerous*. Now she sees me as a pre-cancer. I see myself as a pre-cancer.

"Too old subject matter to research." His empty and skinny face bounces with a dirty tongue. *Why is the issue of comfort women important?* His face cracks into a grin. "Colonialism ended 65 years ago." That is all he—a professor in postcolonial South Korea—can think about comfort women. His spit spatters and spills, overflowing and buzzing. He keeps speaking. I hear nothing.

*I hear the people droning in the distance
She is lucky, she wasn't raped.
Do I own my body, or is my body owned?*

*I see people seeing people through organ
People and people as Organ and organ
Organ, The organ, Sexual Organ
I see myself what others see
Days and days, Years and years,
Sigh, Silence, Period.*

*I don't own my body, it is a machine
More than one template for the machine
Until machine has no organ, the organ, Sexual Organ
Days and days, Years and years,
Speak, dance, sing, and ellipsis...
It is uncertain, but I see myself what I see*

Should it happen between male and female, should we see male as perpetrator and female as victim, should it be called rape, the word rape makes rapists deny themselves as rapists and their victims as victims. It is rather, violence, violators, and violated.

Evocative: My Deceased Grandmother's Imaginary Viewing of Kang's Painting, *Lost Virginity* (1995)

Evocative in Pollock's (1998) performative writing enables images and ideas to become agents. Metaphorical writing evokes other-worlds that are "other-wise intangible and unlocatable ... such as worlds of memory, sensation, affect, and in-sight" (p. 80). Writing between creative and critical and between present and absent does not report or describe events, but paints a "self-evident version of the world" (ibid). In this story, I project the imaginary world where my deceased grandmother is viewing comfort woman Kang's painting *Lost Virginity* (1995). Born in the same generation, they went through both colonial and postcolonial Korea, and are presently both deceased. By writing *as if*, I intend for both of them and the *Lost Virginity* to be seen, felt, and thus made perceptible.

Uri halmoni [My grandma] is walking into the room. The black closet that she used for more than 40 years is there. With both hands, she pulls the two doors and takes out one white flat paper box. She opens the top of the box. The box has hemp shrouds. One is for her and several are for those alive. The shroud wearers don't buy them, but she did. Tops, trousers, and skirts ... She is standing in the middle of the room, as she needs space. She spreads labeled shrouds out on the floor. **특대, 대, 중, 소** [X-Large, Large, Medium, Small]. The labels are in her handwriting attached inside the clothes. She put labels on each piece for her seven children, seven children-in-law, and 14 grandchildren. Usually, the hemp shrouds are made by old women. Seeding, harvesting, peeling off the hemp with teeth and lips, threading with fingers and thighs, and knitting with handloom, days and nights. Old women's soft lips and skins become furrowed for the finest hemp shrouds. Living women become slouched, stink, and old, for those dead to become neat and refined. My grandmother picks and wears the smallest one. She leaves the box lid open. Her sons and daughters, more and more shall come and wear these hemp shrouds. (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. Wonhwa Choi (2012), *Hemp Shrouds*.
Courtesy of Hyunji Kwon.

My grandma is entering the room. She crosses the wood threshold. Her skirt trails on the floor. The skirt is too long and big for her. Her body is merely a rasher of bone and flesh. She turns her head exactly to the left and she stops. Then she leans toward the painting. Closer and closer ... her hemp skirt trembles. She turns her head to the top. The color of warmth takes her backward to April. When she was in Pyongyang, she heard that Japanese soldiers are unaccountable, like growing numbers of petals, and the atrocities were inexplicable, like the beauty of blooming cherry blossom beyond words. Countless lightest petals are touching and blinding her. She looks at the center of the painting, one she doesn't want to see. "Japanese bastards..." she mumbles. One male soldier with no eyes, no left arm, and no legs, approaches a young girl in the painting. "Fuck off!" The creepiness of the soldier takes her backwards. She almost tripped. Then she again proceeds more than a step to

the front of the painting (see Figure 2).



Figure 2. Duk-kyung Kang (1995), *Lost Virginity*. Seoul, South Korea: War and Women's Human Rights Museum. Retrieved from <https://www.womenandwar.net/contents/home/home.nx>. Copyright 1995 by Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan. Reproduced with permission.

Naked. Young. Small. Crying. Vulnerable. Like the young girl in the painting, my grandmother sees herself as an adolescent back in 1945; they must be the same age. "Don't be lying there." My grandmother leans toward her, approaches her right arm. Her utmost movement. Nothing changed. She looks down and sees other women on the bottom, the same but multiple, in the place as the day before, the days beyond count. Now she sees the macabre roots growing over the women on the ground. To nature, to her, to daughter, and to daughters, and to the place as the day before, the days beyond count. She can hear ghostly sounds and feel the ghoulishness growing. She *heard* that Japanese soldiers are unaccountable and the atrocities were inexplicable. Now she sees them.

Citational: Affective Bond Between You and Me Through Language

Citational in Pollock's (1998) performative writing enables ideas to become performative by using varied textual recurrence and reiteration. Citational writing utilizes quotations that are "always and already performative" (p. 92). By accumulating quotations, self-quotations, or quotations beyond academic prose, this writing refocuses citation, stages its own citationality, and has "affective alliance" as its purpose (ibid, p. 94). In this story, I create an affective bond between trauma subjects by quoting Cha's *Dictée* (1982), the author of which was raped and murdered in 1982, and feminist scholars Sharon Marcus, Andrea Smith, and Kelly Oliver, whose academic works concern violence and trauma against women. Therefore, the need, conflict, passion, and desire for a different reality of trauma are captured within textuality.

For those people who are raped, for those people who lost beloved ones or nation, for those people who are alienated because of skin color, gender, sexuality, economic status, class, and emotional or physical disability, the enemy of our own is not colonization, nationalism, or sexism itself. "The abstraction is our enemy" (Cha, 1982, p. 32). An abstract process of othering that sees "our bodies as dirty that must be

purified and cleared away” (Smith, 2003, p. 72) and forces us to become “subjects of fear and objects of violence” is our enemy (Marcus, 1992, p. 393).

For those people whose realities are constrained and intermingled by old chains of the subject and being *othered*, for those whose trauma fails from the repetition and representation of othering, your trauma repeats because it “threatens the integrity of your subjectivity and dependence on others” (Oliver, 2001, p. 66). Violence and trauma are extreme and threaten *our* integrity for bearing witness. But remember, we are here and we have language, our language. Our realities and history can be different when our language transforms, transcends, and transmits our pains through the *bond* between you and me.

Consequential: Connecting My Childhood with Researcher-hood through A Tale of My *Bottari* [Bundle]

Consequential in Pollock’s (1998) performative writing generates a linguistic productivity by allowing the reader to become a writer. Consequential writing subsumes the constative into the performative, by replacing “words that *report*” with “words *doing* what other words report” (p. 95). Consequential writing is vulnerable, as it subjects itself to its own critique by inviting new audiences and the public. However, the vulnerable capacity of writing is what makes it performative. In this story, I create an open-ended allegorical tale about my *bottari* [Korean for bundle]. As used by Cha (1982), *bottari* is a metaphor for restless Korean women’s lives, due to women’s role in transporting household goods in *bottari* to settle in another place. Thus, a tale of my *bottari* creates a mobile and transitional space where my molested childhood is relived in researcher-hood and connected with readers to create a different reality.

Her mom was called as “Jae’s mom,” which is the little girl’s brother’s name. No one calls her mother by her own name or by the little girl’s name. She remembers that she liked her *woi-halmoni* [maternal grandmother], because when she was with her, she was herself, not Jae’s sister. She has had scars on her face since she remembers. It is like

braille, like stars, constellations, and galaxies. Boys teased her by counting it: one, two, three, you have one more today! She remembers that she could cry about scars, but not about certain things, secrets. For 24 years, her mother’s pained look stopped her from talking about it.

At 30 years old, she met wise and knowledgeable heralds. One man had given her a little *bottari* of comfort women to keep. The heat rising from the *bottari* almost blurs her view. She tries to leave the *bottari* open to turn off the heat, but it never cools down. Two women gave her two *bottaris* of artists who allow suffering to become visible that was once private and secretive, like hers. From a distance, the figures of the *bottaris* look just fine, but when she opens it, her body melts with heat in it. The more she opens it, the less her body remained. One woman gave her an empty little *bottari*. She told her to slowly fill the *bottari* with her own heat. If she fills *bottari* hastily, the *bottari* would be burnt. She closes her eyes, exhales a long sigh, but does not cry. She reads, writes, draws, and creates. The *bottari* was heated, but nothing stopped her. The last woman told her how to tie the *bottaris* together. “Your mom just wants you to be happy.” She hardly believed. If so, her mom should have listened to her. But she had once decided to believe a wise woman. She holds warm *bottaris* in her bosom and tells her mother that she is going to show her *bottaris* in public. She hears a short gasp and sees her mother’s pained look again. But after her mom looked at her *bottaris*, there was no gasping, no pained look. Her mother gives her a warm embrace.

The mother was not her own. The mother was a daughter, a daughter-in-law, wife, and a mother. The mother held too many *bottaris* in her, like my *woi-halmoni* did. She just didn’t know how to make her daughter happy. Now the mother is my mother, our mother, and future daughters’ mother. The mother wants her daughters to be happy. I am holding more than four tied *bottaris*. I am holding the *bottaris* with care. These *bottaris* are ready to be handed out.

Someone opens the *bottaris*.

Conclusion: Writing Witnessing *Speaks* Witnessing, *Acts* Witnessing, and *Performs* Witnessing

Unlike *Hemp Shrouds* (2012), showing my grandmother's trauma from ethnic abuse against Northerners and preparation for her own death, and also *Lost Virginity* (1995), which reveals former comfort woman Kang's sexual trauma caused by patriarchy and colonialism, my eyewitness testimony of child molestation and adult sexual assault had never been told, visualized, or written. It only existed in the form of shattered images inside my mind. Since the fragmented images' force was far greater than my integrity to resist its repetition, I inevitably lived as a victim of sexual assault.

In order to *work through* my trauma, as suggested by Oliver (2001) and LaCapra (2001), infinite address-ability and response-ability enabled me to bear witness and thus address, engage, and repeat my trauma to overcome it. As theorized by Pollock (1998) and practiced by Cha (1982), I propose that writing performative autoethnography related to trauma is an appropriate site for bearing witness. However, one may question if writing and *working through* trauma could restrict trauma subjects within descriptive text. Presumably, writing trauma makes it possible for subjects to remember, relive, and revivify one's own trauma or become traumatized by others'. In this context, an *act* of witnessing through writing is hardly possible.

However, rather than the descriptive representation of trauma, the focus should be on the different repetition of trauma that performative autoethnography provides. First, performative autoethnography helps create multiple subjectivities of the trauma subject through an "extended form of continued engagement" with several selves and the intertwining of multiple accounts of other trauma subjects in one body (Bennett, 2005, p. 64). As practiced in my performative autoethnography, my subjectivities are constructed through dynamic engagement with my grandmother, Kang, and my multiple selves that are responsive to others and myself. However, following LaCapra's (2001) cautionary advice that empathy is often conflated with "unchecked identification and vicarious experience," empathically related trauma subjects should be attentive to the "alterity of subjectivity" (p. 40). This shows how one cannot be independent from

others but should also not be assimilated to another subjectivity for bearing witness. Second, performative autoethnography projects a different reality of trauma. By weaving our traumatic experiences and subjectivities, it becomes possible to expose and challenge the limits and contradictions of the universalities of violence and trauma repetition. Additionally, the inclusion of artworks previously used for other trauma subjects' bearing witness within multilayered and reflexive narratives projects a different reality of trauma as an alternative to its destructive repetition. Therefore, performative autoethnography as a "charged and contingent space of complex webs of our respective stories" is a suitable site for bearing witness (Pollock, 2005, p. 1).

While I write, read, re-write, and re-read, my subjectivities as a trauma subject, contextualized within artworks, are no longer tantamount to my eyewitness testimony of shattered images of repeated trauma. I was not secondarily victimized or traumatized by it, but instead convinced to see, understand, and feel my trauma that cannot be seen with my own eyes. Increased response-ability and address-ability as the process of bearing witness, and subjectivity as the result of witnessing, overcome concern for trauma's compulsory repetition. This is how performative autoethnography *witnesses* and not merely reports what bearing witness is. Writing becomes witnessing itself. Thus, writing witnessing *speaks* witnessing, *acts* witnessing, and *performs* witnessing.

References

- Bennett, J. (2005). *Empathic vision: Affect, trauma, and contemporary art*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Cha, T. H. K. (1982). *Dictée*. New York, NY: Tanam Press.
- Choi, W. (2012). *Hemp shroud* [Artifact]. Gimcheon, South Korea: Archived by Hyunji Kwon.
- Duk-kyung Kang. (2013, November 19). *Testimony*. Retrieved from <https://www.womenandwar.net/contents/home/home.nx>
- Ellingson, L. L., & Ellis, C. (2008). Autoethnography as constructionist project. In J. A. Holstein & J. F. Gubrium (Eds.), *Handbook of constructionist research* (pp. 445-466). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Ellis, C. (2004). *The ethnographic I: A methodological novel about auto ethnography*. Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press.
- Foucault, M. (1977). Nietzsche, genealogy, history. In D. F. Bouchard (Ed.), *Language, counter-memory, practice: Selected essays and interviews* (pp. 139-164). (D. Bouchard & S. Simon, Trans.). Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Gutting, G. (2014). Michel Foucault. In E. N. Zalta (Ed.), *The Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University. Retrieved from <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2014/entries/foucault>
- Kang, D. (1995). *Lost virginity* [Painting]. Seoul, South Korea: The Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan. Retrieved from <https://www.womenandwar.net/contents/home/home.nx>
- Kim, T. (1970, August 14). *Migyol 25 Nyon: Chongsindae (Unresolved for 25 Years: The Volunteer Labor Corps)*. Seoul: Sinmun.
- LaCapra, D. (2001). *Writing history, writing trauma*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Marcus, S. (1992). Fighting bodies, fighting words: A theory and politics of rape prevention. In J. Butler & J. W. Scott (Eds.), *Feminists theorize the political* (pp. 385-403). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Oliver, K. (2001). *Witnessing: Beyond recognition*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Pollock, D. (1998). Performing writing. In P. Phelan & J. Lane (Eds.), *The ends of performance* (pp. 73-103). New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Pollock, D. (2005). Introduction: Remembering. In D. Pollock (Ed.), *Remembering: Oral history performance* (pp. 1-18). New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Pyon, Y. (Producer) & Pyon, Y. et al. (Director). (1995). *Najün moksori: The murmuring* [Video/DVD]. The Republic of Korea: Kirok Yŏnghwa Chejakso Boim.
- Smith, A. (2003). Not an indian tradition: The sexual colonization of native peoples. *Hypatia*, 18(2), 70-82.

About the Author

Hyunji Kwon is a dual-title degree Ph.D. candidate in Art Education and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at The Pennsylvania State University. Prior to that, she was an elementary teacher in Korea and earned a Master's in Fine Arts Education from Seoul National University, Korea. Her research explores feminist art pedagogy and interventional force of trauma-related art in constructing the subjectivity of the trauma subject.

Hyunji Kwon can be contacted at huk159@psu.edu