

Defiance in the Shadows: Flames of Resilience in the Selected North Korean Memoirs

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Abstract

The resilient autobiography focuses on the interpersonal dynamics of life narratives, including the relationships that have exacerbated the hardships described and the ones that have provided the support and strength necessary to overcome them. The selected text for this paper is *A Thousand Miles to Freedom: My Escape from North Korea* by Eunsun Kim and Sebastien Falletti and *In Order to Live: A North Korean Girl's Journey to Freedom* by Yeonmi Park and Maryanne Vollers. These two texts talk about their catastrophic journey from North Korea because of poverty caused by famine and their migration to China, where they were trafficked and subjected to humiliation and their final escape to South Korea. The memoirs depict the individual's embodiment of resilience as they narrate their own struggles and victories in overcoming hardship. Resistance to adversity and suffering, as well as the ability to bounce back from painful experiences in one's own life and in the lives of others, are the hallmarks of resilience. Trauma becomes ingrained in attempts for survival in both memoirs, which illustrate the catastrophic impacts of famine, relocation, and personal loss. One effective approach to enhance resilience is reorganizing and reestablishing control over one's life after a traumatic event. Interpretations and writings of the personal narrative are offered from both the subject's and an outsider's points of view. Thus, the life story is formed in a dual sense: autobiographically and biographically.

Keywords: North Korean women, Memoirs, Trauma, Resilience

1. Introduction

This study delves into two contemporary autobiographical works to examine the concept of resilience. It argues that resilience is illustrated in the autobiographical narrative through the depiction of various selves and their relationships and interactions, rather than simply as a matter of basic survival. Eunsun Kim in her memoir *My Escape from North Korea: A Thousand Miles to Freedom* (2015) which is co-authored by Sebastien Falletti, provides a vivid account of her upbringing in North Korea, where she faced poverty, hunger and the pervasive control of the regime. This memoir is both unsettling and deeply moving as it depicts her family's fight, for survival during times of famine and other adversities. The narrative traces Eunsun's escape from North Korea alongside her family. Their journey entails navigating paths through China encountering obstacles (including human traffickers) and ultimately finding refuge in South Korea. Similarly, Yeonmi Park in her memoir *In Order to Live: A North Korean Girl's Journey to Freedom* (2015) co-written by Maryanne Vollers begins her story by sharing her experiences growing up in North Korea, a place where she faced hardships and oppressive rule during her childhood. The challenges her family endured, including food shortages, government oppression and the loss of her father, are vividly described in the narrative. A significant turning point occurs when Yeonmi and her mother make the decision to escape from North Korea. However, their journey is far from safe, as they encounter difficulties such as trafficking and exploitation after crossing the border into China. They had to make choices and sacrifice things in order to ensure their survival, which is explored in detail within this narrative. After an arduous journey Yeonmi finally arrives in South Korea where she begins adapting to her independence. Famine, grief, and violence all contribute to the nebulous concept of resilience. Crucial to the stories told are the unique social, political, and historical settings of the two books under consideration. From a clinical, social, and therapy-related vantage point, a positive outlook on life and its challenges is considered essential to resilience, especially when it comes to adapting positively to different situations (Herrman et al., 2011, p. 259; Harms, 2015, p.11; Ungar, 2013). In *Understanding Trauma and Resilience*, Louise Harms argues that resilience must be "tested" through severe circumstances (2015, p.11), but Michael Ungar argues that resilience is the same as 'positive outcomes', and that attention is currently focused on how a person interacts with their environment rather than on their 'individual characteristics' (2013, p.111). According to Helen Herrman et al., in spite of adversity, good adaptation is associated with "the ability to maintain or regain mental health" (2011, p. 259). Going beyond the concept of positive adaptation, this paper contends that the two texts under consideration show a distinct kind of resilience. This resilience is not based on positivism per se, but rather is depicted as an essential component of surviving in harsh conditions, a survival that frequently relies on the assistance and backing of others. The centrality of the relational component of resilience is emphasized, aligning with Ungar's proposition that current methods focus less on personal attributes and more

on the relationships between an individual, specifically the self-portrayed in the two co-authored narratives, and the surrounding situations. The concept of relationality is also evident in the memoirs themselves, since autobiographical writing inherently promotes the idea of 'self-determination' (Eakin, 1999, p. 43). According to Paul John Eakin, the process of telling one's own story might contribute to resilience by considering the many aspects of one's identity, referred to as 'multiple registers of selfhood' (1999, p. 101). According to Eakin, the self that is presented in autobiographical writing is only one interpretation of it (1999, p. 101). Anthony Chennells also discusses the concept of 'multiple selves' in autobiographical writing, he suggests that as we navigate the uncertainties of life, we go through different phases that give rise to different aspects of our identity (2005, p.134). These numerous selves are potentially shown in different relationship situations within self-writing. The inclusion of a trauma factor exacerbates the complexity of the offered identities. The collaborative endeavor that facilitated the creation of the two memoirs is likewise an integral component of the interconnected nature of expressed resilience.

A Thousand Miles to Freedom: My Escape from North Korea written by Eunsun Kim and Falletti chronicles her experiences starting from 1997. This was a year when North Korea experienced a crisis that resulted in widespread starvation particularly in the northern regions. The book delves into the impact of hunger on her family members. How she, along with her mother and sister became desperate for food. Ultimately this desperation led them to embark on a journey to China. Upon reaching China, they found themselves sold into servitude by a family who treated them as nothing other than slaves. Enduring sexual violence at the hands of their captors they realized that they had to escape. Thus, they made the decision to split up and pursue paths towards survival. They relocated to different cities within China. Took on various jobs just to make ends meet. Living in fear of arrest and unable to feel secure while in hiding, it became clear that their only chance at freedom lay in moving to South Korea. This memoir vividly portrays Kim's nine-year struggle in China before arriving in South Korea. It focuses not on the hardships endured during the famine but on coming to terms, with the events that transpired and the lasting trauma that continues to affect both her past and present. Similarly, Yeonmi Parks memoir, *In Order to Live: A North Korean Girl's Journey to Freedom* captivates readers as she shares her account of growing up in North Korea and the immense obstacles she faced in her quest for freedom. The narrative vividly portrays the realities of poverty, starvation and living under a regime that defines North Korean society. Park paints a picture of the hardships endured by her family including the loss of her father. The memoir primarily focuses on Park and her mother's courageous journey to China, where they navigate the complexities of survival amidst dangers, including trafficking. The author delves into the choices they had to make in order to secure their independence. In the following chapters of the book Park recounts her experiences upon arriving in South Korea shedding light on the challenges she encountered while adapting to society and overcoming the lasting effects of her past. Throughout this memoir Park reflects on themes such as resilience, the pursuit of freedom and grappling with one's identity after enduring painful experiences. These memoirs provide a comprehensive account of the political landscape and events in North Korea throughout the 1990s, while also delving into the author's personal experiences and upbringing. The narrative intertwines the themes of adversity and luck. Both memoirs provide a viewpoint on resilience that is not shown as exclusively relying on the actions of the writers alone, but also on the actions of others. Both texts prominently incorporate trauma, and the memoirs explicitly highlight the importance of narrative in organizing and understanding trauma. Relational attempts to make trauma comprehensible are also shown through the actions of the family members and journalists in South Korea which gave them an opportunity to voice out their stories to a large audience.

2. Echoes of Pain: Exploring Individual and Shared Trauma

Two of the memoirs discussed in this study were written in collaboration with another author. Based on her research of Francophone autobiographical narratives written by Rwandan genocide survivors, Catherine Gilbert has concluded: "In order to overcome the difficulties inherent in expressing the traumatic experience, many women survivors in particular have recourse to a co-author or collaborator to help convey their stories in writing" (2013, p.115). With this foundation, the connection between the narrator and the recounted I becomes more complex.

Resilience may arise in such interactions between the narrator and co-author, highlighting the relational nature of writing trauma. It should be remembered that the term 'resilience' is often introduced by outside forces and is not something to which the writers directly allude. By combining trauma with a relational approach, resilience serves as a prism through which the memoirs are examined. According to Katja Kurz, who believes that life writers may benefit from working with a co-author state that "to amplify their voices and to make their experiences legible through a specific cultural and aesthetic frame within their context of life writing that readers would be able to recognize" (2015, p. 37). The form of the narrative is significant in this context since it gives structure to the narrative, thus making it easily understandable and recognizable as a memoir. The memoir makes life and hardship transparent and understandable. When a person's life and the circumstances around it are shaped by extreme trauma, these endeavors become more complex. Gilbert's observation suggests that when trauma is sifted through and processed in conjunction with another writer, it may be less resistant to narrative.

Autobiographical works that are co-authored, according to Eakin's *Writing Life Writing: Narrative, History, Autobiography*, are the work of "a second person speaking... who has fashioned and interpreted the first person's story" (2020, p. 56). In his work Eakin delves into the connection, between the person observing (referred to as the 'eye') and the individual being observed (known as the 'I'). This bond becomes more intertwined when autobiographical writing is produced in collaboration with another writer. The personal narrative is shaped not by the person whose life is being depicted but also by the perspective of an outside observer. The resulting account can be seen as a blend of both autobiography and biography. Yeonmi Park gives a lot of credibility to her co-author Maryanne Vollers in her acknowledgement section, she mentions it as, "Maryanne Vollers, without you, this book would not be possible. You showed me not only

your intelligence and grace, but a deep and genuine love for the North Korean people and all humanity. It was a great honor and privilege to work with you and to call you my friend” (Park & Vollers, 2015, p. 269). Eakin argues that the inclusion of trauma in autobiographical narratives complicates the connection between the observer and the narrator. As stated by Eakin, who asserts that “eyewitness narrative promises access to the past, to a biographical or historical truth that will help them make sense of their lives” (2020, p. 62). The endeavor to comprehend existence is shown by the efforts to recount the experience of trauma in the two memoirs. In the introduction to her groundbreaking work *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, renowned trauma researcher Cathy Caruth states that a traumatic event “is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experienced it. To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event” (1995, pp. 4–5). Yeonmi Park’s memoir vividly portrays this kind of possession as they attempt to reawaken horrible memories of the author’s struggle for existence in China and the 1990s North Korean hunger, and more especially, of the author’s new life in South Korea, where these memories resurface.

I wanted to erase my old life, but its horror would come back to visit me as soon as I fell asleep. My dreams were all nightmares... Someone was always chasing me, but no matter what, I couldn’t get away. Sometimes the nightmares were so bad that I would wake myself up screaming. It took me a few moments to recognize the thick blanket on my bed, to remember I was safe, I had survived, I was out (Park & Vollers, 2015, pp. 218–219).

The paper’s research revolves around the juxtaposition of individual and social trauma, which is very complicated. In a special issue on decolonizing trauma studies, Michael Rothberg brings this up and says that many of the articles therein condemn “psychoanalytic approaches to trauma [that] tend to import individualizing and psychologizing models onto the terrain of collective violence” (2008, p. 230). In this context, the relational viewpoint plays a vital role; it may help us go beyond individualistic trauma theories while also acknowledging that memoirs, being autobiographical texts, are fundamentally very personal. Beyond the singular point of view, the collective efforts that gave birth to the memoirs also have significance.

Yeonmi Park, in her memoir, also talks about their days in a resettlement camp and how life was not that easy for North Koreans when they reached South Korea because of a lot of stress and trauma. “All of us at Hanawon were trying to act like normal people, while inside the anguish of our past and the uncertainty of our future was eating us alive” (Park & Vollers, 2015, p. 219). In the memoir Park and Vollers vividly portray the plight her family had to through because of starvation; she mentions it in her memoir as “My parents couldn’t sleep. They were afraid they might not wake up, and then their children would starve to death” (2015, p. 104). She also admits that her first introduction to sex was her mother being raped in front of her. Later when she was raped, she was only thirteen years of age, and that incident made her realize that her childhood was taken away from her. “I didn’t recognize me either. I no longer looked like a child, and everything that was childlike inside me was gone. It was as if the blood had dried in my veins and I’d become another person” (Park & Vollers, 2015, p. 148). Yeonmi Park characterizes North Korea as a dystopian place that sharply contradicts the narrative it promotes. The country’s severe food shortage resulted in a significant number of women fleeing to China in search of sustenance, which in turn led to the trafficking of women in China. She highlights it 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... if North Korea wasn’t such a hell on earth, there wouldn’t be a need for the women to flee in the first place (Park & Vollers, 2015, pp. 154–155).

The recollected narrative of life in North Korea and China is therefore portrayed in part as a shared narrative of anguish and catastrophe. Eunsun Kim likewise expresses similar incidents of starvation in North Korea and trafficking in China. She blames North Korea for taking away their childhood as they were constantly on the brink of starvation. In her story, she vividly portrays the days she spent begging in North Korea for survival. She describes an incident which made her realize her current status was when she was referred to as “*kojebi*” (homeless child), “I had never felt so insulted in my life... But worst of all, even worse than being called a *kojebi*, was the realization that it was indeed true. I had truly become a *kojebi*, a child of the streets” (Kim & Falletti, 2015, p. 61). She also gives a gruesome picture of trafficking as they were being sold as slaves to a Chinese family and how the Chinese farmer constantly abused her mother for a son. The whole of what transpired in North Korea in the 1990s cannot be captured in a single phrase, and neither can the personal and communal experiences of those who lived through these crimes as recounted in a single account. North Korea serves as an example of a situation, where they have been facing a severe food shortage for nearly a decade. It is estimated that around one million North Koreans, which accounts for 5% of their population, lost their lives during a famine in the mid-1990s. There are differing estimates of the numbers. Additionally, millions more had to endure the aftermath of the crisis dealing with lives and personal suffering. The long-term effects on the development of newborns and children are especially worrisome as some of these impacts may be lasting and irreversible (Haggard, 2005, p. 9).

Yeonmi Park provides a collective perspective on her own experiences of growing up in poverty and upheaval. She speaks of ‘starving civilians’ struggling to live in a ‘living hell’, highlighting the significant tragedy faced by North Korean women as a very personal ordeal,

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... Like tens of thousands of other North Koreans, I escaped my homeland (Park & Vollers, 2015, p. 3).

Their deep sense of responsibility to others who have never had a safe space to discuss or process the trauma they endured in battle drives them to seek out effective ways to communicate their story. Autobiographical works, in this case created through collaboration, eventually

have their final, edited forms made public. Thus, the two texts have a dual purpose: first, as first-person accounts of extraordinary danger and agony; and second, as pleas for the recognition of shared tragedies.

Leena Kurvet-K äsaar has studied the connection between trauma and life writing. She notes that trauma memoirs have increasingly dealt with ‘world-historical events’ like 9/11, the Vietnam War, the Rwandan genocide, and the Holocaust, as well as personal narratives of “suffering, violence and injustice in common everyday life contexts” (Kurvet-K äsaar, 2020, p. 305). Since they are narratives of the ‘world-historical events’ that Kurvet-K äsaar enumerates, the two books under consideration may be said to fall into the first group she describes. We might add the current political turmoil in North Korea to any list of contemporary wars that have profoundly affected the lives of ordinary people, but we don’t. According to Laurie Vickroy, who argues that “Our conceptions of self are determined and interpreted within cultural histories and contexts” (2002, p. 25), and Stef Craps, who argues in *Beyond Eurocentrism* that trauma research must adhere to specific social and historical frameworks (2014, p.50). Further research by Vickroy sheds light on how “literary narratives contextualize trauma for readers by embedding them in scenarios of social and historical significance” (2015, p. 1). Raising awareness is another goal of the trauma story. Viewed in this light, this aspect of the story both reflects and develops upon the protagonist’s perseverance.

Resilience, while dealing with trauma, refers to the ability to construct a narrative and ultimately come to terms with the past, to the degree that it is feasible. Mark Freeman argues that “there is indeed a shape to the past, but it is an inchoate one, one that awaits narrative, we might say, to come into being. Narrative therefore binds together what might otherwise escape our attention and understanding, giving meaning to the movement of experience” (2017, p. 280). This remark highlights the transient character of history, identity, and narrative, which is a crucial issue. The power of story lies in its ability to weave together disparate parts of our life and to create bonds where none existed before. The two memoirs we looked at illustrate this point because they both recognize the communal nature of suffering. Like any other concept, resilience needs an inward focus, but the memoirs show how the shared experience of hardship gives it a larger meaning.

3. Memoirs of Resilience

The stories of Park and Kim show that perseverance is not a continuous phenomenon. Lynn Gumb argues resilience as “‘hardiness’ an individual develops in childhood whereby life is viewed as meaningful” (2018, p. 465), and therefore, “severe or chronic childhood abuse can interfere with the development of resilience” (2018, p. 465). Both memoirs do not provide a narrative of childhood resilience, but mostly concentrate on the act of surviving under harsh conditions. *In Order to Live: A North Korean Girl’s Journey to Freedom* starts with the first chapter where Park talks about her birth in the year 1993, which was marked by famine and a lack of medical facilities in north Korea.

I came into this world too soon. My mother was only seven months pregnant when she went into labor, and when I was born on October 4, 1993, I weighed less than three pounds. The doctor at the hospital in Hyesan told my mother that I was so small there wasn’t anything they could do for me (Park & Vollers, 2015, p. 10).

Similarly in the first chapter which dates from 1997 Kim talks about her childhood came to an end because of starvation and poverty that struck her family and she was eleven years old that time.

Once the sun went down, I would have no more light- electricity no longer worked in the apartment, and besides, the lightbulbs had been gone for quite some time already. There was no more heating, either, but I hardly felt the cold at all, because I was completely exhausted after several days without eating. I was sure that I was about to die of hunger... I was eleven years old (Kim & Falletti, 2015, p. 2).

Thereby, the two authors are considered to belong to the same generation and had their childhood robbed from them because of poverty. They had a fair share of struggle when the famine hit north Korea in the 1990’s.

Writing a memoir is a method of giving voice to a painful event and highlights the fact that survivors of trauma often require “a simple desire to tell and is coupled with a need for recognition, a validation of the story by the listener” (Gilbert, 2013, p. 113). This need is underscored when Park was invited to give a talk about her experiences in North Korea at the annual One Young World Summit in Dublin where she was not able to control her emotions while talking about her experiences,

One of my great fears has always been losing control of my emotions. Sometimes I feel an anger like a dense ball inside me, and I know if I ever let it out, it might explode and I won’t be able to contain it. I worry that when I start to cry, I may never be able to stop. So I always have to keep these feelings deep down inside me... My wounds are well hidden. But that day in Dublin, they were there on the stage for all to see. As I walked to the podium with my prepared speech rolled up in my hand, I fought to speak through my tears (Park & Vollers, 2015, p. 261),

and she also goes on to mention about the audience reaction to her experience which was a stepping stone for her to write the memoir, “Everybody in the audience was back on their feet, crying with me. I looked around and knew that justice was alive in that room. I felt, at least for that moment, that there was hope for all of us” (Park & Vollers, 2015, p. 262).

Following her successful evasion from North Korea, books remained an essential component in Yeonmi’s existence. In her new setting, they served as a medium for more education, language learning, and cultural comprehension. Her continuous engagement with reading facilitated her assimilation and incorporation into unfamiliar communities. The bond between Yeonmi Park and books exemplifies how

literature has become a crucial component of her resilience. “I read to fill my mind and to block out the bad memories. But I found that as I read more, my thoughts were getting deeper, my vision wider, and my emotions less shallow” (Park & Vollers, 2015, p. 229), and she also goes on to give lot of credibility to reading highlighting it as “I could literally feel my brain coming to life, as if new pathways were firing up in places that had been dark and barren. Reading was teaching me what it meant to be alive, to be human” (Park & Vollers, 2015, p. 230). A key component of Yeonmi Park’s relational resilience is her connection with literature. Literature had a significant impact on her viewpoint and resilience in the face of the hardships she encountered on her journey for freedom, whether as an escape, a link to humanity, an educational tool, a source of inspiration, or a coping strategy.

Yeonmi Park and Eunsun Kim memoir starts with the backdrop of famine and severe starvation in the 1990’s. Both Yeonmi Park and Eunsun Kim hail from the northern region, an area that bore the brunt of the devastating famine. Faced with the circumstances their families endured, they jointly made the decision to embark on a journey to China in search of sustenance. China represented their only means of survival. In her memoir *A Thousand Miles to Freedom: My Escape from North Korea*, Eunsun Kim talks about how she was desperate for food in North Korea. “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, 2016, p. 5). Yeonmi Park 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” (Park & Vollers, 2015, p. 104). Both the authors witnessed lots of their family members passing including their own fathers who passed away in famine. Following the death of family members, it is rather dubious to discuss resilience in the context of ‘positive adaptation’ (Herrman et al., 2011, p. 259; Harms, 2015, p. 11). The ‘hardiness’ that Gumb mentions (2018, p. 465) is somewhat reflected in the memoirist and their mother’s efforts to support the family. Resilience and survival are not always the same thing, as the stories show. Resilience may be hard to pin down when you’re fighting for your life.

Park’s and Kim’s familial bond, particularly with their mother, is notable for its role as a pillar of resilience. Notwithstanding the challenges they encounter, the family unit perseveres, and their connections strengthen as they provide mutual assistance throughout the adversities. Both the authors give a lot of acknowledgements to their mothers who became breadwinners of the family through black markets and their sacrifices they made to protect their children from traffickers emphasizes relational resilience.

A significant shift in their lives happen when they are exposed to foreign movies and dramas. For instance, Yeonmi Park’s exposure to American movies, especially Titanic which offered her “first small taste of freedom” (Park & Vollers, 2015, p. 53). And for Eunsun Kim her first resistance started when she was exposed to South Korean TV shows when she was in Shanghai. “Little by Little, I started to dream about going to South Korea. In Shanghai, thanks to the South Koreans who treated us so nicely, I rediscovered my roots, my native language, and formed a clearer picture of the world” (Kim & Falletti, 2015, p. 145). The resilience meant in this context refers to a nuanced kind of resistance against cultural conventions of watching foreign dramas and well as dreaming of living in such freedom in countries like America and South Korea.

Yeonmi Park’s narrative of her journey from North Korea to China, ultimately culminating in her arrival in South Korea, exhibits a heightened and overt resistance against the deplorable and degrading circumstances she faced. It begins with her survival from North Korea to South Korea as she highlights it as, “My Life so far had been all about survival. I had found a way to survive in North Korea. I had found a different way to survive in China. But I wondered whether I had the energy to survive here. I felt so very tired” (Park & Vollers, 2015, p. 212). She initially after settling in South Korea thought of forgetting her past life and moving on with her present, but eventually she came to realize “that without the whole truth my life would have no power, no real meaning” (Park & Vollers, 2015, p. 5). After coming across Joan Didion quote “We tell ourselves stories in order to live” (Park & Vollers, 2015, p. 5) she came to the conclusion that surviving her own memories is only by shaping “them into a story that makes sense out of events that seem inexplicable” (Park & Vollers, 2015, p. 5). The need to articulate trauma was further underscored by her mother who insisted that the whole world knew about North Korea as, “one big prison camp” (Park & Vollers, 2015, p. 264), and what happens to women when they escape North Korea and are caught in the hands of traffickers in China. So, she made a decision to write her story, “fully and completely, holding nothing back... As soon as I decided to tell my secret, I felt free for the first time ever. It was like a heavy sky had been pushing down on me, pinning me to the earth, and now it was lifted and I could breathe again” (Park & Vollers, 2015, p. 264). Yeonmi Park portrays trauma as unfathomable because it is entwined with the struggle to ‘not shatter’ and because it’s devastating repercussions are shown even after a certain level of safety has been achieved. The memoir might be seen as a tangible expression of the need to no longer maintain a state of immobility and silence.

The narrative also depicts instances of treachery and tense relationships, emphasizing the difficulties encountered by people in their pursuit of liberation. These obstacles assess the character’s ability to maintain strong relationships while dealing with deceit and the potential for being apart especially in China in the hands of traffickers. But it also highlights the importance of a few people like Hongwei who though sexually abused her in the beginning but still kept his promise of uniting her with her parents. Park even acknowledges that she was well off with Hongwei compared to the suffering other North Korean women sold in brothels undergo. She describes her feelings for Hongwei in her memoir as,

I had such complicated feelings for this man. I had hated him for so long and I didn’t think I could ever forgive him, but my heart

was not so hard anymore. He was not all bad. And he had been a miracle for me, really. He had brought my mother back, brought my father to China, and helped me bury him there... I thanked him for all he had done for me, and then I said good-bye (Park & Vollers, 2015, p. 180).

She also befriends other refugees like Hae Soon, as she makes her way across China to South Korea. Her resilience is bolstered by the new connections she has formed, which provide her with emotional and practical support like her involvement with an organization called 'Youth With A Mission'.

I had chosen Youth With A Mission because I knew they served some of the poorest and most forgotten communities, but I came to understand that I wasn't there for other people- I was there for myself... Through helping others, I learned that I had always had compassion in me, although I hadn't known it and couldn't express it. I learned that if I could feel for others, I might also begin to feel compassion for myself. I was beginning to heal (Park & Vollers, 2015, pp. 250–251).

In Eunsun Kim's narrative her family's attempt to escape North Korea was intensified when they were struck with severe poverty. After they arrived in China, they were tricked into trafficking by a Chinese woman who they initially regarded as a 'guardian angel'. Though they had to endure suffering for nine years, but after their separation from the Chinese family and moving to different cities like Shanghai for jobs, they got acquainted with lots of South Koreans who helped them to move to South Korea where they could be free as legal citizens. Luck played a crucial role in their journey across Mongolian desert as they managed to cross the desert without getting caught. Eunsun Kim's romantic relationship after meeting her journalist boyfriend who is also a defector gives her confidence to talk about North Korea as they both share a common cause of highlighting the atrocities of the regime to the public. She finds a purpose for writing this memoir is to "give a voice to my people to the north who had been forgotten by the world" (Kim & Falletti, 2015, p. 200).

Yeonmi Park and Eunsun Kim the moment they were set free in South Korea after their resettlement program they enrolled themselves in diploma degrees to get their basic high school education. Initially they were intimidated by South Koreans who are better off in education, but they did not give up and worked hard to get themselves enrolled in graduate schools. They excelled in their studies as both the writers were obsessed with books which helped them to widen their knowledge. Through their activism against North Korea, they were invited to talk shows and interviews with several journalists. Yeonmi Park and Eunsun Kim may be seen as exemplars of empathy due to their authorship of memoirs, while enduring personal hardships, with the intention of instilling hope in other survivors. The two writers of memoirs have had very distressing events. Within the context of their memoirs, the author recounts the many tragic events they have encountered, while delineating their journey towards recovery and, finally, personal transformation. The purpose of these testimonials is to uplift individuals, raise consciousness, and motivate a wider audience via narratives including a range of experiences, spanning from enslavement to liberation. Interactions with other people, defiance of authority, and a willingness to use force when required are crucial to Kim's and Park's stories of how they survive. Resilience, according to both memoirs, is accepting what one does not have, making progress towards one's goals, and accepting and processing what one cannot completely own or fully understand.

4. Conclusion

Famine in North Korea disrupts the early lives of Eunsun Kim and Yeonmi Park and their family members, *A Thousand Miles to Freedom: My Escape from North Korea* and *In Order to live: A North Korean Girl's Journey to Freedom* offers personal and communal descriptions of turmoil. A key theme in both stories is survival, whether in less pressing situations (like the writer's lives in South Korea) or in more dangerous ones (like life in China due to human trafficking). The memoirs highlight the power of human connections in overcoming adversity, and how the individual and social aspects of trauma are intertwined with the communal and personal aspects of overcoming adversity and surviving. Drawing on human ties that have either exacerbated or alleviated the hardships described in the memoir, a resilient memoir places an emphasis on the relational aspects of life writing. The narrative reveals resilience as they navigate the complexities of escaping China and eventually settling in South Korea, with the support of journalists and others who played a crucial role. Memory is a source of resilience for memoirists, and in the end, it allows them to survive as well. Both accounts show how awful and harmful, starvation, relocation, and loss can be. In the process of trying to stay alive, trauma starts to solidify. Both memoirs demonstrate resilience via their attempts to reorganize and reassert trauma. In the midst of catastrophic events that have affected many individuals, the narrative of the self is shaped in connection to others, while also placing great emphasis on the significance of the personal encounter.

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Authors contributions

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