

This is not the version of record. The full published version of:
Jensen, Meg (2020) Speaking trauma and history : the collective voice of testimonial literature. In: Hammond, Andrew, (ed.) The Palgrave handbook of Cold War literature. Cham. Switzerland : Palgrave Macmillan. pp. 323-343. ISBN 9783030389727

Can be found at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-38973-4_17

Speaking Trauma and History: The Collective Voice of Testimonial Literature

Meg Jensen

Testimonial literature is a form of witness to historical human rights violation that uses the voice of the 'I' to tell of the often-traumatic experiences of a suffering community. In the Cold War period, as discord simmered between the Communist world and the West, and proxy-conflicts raged in Central and Southern America and the African continent, challenges of many kinds were made to dominant national narratives. In the west, protests raged against McCarthyism, atomic weapons and the war in Vietnam, while the growth of social and political movements like environmentalism, trade unions, social democrat, women's liberation, black power, and Euro-communist parties put forward sometimes violent resistance to monolithic patriarchal ideologies of mid-century capitalism. Such forms of protest, moreover, were often voiced by first-person accounts in testimonial literature, memoir and autobiographically-based fiction and poetry.

In America, for example, works such as Etheridge Knight's *Poems from Prison* (1968) and Jack Henry Abbot's *In the Belly of the Beast: Letters from Prison* (1981) attacked the systemic racism, political corruption, physical brutality and social degradation of the US penal system, while the oppression of black Americans and Western racial economic hierarchies in general were further analysed and contested in autobiographical texts like Richard Wright's *Black Boy* (1945) *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, (1965). Similarly, all across the western world during the Cold war era, radical feminists decried patriarchal gender politics and capitalism's environmentally destructive practices in a new form of anti-orthodox academic writing that drew on and included the experiences of the author to forge polemical arguments. Works such as Simone de Beauvoir's *Le Deuxième Sexe (The Second Sex)*, (1949), Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), and Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* (1970) called for women's liberation, while Frances Moore Lappe's *Diet for a Small Planet* (1971), and *On the Perimeter* (1984), Caroline Blackwood's memoir of the Greenham Common protests used first person testimony to link feminism to other counter-culture causes such as environmentalism and nuclear disarmament.

Elsewhere in the 1950s, 60s and 70s, autobiographical texts likewise testify to the fragile state of the Cold War world. In post-colonial Africa, for example, influential works such as the writings of Kwame Nkrumah (*Ghana: The Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah*, 1957, reissued 1971; *Consciencism: Philosophy and Ideology for De-Colonisation*, 1964) drew

heavily on the rhetoric of socialism and Marxism to create a united language of anticolonial struggle, using local discontent to foster African nationalism. As other Cold War actors like China and Cuba intervened in battles between white minority regimes and black Africans in countries like Rhodesia, South Africa, and the Portuguese colonies other testimonial literature also belied narratives of Africa as merely the proxy of superpower interests. Works such as Hugh Levin's *Bandiet: Seven Years in a South African Prison* (1974) and Polish journalist Ryszard Kapucinski's collected eyewitness accounts of Angola's brutal battle for national independence in 1975, *Jeszcze dzień życia (Another Day of Life, 1976)* powerfully highlight the determination, courage and agency exercised by African individuals and nations throughout the Global Cold War. This chapter focuses on one important strand of protest narrative arising from eyewitnesses to suffering in the Soviet-aligned world throughout the Cold War period: literature that testifies to imprisonment in Siberian gulags, Bulgarian work camps, Cuban prison camps and North Korean *kwanliso*, reflecting on the forms of political agency and collective testimony these works construct. Like their brothers and sisters in the West, the authors of these narratives positioned themselves as spokespersons whose individual suffering is presented as evidence of their identification with a collective traumatic history.

As Tzvetan Todorov has noted, the 'totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century sought to achieve total control of memory'.¹ They did so, he contends, by 'wiping out evidence',² through 'intimidation'³ and outright 'lying'.⁴ In Cold War contexts where forgetting was the rule of law, public and private memories were often weaponized in this way, and testifying to one's experiences was both a defiant and deadly act. In the complex testimonial spaces of the gulag, moreover, witnessing was notably generative: a single memoir can offer historical evidence of a state's complicity in atrocities and a sociological overview of violent imprisonment as well as an individual life story of suffering and survival. Gulag memoirs thus constitute as well as reflect on the contexts in which they are written, giving rise to a category of 'victim/survivor' with which their authors and other 'victim/survivors' come to identify and are identified by others. Testimonial literature of this period has produced the image of a suffering citizen/ victim, falsely accused, falsely imprisoned, subject to

¹ Tzvetan Todorov, *Hope and Memory: Lessons from the Twentieth Century*, trans. by David Bellows (2000; London: Atlantic Books, 2003) p. 113.

² Todorov, *Hope*, p. 114.

³ *Ibid*, p. 114

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 116.

unspeakable horror and deprivation, lied to, beaten, starved and frozen, robbed of every shred of humanity except one: their voice. And through that voice such texts articulate the relationship between trauma, memory, and politics under totalitarian regimes, a collective history shaped by the identifiable characteristics of traumatic injury.

Trauma, Betrayal and Collective Memory

As Sidonie Smith, Kay Schaeffer, Julia Watson and Gillian Whitlock among others have shown, testimony produced by survivors of and witnesses to rights violations are subject to both external and internal pressures.⁵ These pressures enforce complex negotiations between the level of detail and consistency necessary to legal forms of justice and the often fragmented narratives produced by traumatized witnesses. Elsewhere, I have written in detail about the causes of traumatic suffering and the relation between these and life narratives of many kinds.⁶ I will not rehearse that information here, but what *is* important to note is that the symptoms associated with traumatic disorders are, recent research shows, essentially failures of normal memory processing that can occur in the brains of those faced with overwhelming stress events. The creation of memories requires a complex set of interactions between brain processes, and when any part of this system breaks down, as it does in posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), the results are wide-ranging. The sufferer may experience disruptive symptoms such as hyper-alertness, exaggerated anxiety, flashbacks, or sleeplessness as well as numbing symptoms such as psychological dissociation, and fragmented memory. These symptoms, as we shall see, greatly impact upon both the form and content of much Cold War testimonial literature.

Holocaust historian Lucy Dawidowicz has argued that survivor testimonies tend to be ‘full of errors in dates, names of participants, and places’.⁷ ‘To the unwary researcher’ Dawidowicz warns, such accounts ‘can be more hazard than help’.⁸ But while evidence procured from

⁵ Sidonie Smith and Kay Schaeffer, *Human Rights and Narrative Lives: The Ethics of Recognition* (New York: Palgrave, 2004), pp. 3-34, 35-52; Gillian Whitlock, *Postcolonial Life Narrative: Testimonial Transactions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 107-135, 168-201; Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, ‘Metrics of Authenticity, Collective I-Formations and the Ethics of Verification in First-Person Testimony’, *Biography* 35: 4 (2012).

⁶ See Meg Jensen, *The Art and Science of Trauma and the Autobiographical: Negotiated Truths* (London: Palgrave Studies in Life Writing Series, 2019).

⁷ Lucy Dawidowicz, *The Holocaust and the Historians* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 177.

⁸ Dawidowicz, *The Holocaust*, p. 177.

traumatized witnesses may not be useful in providing accurate factual details, it may offer something equally historically enlightening. Survivor narratives like those I will examine here from Russia, Bulgaria, North and South Korea and Cuba, comprise a form of ‘speaking for’ a seventy-plus-year history of Soviet-aligned terror in which the agonies being represented in each text, and their devastating consequences on minds and bodies, are shockingly similar. From the early gulag testimonials by Alexander Solzhenitsyn and Eugenia Ginzburg, to memoirs from lesser known survivors of political imprisonment from Sofia to Pyongyang to Havana and beyond, such works present a compelling history of those both *betrayed* and *held captive* by the mercurial politics of the Cold war.

While certain historical events, such as a terrorist attack or political assassination, may be recalled as challenging or even psychologically damaging for some members of an affected community, they often have little long-term effect on those not directly involved. Other kinds of events, though, such as civil war and natural disasters are culturally transformative, changing the lives of nearly all individuals in the community.⁹ In 2013 a sociological study by Amy Corning and colleagues suggested that such “‘traumatogenic’ change’ is identifiable by four characteristics.¹⁰ Firstly, these events are ‘typically rapid’ and secondly they are ‘comprehensive’, affecting the basic structures of life for many people. Thirdly, such changes are ‘destabilizing, overturning fundamental values, norms, and habits’, and fourthly, they evoke ‘surprise, disbelief, and shock’.¹¹ Corning’s reading of ‘transformative’ and ‘traumatogenic’ events thus maps neatly onto the individual and collective expressions of suffering found in Cold War testimonial literature arising from ‘transformed communities’¹² in which a revolutionary, shocking and destabilizing change brought about the comprehensive restructuring of community life. Moreover, as such texts demonstrate, while many citizens in these transformed communities were initially either pleased or unconcerned with the changes around them, the moments in which they first understood the true nature of the revolution were often deeply traumatic.

⁹ Amy Corning, Vidas Gaidys and Howard Schuman, ‘Transformative Events and Generational Memory’, *Sociological Forum*, 28:2 (2013)p. 373.

¹⁰ Here, Corning and colleagues develop an idea first presented in Piotr Sztompka, ‘The Trauma of Social Change: A Case of Postcommunist Societies’, in Jeffrey Alexander, Ron Eyerman, Bernard Giesen, Neil J. Smelser and Piotr Sztompka, eds, *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (Berkeley: University of California, 2014).

¹¹ Corning et al, ‘Transformative Events’, p. 375.

¹² *Ibid*, p. 375.

‘Betrayal Trauma Theory’ (BTT) suggests that a specific kind of traumatic injury arises when an individual suffers at the hands of a ‘trusted, needed other’.¹³ In such cases, often associated with childhood abuse by a caregiver, a victim risks severing a relationship which is necessary to their own survival if they acknowledge their suffering or confront their carer/perpetrator.¹⁴ Denial, emotional detachment and psychological dissociation are, therefore, the key symptoms resulting from betrayal trauma. Gulag memoirs, I have found, repeatedly represent precisely these distressing outcomes, frequently rendering moments of detachment and dissociation in which victims see themselves as ghosts, spectres, and/or strangers. In these texts, however, the trusted, needed ‘figure of betrayal’ is the state itself, in the person of, for example, Stalin (known as ‘Father of Peoples’), Kim Il-sung (‘The Great Leader’, and the ‘Grandfather’ of North Korea), his son Kim Jong-il, (called ‘Dear Leader’) or Fidel Castro (‘Father of the Revolution’). These self-declared father-figures of totalitarian regimes, that is, inflicted not only political wounds on the countries they claimed to serve, but traumatic personal injuries on countless individuals. Testimonials of gulag survivors are thus evidence of both intimate and historical betrayal.

As historian Catherine Merridale has argued, because those living under Communism spent ‘their lives interpreting and discussing their experience in a language almost entirely shaped by ideology’, in their case the term “‘collective memory” has real meaning’.¹⁵ During her interviews with hundreds of elderly gulag survivors in the early 1990s, Merridale came to believe because their communist culture ‘emphasized membership of the group, not the analysis of individual feelings,’¹⁶ that group identity, forged by Communist propaganda, ‘provided support in return and even a sense of personal worth’.¹⁷ Thus, instead of ‘looking inward’ she claims, ‘survivors of Stalinist bloodshed turn to each other’.¹⁸ While once these survivors had gone ‘on parades’ and ‘waved flags,’ Merridale explains, in the 1990s ‘they

¹³ Anne Prince, Laura Brown, Ross Cheit, Jennifer Freyd, Steen Gold, Kathy Pezdek, Kathryn Quina. ‘Motivated Forgetting and Misremembering: Perspectives from Betrayal Trauma Theory’, in R. Belli, ed., *True and False Recovered Memories. Nebraska Symposium on Motivation Volume 58* (New York: Springer 2012), p. 193.

¹⁴ Prince et al, ‘Motivated Forgetting’, p. 193.

¹⁵ Catherine Merridale, ‘Soviet Memories: Patriotism and Trauma in Memory’, in Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz eds., *Histories, Theories, Debates* (Fordham: Fordham University Press, 2010), p. 376.

¹⁶ *Ibid* p. 381.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 381-82.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 382.

sing songs together and tell old stories'.¹⁹ The sharing of 'these collective statements'²⁰ of Soviet heroism, self-sacrifice and bravery in the face of war and deprivation 'worked', Merridale insists: state propaganda so improved 'morale',²¹ she argues, that although they were 'victims of one of the cruellest regimes of the twentieth century' many survivors 'were actually homesick for it'.²² 'The traces were there,' she notes, when:

a gallery in St. Petersburg mounted an exhibition of socialist realist art [and] a large proportion of people who commented in the visitors' book expressed their pleasure at seeing such cheerful images back on display, their nostalgia for communist truths still innocent of any sense of rage.²³

Merridale also notes, however, that because all discourse 'was carefully shaped and monitored'²⁴ within these closed societies, many of those she met 'found it awkward to talk about their suffering' while others 'could talk of little else',²⁵ repeating 'the same tropes with increasing intensity' to 'lift some burden from their hearts'.²⁶ Merridale contends, however, that these survivors were not traumatized and that such a diagnosis is not appropriate in their context: 'the survivors I met' she argues, 'were neither mentally ill nor deluded about the impact of stress upon their lives. On the contrary, they were often models of resilience'.²⁷ In her view, the 'western European emphasis upon the ego' was 'entirely foreign'²⁸ to the survivors, who valued 'membership of the group' over 'the analysis of individual feelings'.²⁹

Despite Merridale's arguments, however, the testimonies she collected offer ample evidence of traumatic response. While these survivors might 'balk'³⁰ at a diagnosis of trauma, Merridale notes that many 'tell their stories repeatedly' needing 'an audience' decades later.³¹ This overwhelming desire to bear witness to past terror, as well as such repetition of key stories and images, are, of course, identifiable characteristics of trauma narratives. The stories

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 382.

²⁰ Ibid, p. 382.

²¹ Ibid, p. 382.

²² Ibid, p. 382.

²³ Ibid, p. 382.

²⁴ Ibid, p. 379.

²⁵ Ibid, p. 379.

²⁶ Ibid, p. 379.

²⁷ Ibid, pp. 380-81.

²⁸ Ibid, p. 381.

²⁹ Ibid, p. 382.

³⁰ Ibid, p. 382.

³¹ Ibid, p. 382.

of other survivors, Merridale notes, ‘follow a pattern’ and this ‘uniformity’ causes them to have ‘a synthetic feel’ as if ‘they were describing events and emotions that affected someone else’.³² For Merridale, this sense of detachment is linked to the state’s overwhelming ‘control over ideas’ and ‘individual imaginations’.³³ But detachment and disassociation are emblematic of narratives arising from traumatic experience. The survivors’ insistent repetition of state-approved stories of individual heroism and collective survival (rather than tales of their own arbitrary imprisonment and/or suffering) may also constitute evidence of traumatic injury: the symptom known as *avoidance* or *denial*. In the following pages, I will examine the development of a Cold War testimonial literature that represents traumatic encounters with violence, oppression and betrayal using similar rhetorical swerves and aporia. These texts, I argue, occupy a liminal memorial space in which both private, familial-like betrayal *and* traumatogenic collective suffering is revisited, negotiated, and commemorated.

Soviet Literatures of Captivity

As the Polish exile Czesław Miłosz wrote in 1951, Stalinism impacted not only public politics but private personality, forcing the ‘captive minds’ of new communist societies to acquire ‘new habits quickly’.³⁴ Where once he would have called the police ‘had he stumbled upon a corpse on the street’, later Miłosz learned to ‘refrain from asking unnecessary questions’.³⁵ Forms of Cold War testimonial that speak to such experiences of silencing can be understood as what Helen Grice and Tim Woods term ‘literatures of captivity’, in which captivity may refer to literal or psychological imprisonment.³⁶ Such texts, they argue, bear painful personal witness to historical wrongs and in doing so raise issues not only of law, rights and memory, but also aesthetic representation of suffering.

What might be called the gulag testimonial aesthetic was perhaps most famously shaped by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s novel *Odin den’ Ivana Denisovicha* (*One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, 1963). Ivan Denisovich Shukhov, falsely accused of being a spy after his escape from German capture in the second World War, is sentenced to ten years in a forced labour

³² Ibid, p. 382.

³³ Ibid, p. 382.

³⁴ Czesław Miłosz, *The Captive Mind*, trans. by Jane Zielonko (1953; London: Penguin, 2001), p. 25.

³⁵ Miłosz, *Captive*, p. 27.

³⁶ Helen Grice and Tim Woods, ‘Human Rights, Human Wrongs: Literatures of Captivity’, *Textual Practice*, 26: 5 (2012), p. 832.

camp: the gulag.³⁷ There were nearly five hundred large and small camps scattered across the most remote regions of the USSR in which some twenty to thirty million were executed.³⁸ Solzhenitsyn's novel draws heavily on his own experiences as a prisoner from 1945-1953, and follows the fictional Shukhov while he schemes and degrades himself for the smallest imaginable measures of food, shelter, and favour. It begins with his reflection on the bitterness of facing a 'whole day of work' with a 'hungry belly'. 'You lose your tongue' Shukhov says, and 'all desire to speak to anyone'.³⁹ This necessity for distancing oneself from fellow 'zeks' or prisoners, is a theme that appears in later testimonial literatures as well: the testifying survivor is almost without exception a detached figure who concentrates fiercely on remaining alive.

This singular purpose, moreover, is shown to be produced by the gulag in which the state's agents have obsessive control over the bodies of prisoners. Solzhenitsyn's Shukhov demonstrates that reality repeatedly, beginning with the so-called 'morning prayer': 'Attention, prisoners. Marching orders must be strictly obeyed. Keep to your ranks. [...] A step to the right or left is considered an attempt to escape and the escort has orders to shoot without warning'.⁴⁰ Here, this single memorised death threat hints at the unimaginable range of violent epithets ingrained daily into prisoners' minds by relentless repetition. 'The thoughts of a prisoner', Shukhov observes, 'they're not free either. They keep returning to the same things',⁴¹ and these singular, oppressive thoughts of assuaging hunger and cold are precisely those desired by the gulag bosses and the state they represent. As Shukhov explains, '[y]ou've only to show a whip to a beaten dog'.⁴²

In addition to physical deprivation and internalized monitoring, a further form of dehumanisation is represented repeatedly in gulag testimonials from Bulgaria to North Korea to Cuba: the hierarchy quickly established and brutally maintained among the prisoners themselves. Shukhov notes, for example, that he 'wouldn't take on any old job either. There

³⁷ The term 'gulag' is an acronym for the words *Glavnoe Upravlenie Lagerei*, or Main Administration of Camps.

³⁸ Deborah Kaple, 'Introduction', to Fyodor Vasilevich Mochulsky, *Gulag Boss: A Soviet Memoir*, trans. by Deborah Kaple (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011), p. xvi.

³⁹ Aleksander Solzhenitsyn, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, trans. by Ralph Parker (1963; London: Penguin Books, 2000), p. 26.

⁴⁰ Solzhenitsyn, *One Day*, p. 35.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 36.

⁴² *Ibid*, p. 53.

were others lower than him' in the camp.⁴³ The curation of his place in this hierarchy enables Shukhov to remain alive: survival 'was all he thought about' he observes.⁴⁴ Thus while condemning other prisoners ('the dirty snakes') for 'the tricks they play'⁴⁵ on 'their fellow zeks',⁴⁶ the novel's conclusion finds Shukhov scheming to pilfer a sausage from his own bunkmate. As Solzhenitsyn's novel illustrates, the gulag system both produces and survives on betrayal.

A similar dynamic is at work in Eugenia Ginzburg's gulag memoir *Krutoj Mas rut (Into the Whirlwind)*, (1967). Before her arrest in 1937, Ginzburg belonged to an elite community of intellectuals 'from simple backgrounds'⁴⁷ who were entirely loyal to the Communist party and in return enjoyed 'a good standard of living'.⁴⁸ In 1934, however, a senior member of Stalin's Politburo was murdered and 'the Revolution began to devour its children'.⁴⁹ Varlam Shalamov, author of the gulag stories later translated and published in the West as *The Kolyma Tales* (1954-1973) met Ginzburg in the Kolyma camp. He complained that the experience she recounts in her famous memoir was privileged compared to that of most prisoners.⁵⁰ Likewise, the editor who first published Solzhenitsyn's *Ivan Denisovitch* rejected *Whirlwind*, arguing that Ginzburg had 'only noticed there was something wrong when they started jailing Communists. She thought it quite natural when they were exterminating the Russian peasantry'.⁵¹

Despite such misgivings about how far Ginzburg's memoir 'represents' typical gulag experience, the text itself has been hugely influential. In fact, words, images and even scenes from *Whirlwind* repeatedly resurface, whether coincidentally or otherwise, in later narratives of Cold War captivity. Like many of those later texts, for example, Ginzburg's begins by recounting the moment of her arrest in great sensory detail. At four o'clock on the morning of '1st December 1934',⁵² Ginzburg was summoned to the Regional Committee office. She

⁴³ Ibid, p. 17.

⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 121.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 121.

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 12.

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 12.

⁴⁸ Roderic Braithwaite 'Afterword', in Eugenia Ginzburg, *Into the Whirlwind*, trans. by Paul Stevenson and Manya Harai (1967; London: Persephone Books, 2014), p. 336.

⁴⁹ Braithwaite, 'Afterword', p. 336.

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 341.

⁵¹ Alexander Tvardosky, cited by Braithwaite, Ibid, p. 341.

⁵² Ginzburg, *Whirlwind*, p. 11.

notes that ‘even now’ she can ‘still remember the silently falling snow and the strange lightness of my walk’.⁵³ But she also confides that her feelings during this ‘prelude’ to her imprisonment are incongruous, for ‘after all’ until 1937, her ‘sufferings were only mental’ and her ‘family was still safe and my dear children were still with me’.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, Ginzburg claims she suffered more in this initial period than ‘when I was kept in solitary confinement’ or ‘felled trees’ in Kolyma.⁵⁵

Soon the reason for that suffering becomes clear: her arrest, the first betrayal by the state Ginzburg so loyally served, was an irrevocably traumatic event. Indeed, her later representations of the terrifying events of her captivity follow the same pattern she uses to describe this initial trauma, and that pattern, itself contains the rhetorical characteristics of trauma narratives: emotional detachment, psychological dissociation, chronological disorder and the repetition of indelible sense memories. ‘The door banged shut’, Ginzburg recalls of that morning, ‘I still remember the sound’.⁵⁶ On the stairs, she runs into her stepdaughter, her ‘enormous blue eyes wide open’, a horrified expression on her face that Ginzburg ‘dreamed of for years afterwards’.⁵⁷ A similarly searing image is used to describe Ginzburg’s final encounter with her husband, and the ‘look in his eyes! The piercing look of a baited animal’.⁵⁸ Years later, after her release, Ginzburg could recognise her fellow survivors ‘in a train or at the seaside’⁵⁹ by this same haunted expression.

Ginzburg’s own traumatic pathology is mapped throughout the text as well, such as in her description of the moment: ‘I had forty-eight hours to live’.⁶⁰ In the memoir, a blank space follows this statement, forging a visual representation of psychological dissociation. The words that appear after this space ignore Ginzburg’s death sentence: ‘There was once a little girl called Jenny, and her mother used to plait her hair into pigtails. Then she grew up’.⁶¹ Another blank space follows before the text recommences with the words ‘The cell was dead silent’.⁶² In such moments, Ginzburg’s memoir swerves between detailed renderings of

⁵³ Ibid, p. 11.

⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 20.

⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 20.

⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 43.

⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 43.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 43.

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 122.

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 128.

⁶¹ Ibid, p. 128.

⁶² Ibid, p. 128.

sensory memories and representations of complete emotional detachment. Towards the end of *Whirlwind*, however, as illness and starvation make Ginzburg's death seem 'a certainty',⁶³ the movement between perception and dissociation collapses into an utter lack of self-recognition. As she sees herself 'dimly reflected' in a 'looking-glass', Ginzburg appears to excavate emotional and psychological space between her felt self and the condemned 'other' in the mirror by recalling the words of poem: '*Such a self I cannot live with/ Such a self I cannot love. Surely this couldn't be me*'?⁶⁴ That poetry should forge an escape from impending death, moreover, is hardly surprising: throughout *Whirlwind*, recitations and sharing of verse are portrayed as a secular form of salvation, a remnant of humanity. 'Poetry' Ginzburg writes, 'they couldn't take that away from me! They had taken everything else'.⁶⁵ She then recounts an episode in the cattle car that transported dozens of female prisoners to Kolyma. Books were forbidden on the long journey, and hygiene conditions in the packed car were horrific. To survive, the women recited poetry from memory. Ginzburg, an academic, 'knew even more poetry by heart' than most others.⁶⁶ One evening the train stopped on a siding, and although the women were commanded to remain completely silent, Ginzburg continued reciting a poem. Suddenly 'the bolt crashed open' and 'the commander's voice rasped out' telling the captives to hand over the book.⁶⁷ Under threat of death, Ginzburg had to recite from memory for a full thirty minutes, to prove to the commander that they had no hidden books. Interestingly, moreover, versions of this same story and others told in *Whirlwind* appear in later gulag literature, unattributed to Ginzburg, suggesting that certain tropes of near-mythical survival strategies were being circulated across the gulag archipelago.⁶⁸

⁶³ Ibid, p. 309.

⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 309. italics Ginzburg's own.

⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 167.

⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 223.

⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 225.

⁶⁸ See for example the memoir of Olga Adamova-Sliozberg ('My Journey') in Simeon Vilensky ed., *Till My Tale is Told: Women's Memoirs of the Gulag*, trans. by John Crowfoot, Marjorie Farquarson, Catriona Kelly, Sally Laird and Cathy Porter, (1989; London: Virago Press, 1999), p. 46. Olga recalls 'somebody was reciting' when at 'one of the stations, the officer in charge of the escort guard came up to our wagon with three soldiers [...] they abruptly threw open the door and demanded that we hand over the book. [...]—but of course no book was found'.

While Ginzburg described her captivity (1937-1955) as ‘a kind of black stream, flowing and yet frozen still’⁶⁹ (an apt analogy for trauma), similar images are used by the survivors whose testimony was collected in Simeon Vilensky’s, *Dodnes’ tiagoteet: Zapiski vashei sovremennitsy (Till My Tale is Told: Women’s Memoirs of the Gulag, 1989)*. Despite the physical distances separating the prisons and camps in which these women were held captive, moreover, their individual testimony returns again and again to the same key images: inescapable and terrifying sense memories appearing in nightmares and flashbacks, accompanied by severe detachment and dissociation. Olga Sliozberg, for example, describes night-time at Solovki camp in Northern Russia, where she would regularly wake ‘as if from a stab in the heart’.⁷⁰ The hours before dawn she recalls, were ‘an indescribable torture’ as she forced herself ‘not to remember’ the ‘faces of my children, my husband, my mother’ because when she did, she’d ‘start screaming out loud’.⁷¹

In addition to descriptions of such pathological memory effects, many of these memoirs contain images of bodily detachment and inability to recognise oneself. Hava Volovich, for example, recalls that in the gulag ‘I didn’t so much directly experience what was going on as observe it from a distance’.⁷² And just as Eugenia Ginzburg did not recognise her own, Olga Sliozberg writes of standing in a crowd before a ‘wall-length mirror’, ‘unable to figure out which of the women was me’.⁷³ Memoirist Tamara Petkevich tells of a similar moment in which she could not ‘immediately realize who it was’ she saw in the mirror, as it was ‘almost impossible to recognise anything familiar in that reflection’.⁷⁴

Several survivor memoirs suggest that long-term starvation brings about such bodily detachment. As Petkevich makes clear, for example, her ‘half-starved condition prompted neither forgetfulness nor exaltation, but a feeling that you had disappeared’.⁷⁵ And in certain vital ways these survivors had ‘disappeared’, replaced by a starved, brutalized, and often brutal, unrecognisable shadow self. That long-term exposure to such conditions often led to madness is also illustrated in such memoirs, peopled by victims like the former ‘high-up

⁶⁹ Ginzburg, *Whirlwind* p.191.

⁷⁰ Sliozberg, ‘Journey’, p. 30.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, p. 30.

⁷² Hava Volovich, ‘My Past’ in Vilensky, ed., *Til My Tale*, p. 246.

⁷³ Sliozberg, ‘Journey’, p. 47.

⁷⁴ Tamara Petkevich, ‘Just One Fate’, in Vilensky, ed., *Til My Tale*, p. 225.

⁷⁵ Petkevich, ‘Fate’, p. 225.

Party official from Siberia who raved incessantly’ about ‘state grain procurements’,⁷⁶ or the ‘collective farm chairman’ obsessed with the idea ‘that people were coming to shoot him’.⁷⁷ In Yelena Sidorkina’s memoirs, she recalls ‘the wife of a former military commissar’ who wore an ‘army great coat’ and ‘a cavalry helmet’ and was ‘endlessly searching for someone and talking to herself’.⁷⁸ The forms of madness described in such narratives, moreover, have a distinct, cognate quality recognisable as traumatic flashback: destabilizing visitations; fatal administrative failures; searches for someone lost forever. Perhaps most poignantly, as Hava Volovich observes, are those survivors who refuse to talk about the past at all, because in her view such ‘reluctance to remember isn’t simply caused by the desire to shut out years of torment and deprivation’ but is ‘prompted by a sense of shame’.⁷⁹ The emotions of gulag survivors she contends, ‘are those of a girl dishonoured by the man she loves’.⁸⁰ Like that dishonoured girl, that is, the narrators of Cold War testimonials tend to blame themselves, at least in part, for own their betrayal.

This same vicious cycle of loyalty, betrayal, traumatic suffering and shame was re-enacted across the Soviet-aligned world in camps from Sofia to Pyongyang to Cuba. As Todorov notes, each camp ‘cultivated its own form of destruction’: ‘Kolyma took advantage of the winters and sheer fatigue’ and the Bulgarian camps, especially Lovech, ‘were distinguished’ by ‘beatings with clubs and sticks’.⁸¹ The ‘superhuman work quotas’ and ‘relentless beatings’, Todorov argues, had one aim: ‘to shatter the prisoner’s inner resistance. If you did not submit, you died’, and ‘there was no other way to survive’.⁸² The testimonies of gulag survivors illustrate the truth of Todorov’s argument while also echoing the memory defects and detachment resulting from the state’s betrayal of its citizens.

The Lovech survivor Lilyana Pirincheva, for example, argues that ‘by far the worst thing’, was ‘what happened to our souls’.⁸³ The horror of the camps, she observes, was not simply the inescapable reality of death, but the way in which they ‘sapped our moral and

⁷⁶ Nadezhda Surovtseva, ‘Vladivostok Transit’, in Vilensky, ed., *Til My Tale*, p.187.

⁷⁷ Surovtseva, ‘Vladivostok’, p.187.

⁷⁸ Yelena Sidorkina, ‘Years Under Guard’, in Vilensky, ed., *Til My Tale*, p.198.

⁷⁹ Volovich, ‘My Past’, p. 259.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, p. 259.

⁸¹ Tzvetan Todorov, ‘Introduction’ in Todorov, ed., *Voices from the Gulag: Life and Death in Communist Bulgaria*, trans. by Robert Zaretsky (1992; University Park Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), p. 18.

⁸² *Ibid*, p. 24.

⁸³ Lilyana Pirincheva in Todorov, ed., *Voices*, p. 114.

psychological strength, our dignity, and our integrity'.⁸⁴ The effect on the bodies and minds of those imprisoned, moreover, did not end with their release. The scars of such humiliations and even the fact of their survival haunted many former captives forever. Boris Gikov, for example, notes that he'd had no 'run ins with the police' after his release from Lovech thirty years previously, but reveals he has 'been alone since then, too, without family and friends... just with my memories and nightmares'.⁸⁵ His fellow prisoner, Nikolas Dafinov writes similarly that 'I was able to return to Sofia. Or, rather, it was my battered body and my soiled deadened soul that came back'.⁸⁶ As we shall see, such tropes of detachment, dissociation, flashback, betrayal and self-blame found in gulag testimonials from Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union can also be traced in survivor literature from the Korean peninsula and Cuba.

Korea: Voices Across the 38th Parallel

After the withdrawal of the Soviets in 1948 and the Americans in 1949, Korea became the site of 'two competing versions of universalizing modernity'⁸⁷ that pitted capitalism against communism. As the literature concerned with this time period repeatedly illustrates, within this contested space each country was 'constantly subject to betrayal by her more powerful friends' while at the same time betraying 'her brothers and sisters in turn'.⁸⁸ In these texts, in other words, we encounter the aftermath of the division of the Korean peninsula into two politically and ideologically opposed regimes in which Cold War rituals and regulations continue to impact on life into the present day. In the following pages I examine a series of texts including two *kwanliso* testimonies, memoirs of captivity in the North Korean gulag in the 1970s, and 80s and one memoir of the decade-long famine of that began in the late 1980s during which the collapse of Soviet Union led to mass disruption of North Korean state food distribution systems and caused widespread starvation. In addition, I explore two autobiographically based novels written in English by Korean expatriates, one set in the Pyongyang in the autumn of 1950, and the other in 1960s Incheon, each of which testifies to the violent and ongoing legacy of mid-century totalitarian terror on both sides of the 38th parallel. These forms of witnessing share what Grice and Woods term the 'aesthetic

⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 114.

⁸⁵ Boris Gikov in Todorov, ed., *Voices*, p. 100.

⁸⁶ Nikolas Dafinov in Todorov, ed., *Voices*, p. 108.

⁸⁷ Josephine Nock-Hee Park, *Cold War Friendships: Korea, Vietnam, and Asian American Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2016), p. 7.

⁸⁸ Nock-Hee Park, *Cold War Friendships*, p 25.

problem of reconciling normality with horror' in the face of pervasive 'death and torture,'⁸⁹ and negotiate that problem alongside 'the constant violation of the coherence of the self' inscribed by the Cold War context of physical, social and political divisions.⁹⁰

In *Long Road Home: Testimony of a North Korean Camp Survivor* (2009), for example, Kim Yong tells the story of how he, once a privileged Lieutenant Colonel in the North Korean army, was suddenly arrested one morning in 1993 and imprisoned for being the son of a spy working for America.⁹¹ After Kim's birth in 1950, his mother falsified documents so that her son could be adopted by loyal party members, protecting him from his father's crimes.⁹² Although Kim never knew of his heritage and was himself a fanatically loyal devotee of the state, he was sentenced to ten years hard labour, mining coal thousands of feet below ground. The conditions at Camp No. 14, the notorious *kwanliso* first established in 1959, were so horrific that previously 'the inmates had rebelled, killing half a dozen guards',⁹³ who sought revenge by cramming '1,500 prisoners into an empty mine shaft' and massacring them with explosives. This wanton violence characterises every aspect of Kim's life both in Camps 14 and 18, to which he was transferred and from which he escaped in 1998. Senseless brutality not only characterised interactions with guards and interrogator/torturers, moreover, but also daily encounters with his fellow captives.

In a story which finds a parallel in several other gulag memoirs, for instance, Kim explains that as a newcomer he was forced to sleep next to the stinking slop bucket in the cramped cell, 'according to the rules among prisoners'.⁹⁴ Again, similar to the hierarchies described in other prison camp testimonies, Kim explains that in Camp 14 the guards relied on the most brutal criminal convicts to protect them from further revolt.⁹⁵ At one point, Kim recalls being targeted by one of these criminal prisoners and narrowly escaping 'rape by pushing him away

⁸⁹ Grice and Woods, 'Human Rights', p. 846.

⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 846

⁹¹ Kim Yong with Kim Suk-Young, *Long Road Home: Testimony of a North Korean Camp Survivor* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), p. viii.

⁹² As Kim explains, North Koreans regard '*seongbun*', or 'socioeconomic or class background', as the primary factor in 'one's future prospects' and 'there is nothing an individual can do to improve it'. Kim, *Long Road*, p. 17.

⁹³ Ibid, p. 81.

⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 82.

⁹⁵ Ibid, p. 89.

with what little strength I had'.⁹⁶ 'In response', he writes, 'the guards severely beat me in public for touching their collaborator'.⁹⁷

Worse yet was the senseless torture Kim underwent throughout his imprisonment.⁹⁸ He tells of being handcuffed and hung 'by the wrists for hours',⁹⁹ noting that he carries the 'scars from that torture to this day'.¹⁰⁰ And while such violence was 'unbearable',¹⁰¹ what tormented him even more was the 'feeling of betrayal'¹⁰² caused by his unjust imprisonment. He had been, as he details, 'completely loyal to Kim Il-Sung and Kim Jong-il since I'd learned how to walk and talk'.¹⁰³ Imprisonment was not simply a miscarriage of justice, Kim makes clear, but the utter destruction of the 'great purpose that had defined my life'.¹⁰⁴ The 'feeling of betrayal', he repeats, became 'the worst possible torture that broke me into a thousand pieces'.¹⁰⁵ And while in 1998 he heroically escaped through Mongolia to South Korea and finally the United States, Kim's memoir ends as it begins, by reflecting on the ongoing entrapment and suffering of his shattered, scarred shadow-self.

The memoir's opening finds Kim near his new home in Los Angeles in 2008, looking across the ocean towards Korea. The ocean's 'rhythmic but futile movement' recalls to him 'the shores of my heart, also marred by scars of memories',¹⁰⁶ and 'longing'.¹⁰⁷ This longing, he makes clear, will never be relieved, as 'my fragmented being cannot contain the swaying memories'.¹⁰⁸ Similar to the Soviet survivor testimonials, that is, Kim Yong's narrative represents his gulag experiences as a 'scarring' and powerful *presence* he can't 'hold back', and also an *absence* that cannot be filled by the 'fragmented being' he has become. This

⁹⁶ Ibid, p. 82.

⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 82.

⁹⁸ As Kim Suk Yong notes in the Introduction to this memoir, Kim 'is the only person known to have walked out alive from No. 14, and the only one to have successfully escape No. 18', *Long Road*, p. 11.

⁹⁹ Ibid, p. 73.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, p. 74.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, p. 74

¹⁰² Ibid p. 74

¹⁰³ Ibid, p. 74

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, p. 74.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, p. 74.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, p. 17.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, p. 17.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, p. 17.

aesthetic, moreover, can be related directly to the memory effects of traumatic disorders: chronological chaos, fragmentation and intense sensory recall.

In this text, Kim portrays his post-escape life into which ‘myriads of faces’ arise each night before they ‘dissolve into obscure figures’¹⁰⁹: ‘the faint smell of my young children, the low voice of my wife, the wind blowing from bleak mountains’, and the sound of ‘slowly moving trains’.¹¹⁰ Soon, however, these visitations disappear: ‘where have they all gone?’¹¹¹ Kim asks. He writes that he is ‘not exactly sure what happened’ to his ‘wife and children’, but ‘would be greatly surprised if they weren’t also sent to a camp’.¹¹² In such emotionally flat passages as this, what Kim has lost is set against his quest to forget, to let go of the frightful visions of his family, the mountain camp and his terrifying escape by train. But what his testimony most vividly relates is that the same emotional detachment that enabled his survival makes him unable to reconnect to memories of his pre-camp life. ‘Constantly longing for home’, he observes, ‘accompanied by a long shadow’ and whispering ‘the names of my wife and children’.¹¹³ That long shadow, moreover, seems to represent both what Kim left behind and the scarred and emotionally absent figure who narrates this text: captivity has left him as a shadow-survivor self. ‘There is no end to my story’, he concludes,¹¹⁴ thus suggesting that nothing, not even bearing witness to his experiences, can reconnect him to his former self, or silence the ghosts of his past.

Given the subject matter, it is interesting that two of the very few *kwanliso* memoirs available in the West are written from the perspective of childhood. Kang Chol-Hwan’s *Aquariums de Pyongyang* (*The Aquariums of Pyongyang*, 2000) was the first published by an escapee from a North Korean gulag, and *Ici, C’est Le Paradis!: Une enfance en Corée du Nord* (*This is Paradise! My North Korean Childhood*, 2004) by Hyok Kang came soon after. The childhood perspectives used in these works, as we shall see, create a rhetorical stage for addressing ‘the aesthetic of reconciling normality with horror’ that these stories must confront.¹¹⁵ The familiar *bildungsroman*-like narrative arc found in *Aquariums* and *Paradise*, that is, enables bearable, aesthetically normal access both to the horror of the gulag and mass

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, p. 17.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, p. 17.

¹¹¹ Ibid, p. 17.

¹¹² Ibid, p. 72.

¹¹³ Ibid, p. 18.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, p. 163.

¹¹⁵ Grice and Woods, ‘Human Rights’, p. 846.

starvation.¹¹⁶ As *This is Paradise* begins for example, Hyok's child narrator explains that 'in our house, as in all the others',¹¹⁷ a loudspeaker 'delivered the broadcasts from Pyongyang',¹¹⁸ including news and songs 'always devoted to the Dear Leader Kim Jong-Il or to the glory of his father'.¹¹⁹ In moments like these, the text thus presents bizarre realities as part of a collective experience the narrator sees as normal. This 'Paradise' however, is soon revealed to be anything but. Born in 1986, Hyok's childhood in Oonsong, North Korea coincided with the worst periods of the great famine. As Hyok explains, frequent public executions of 'political enemies' in this period (often starving people caught stealing scraps of food), were a matter of excitement for the children who 'stood in the first row',¹²⁰ to 'pick up the rifle cartridges' and 'bullets' left behind.¹²¹ As scenes like this make clear, these children demonstrate no horror in the face of state-sponsored murder: they are fully indoctrinated. In fact, the young narrator describes the execution as a general might recount movements on a battle field, with detail and no emotion: 'An initial salvo, aimed at the chest, breaks the first rope, causing the body to surge forward. A second salvo of three bullets hits the top of the man's head, which literally explodes'.¹²²

Later in the text, however, we see an illustration of this and other key moments drawn by the adult Hyok, a talented artist. Fine details are surrounded by blurred and reticent renderings, simultaneously evoking the absence and presence of both narrator and subject. A drawing of the execution, for instance, shows a single rifleman and the condemned man quite clearly, the soldier's rifle pointed and blood exploding from the victim's head, chest and abdomen. But

¹¹⁶ Hyok Kang with Phillippe Grangereau, *This is Paradise! My North Korean Childhood*, trans. by Shaun Whiteside (2004; London: Abacus, 2007), p. 3. Similar child perspectives on daily indoctrination by state ideology can be found in texts written across the Soviet-aligned world. For just one example, see Ondajaki's autobiographical novel of his 1990s Angolan upbringing in *Good Morning Comrades*, trans. by Stephen Henighan (2001; London: Biblioasis, 2008). In one scene, the young protagonist argues with his family servant, Comrade Antonio, who preferred colonial Angola to present day revolutionary socialist Angola:

'But, Antonio, don't you see that it didn't have everything? People didn't earn a fair wage. Black people couldn't be managers, for example'.

'But there was always bread in the store, son. The buses worked perfectly'.

Ondajaki, *Comrades*, p 8.

¹¹⁷ Hyok, *Paradise!*, p. 3

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 3.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 3.

¹²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 12

¹²¹ *Ibid*, p. 12.

¹²² *Ibid*, p. 13.

behind these two clearly drawn figures are others in pointillistic style, barely decipherable: the rest of the firing squad, the gathered crowd, and three children looking on.¹²³ This moment, clearly vital in Hyok's self-story, is thus offered to us twice: through the excited and only partially comprehending description given by his nine-year old self, and in the reticent, shadowy figuring of his adult illustration.

This same pattern of revelation and concealment reappears as Hyok describes the ubiquity of death during his childhood with the image of his neighbours 'gathered for a few minutes around the body of a child who had just died'.¹²⁴ He explains that everyone gathered 'lost interest again almost immediately. In these times of famine, each person thought only of himself'.¹²⁵ Thus, like other survivor/narrators of totalitarianism, Hyok shows himself as scarred both by crippling, inhuman detachment and by state betrayal: 'deceived'¹²⁶ by a 'total lie encompassing the whole' of his 'existence'.¹²⁷ Even after his escape from North Korea in 1998, Hyok suffers from 'recurring' nightmares, and takes part in the 'violence'¹²⁸ endemic in his suffering, exiled, betrayed community.¹²⁹

The Aquariums of Pyongyang is similarly told from a child's perspective and recounts the terrifying experiences of Kang Chol-Hwan's life, beginning in 1977 with his imprisonment at the age of only nine in the notorious Yodok concentration camp, and continuing through his ten-year captivity filled with 'executions, postmortem stonings, the desperate consumption of rats, roaches and snakes, and an appalling range of tortures'.¹³⁰ Despite being witness to such horrors, however, Kang explains flatly in his introduction that 'from a human rights perspective, my case was shocking'.¹³¹ The tone of Kang's narration throughout, in fact, is comparable to that of many other traumatised victims: seemingly devoid of emotion. He describes, for example, the moment security agents ransacked his house, eventually leading to the arrest of his family, as follows: 'I began to feel a certain malaise, the shape and cause

¹²³ Ibid, p. 168.

¹²⁴ Ibid, p. 125.

¹²⁵ Ibid, p. 125.

¹²⁶ Ibid, p. 191.

¹²⁷ Ibid, p. 191.

¹²⁸ Ibid, p. 192.

¹²⁹ Ibid, p. 192.

¹³⁰ Grice and Woods, 'Human Rights', p. 842.

¹³¹ Kang Chol-Hwan and Pierre Rigoulot, *The Aquariums of Pyongyang: Ten Years in the North Korean Gulag*, trans. by Yair Reiner (2000; London: Atlantic Books, 2006), p. xxiv.

of which I could not altogether comprehend. Perhaps this is why a hole persists there in my memory'.¹³² In telling this story, that is, Kang describes a failure of memory resulting in a persistent 'hole': the lapse symptomatic of traumatic injury.

Like many gulag survivors before him, moreover, Kang sees his betrayal by the state as the cruellest injury of all. He explains that he had 'some happy years'¹³³ before his capture, seeing Kim Il-Sung 'as a kind of Father Christmas' and his son as 'like a god'.¹³⁴ Growing up in this environment, Kang observes, 'I had been made to believe' that 'the Democratic People Republic of Korea was the best country in the world'. But in the camp he found his 're-education' consisted of 'armed teachers beating and insulting their student charges'.¹³⁵ The psychological consequences of such daily exposure to 'the climate of terror' and 'insufficient food', are further illustrated as the memoir continues.¹³⁶ In a chapter entitled simply 'Madness Stalks the Prisoners', for example, Kang outlines some of the 'many fits of madness at the camp',¹³⁷ including a boy who became delirious after being beaten severely by a teacher and another who 'suddenly started raving and broke into uncontrollable laughter'.¹³⁸ Other psychological effects struck closer to home, of course, and Kang recalls with little discernible emotion multiple attempts by his father and uncle to hang themselves: 'Suicide', he explains flatly, 'was not uncommon in the camp'.¹³⁹

Kang's awareness of his own emotional detachment is made clear, however, in his description of a harrowing episode in which he and his fellow school children were made to bury dozens of corpses on a hillside. Not long afterwards, he recalls, the entire site was bulldozed, and the children watched as the rotting bodies tumbled down the hill towards them. 'That scene', he reveals, 'frightens me more today than it did back then'.¹⁴⁰ Witnessing this 'spectacle of horrors', Kang explains, he remained 'relatively calm,' a telling indication of 'just how desensitized I had become'.¹⁴¹ He also reveals, however, that 'the more I

¹³² Kang, *Paradise*, p. 39.

¹³³ *Ibid*, p. 39.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 1-2.

¹³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 69.

¹³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 69.

¹³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 69.

¹³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 124.

¹³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 99.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p. 103.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 103.

witnessed such atrocities' the more 'I desired to stay alive, no matter the cost'.¹⁴² The cost, as this memoir illustrates, was to be haunted by these traumatic events for the rest of his life: like other survivors, Kang describes being plagued by nightmares in which 'the cries of pain, the disfigured faces, the crushed limbs'¹⁴³ of his camp life return. Occasionally in those dreams, however, he is safely back in his childhood home, and finds himself wondering 'whether the camp was the dream, or Pyongyang?'¹⁴⁴

As we shall see, such tropes of ghosting, un-selfing, dissociation and the persistence of traumatic experience also cascade into the literary memoirs and historical fiction of some South Korean writers living in America and writing in English. Such works draw on and negotiate eyewitness experiences of life before during and after the partition of Korea in 1950, using the rhetorical swerves provided by fictive stylistics to navigate the painful memory effects of traumatic injury. Though the specific events and details contained in these semi-autobiographical texts may differ from verifiable historic facts, in other words, they nevertheless bear compelling witness to the truth of collective traumatic suffering in Cold War Korea.

South Korea

The Martyred (1964), was (in English) by Richard Kim, a Korean war veteran who served in the Republic of South Korea's army and later emigrated to the United States, becoming an award-winning scholar and novelist. The setting of the heavily autobiographical novel is the three-month occupation of Pyongyang by South Korean, US, and UN forces in the autumn of 1950: the short moment before the abandonment of the North Koreans by the West, and the deadly war that followed.¹⁴⁵ *The Martyred* is thus a war novel in which there are no battle fields. Instead its key themes are betrayals large and small and the power of key institutions to influence ethical men to do wrong in the name of right. The lack of first names for the main characters, for example, Captain Lee, Colonel Chang, Minister Shin, and Lieutenant Park, 'express their subservience to a "we," ' as they 'protect the collectives they serve'.¹⁴⁶ The opening of the novel demonstrates this collectivism as the narrator, Captain Lee, explains that by the time the North Koreans occupied Seoul in June 1950, 'we had already left our

¹⁴² Ibid, p. 103.

¹⁴³ Ibid, p. 152.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 152-3.

¹⁴⁵ Josephine Nock-Hee Park, *Friendships*, p. 50.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 60.

university, where we were instructors in the history of Human Civilization'.¹⁴⁷ Here, the 'we' to which Lee aligns himself is he and his fellow instructors, but in the course of the war all his allegiances will be challenged. The brutal irony of the field in which Lee and colleagues taught, moreover, is typical of a novel in which every detail is weighted with multiple potential meanings.

Ostensibly, *The Martyred* involves an investigation into the arrest of fourteen church ministers by North Korean forces and the murder of twelve of those men (the presumed 'martyrs' of the title). Captain Lee, a rising officer in South Korean Military Intelligence is charged with turning the story into pro-South propaganda, but first his commanding officer, Colonel Chang, wants Lee to investigate possible collusion by the surviving ministers. From the start, then, concerns around betrayal by good men take centre stage as Captain Lee struggles to draw the line between enemies and friends. In one early scene, for example, he discusses with Colonel Chang the outcome of an interrogation with one of the ministers.

'Sir, I hope you are not suggesting that they collaborated with the Communists', I said.

'Well, what do you think?' [answered Colonel Chang]

'It is very difficult for me to suspect that they could have betrayed the other ministers'.

'Why not?' he asked, with a peculiar, cold smile on his face [...].¹⁴⁸

Although at first Captain Lee is shocked by the idea of the ministers' potential collusion, over the course of the novel it becomes clear that such acts are inevitable when states, religions, and political parties turn men against one another. In this text, religion turns fathers against sons and ministers against congregations, the military demands lies in the name of victory, and the United States abandons North Korea to its dreadful fate, creating an entire country of martyrs.

Another kind of intimate betrayal is found in the literary memoir *Memories of My Ghost Brother* (1997) by Heinz Insu Fenkl, set in Incheon, South Korea in the 1960s. Fenkl, the child of a German GI and a South Korean sex worker frames the events of his childhood as a phantasmic tale of loss, violence and deathly haunting. Growing up in a house owned by a Japanese colonel during their occupation in the second world war, Fenkl sets his memoir in

¹⁴⁷ Richard E. Kim, *The Martyred* (London: Penguin Books 2011), p. 1.

¹⁴⁸ Kim, *The Martyred*, p. 20

the ramshackle, temporary community of prostitutes, hustlers and mixed-race children of GIs and local women that set up 'camp' in these abandoned houses bordering the Demilitarized Zone. These inhabitants of 'camptown' are themselves rendered by Fenkl as 'ghostly'¹⁴⁹ as he defies traditional autobiographical conventions to illustrate both his child narrator's sense of magic and mystery and the ever-presence of death and dislocation in this transient Cold War setting.¹⁵⁰ The author's child self, called Insu by his family and Heinz by his German GI Father, encounters multiple signs, wonders and folk tales, though their meaning, like camptown itself, is endlessly mutable, leaving the boy with no reliable guidance. His uncle tells stories of Swallow-Kings and magical mosquitos, while his father gives him a copy of Alexander Dumas' tale of betrayal and false identity, *The Count of Monte Cristo*. The only thing Heinz/Insu knows for certain is that the ghosts of camptown carry powerful and terrible secrets.

Early on in the novel, Heinz/Insu wakes sees in the moonlight, 'dressed in white', his young and troubled aunt Gannan, who has recently 'befriended' a 'yellow-haired GI'.¹⁵¹ Later, he discovers that his pregnant aunt, abandoned by her GI, committed suicide, so that the moonlit figure he saw must have been her ghost. This vision, like many others, passes almost without comment. But at other points in the novel the boy is visited by a ghost whose identity (like that of Dumas' Count) is an ongoing mystery. When he grows older, he develops a suspicion about who the ghost might be and, on a rare day out with his father, raises the subject: "I had a dream I had a brother," he says, whose name "was Kuristo and he was a ghost".¹⁵² His father insists "it's a bullshit dream".¹⁵³

Not long after, however, Heinz/Insu's cousin explains the truth: this ghostly brother Kuristo "wasn't your father's son". Heinz/Insu's mother was forced to give up Kuristo because his German father "didn't want some other man's son in his family".¹⁵⁴ The narrator then begins to understand that his own life was thus purchased at the cost of his 'ghost'-brother's: the real Kuristo's fate is left unclear. Thus like all the inhabitants of camptown, Kuristo is a commodity, a body exchanged while its spirit is left to wander. And similar to Kim's *The Martyred*, Fenkl's text also emphasises both the narrator's fragmentation and precarity as

¹⁴⁹ Grace Kyungwon Hong, 'Ghosts of Camptown', MELUS, 39:3 (2014), p. 49.

¹⁵⁰ Kyungwon Hong, 'Ghosts,' p. 49.

¹⁵¹ Heinz Insu Fenkl, *Memories of My Ghost Brother*, New York: Dutton Press, 1996, p. 33.

¹⁵² *Ibid*, p. 289.

¹⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 289.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 289.

well as the collective nature of the suffering he narrates. In the aftermath of state betrayal, such texts suggest, individual agency is only attained through the abandonment of familial, religious and/or patriotic loyalties. The price of that freedom, as these works illustrate, is a kind of self-ghosting.

Cuban Stories

While testimonial literature from North and South Korea represents ongoing negotiations of individual and collective survival in the context of Cold war loyalties and betrayals, across the world in the 1960s and 70s, Fidel Castro was overseeing the expunging of pre-revolutionary Cuban history from schools and libraries, burning old books and writing new ones. As American resident and Cuban exile Dania Rosa Nasca outlines in *Lights Out: A Cuban Memoir of Betrayal and Survival* (2016), for example, her family was torn first by the US-backed military dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista, and then by the overthrow of his regime by Castro in 1959. At first a hero to many Cubans, Nasca explains, Castro's increasing alliance with the Soviet Union and his oppression of so-called political enemies led to an era of totalitarian rule rivalling anything found in the Soviet Union. As Nasca describes, by the end of 1959 neighbours in Havana often saw 'friends, neighbours, and acquaintances being led away', and from their houses 'they could hear the gunshots'.¹⁵⁵ Her own family, initially supporters of Castro, were eventually targeted as political enemies. And, as in many testimonies of totalitarian brutality, at the heart of her family's suffering was a terrible sense of betrayal. Of her mother, Nasca writes, it was 'very difficult for her to admit that Fidel had deceived the Cuban people so thoroughly'.¹⁵⁶

The brutality of Castro's regime is described in excruciating detail by Armando Valladares, who in *Contra toda Esperanza (Against all Hope)*, (1985) tells of his twenty-two years in political prisons in Cuba (1960-1982).¹⁵⁷ As befits the length of Valladares's imprisonment, the scope of his memoir is vast, and I cannot address its multiple themes here. But the stories he tells of starvation, casual brutality, summary executions, and prisoner hierarchies are devastatingly familiar to readers of other gulag testimonies. In one passage for example,

¹⁵⁵ Dania Rosa Nasca, *Lights Out: A Cuban Memoir of Betrayal and Survival* (North Charleston, South Carolina, Create Space Publishing, 2016), p. 61.

¹⁵⁶ Nasca, *Lights Out*, p. 68.

¹⁵⁷ Armando Valladares, *Against all Hope: The Prison Memoirs of Armando Valladares*, trans. by Andrew Hurley (1985; London: Hamish Hamilton London, 1986), p xiii.

Valladares describes the length to which his fellow prisoners went to avoid the brutality of outdoor labour:

Besides breaking their arms and legs, many men drew out the liquid around their kneecaps with a hypodermic needle. Others injected petroleum into themselves or rubbed stinging nettles and other plants on their skin until they swelled up like monsters.¹⁵⁸

As Valladares explains, the prison ‘Doctor’ was wise to these deceptions and told prisoners that to stay inside, “‘you’d have to cut off one of your fingers’”.¹⁵⁹ Inevitably, one man does so. “‘You men are all crazy! Crazy!’” the doctor screams.¹⁶⁰ Crazy, maybe. But as we have seen, madness may be the only sane response to regimes in which faith and bravery have become suspect terms, used to justify terror. Better perhaps to be a ghost than to feel one’s own lack of agency, or think oneself mad than to acknowledge that one’s flashbacks are based on reality. The shocking wisdom produced from Kolyma to Cuba is this: Valladare’s story could be Shukhov’s, Ginzburg’s could be Sliozberg’s, Heinz/Insu’s ghostly longing is not so different from Hyok Kang’s.

And like those others before him, Valladares found a way for his suffering and that of his fellow prisoners to be heard, using his own blood as ink.¹⁶¹ The poem he writes, moreover, concerns the power of testimony to serve not only as personal revelation and reflection, but as a site where collective trauma can transform into powerful counter-discourse. That the opening verse repeats Eugenia Ginzburg’s cry (‘they couldn’t take that away from me!’) is further testimony to the power of words and shared tropes in the face of such betrayal:

They’ve taken everything away from me
pens
pencils
ink
because they don’t want
me to write
[...] but I still have life’s ink

¹⁵⁸ Valladares, *Hope*, p. 219

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 219.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p. 219-20.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid*, p. 359.

- my own blood –
and I'm still writing poems with that.¹⁶²

Poems written in blood. That is, finally, the nature of Cold War testimonial literature: tales of traumatising betrayal, madness, detachment, and the ghosts of former selves, composed by survivors who, under penalty of losing the little that they have left, demand to bear witness to history. In the words of Bozidhar Petrov, Lechov camp survivor, 'All of this is now history. Our lives are behind us now, and unfortunately we have no other memories'.¹⁶³

Bibliography

Abbot, Jack Henry, *In the Belly of the Beast: Letters from Prison* (New York: Random House, 1981).

Blackwood, Caroline, *On the Perimeter*, London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1984)

Braithwaite, Roderic, 'Afterword', in Eugenia Ginzburg, *Into the Whirlwind*, trans. by Paul Stevenson and Manya Harai (1967; London: Persephone Books, 2014).

Chol-Hwan, Kang and Rigoulot, Pierre, *The Aquariums of Pyongyang: Ten Years in the North Korean Gulag*, trans. by Yair Reiner (2000; London: Atlantic Books, 2006).

Corning, Amy, Gaidays, Vladas and Schuman, Howard, 'Transformative Events and Generational Memory', *Sociological Forum*, 28:2 (2013), 373-394.

Dawidowicz, Lucy, *The Holocaust and the Historians* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1981).

de Beauvoir, Simone, *The Second Sex*, trans. by H.M. Parshley (1949; London: Vintage, 1997).

Fenkl, Heinz Insu, *Memories of My Ghost Brother*, New York: Dutton Press, 1996.

Friedan, Betty, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1963).

Geer, Germaine, *The Female Eunuch* (London: Grafton Books, 1971).

Ginzburg, Eugenia, *Into the Whirlwind*, trans. by Paul Stevenson and Manya Harai (1967; London: Persephone Books, 2014).

¹⁶² Ibid, p. 359.

¹⁶³ Bozihidar Petrov, in Todorov, ed., *Voices*, p. 112.

Grice, Helen, and Woods, Tim, 'Human Rights, Human Wrongs: Literatures of Captivity', *Textual Practice*, 26: 5 (2012), 829-50.

Jensen, Meg. *The Art and Science of Trauma and the Autobiographical: Negotiated Truths* (London: Palgrave Studies in Life Writing Series, 2019).

Kang, Hyok with Grangereau, Phillippe, *This is Paradise! My North Korean Childhood*, trans.by Shaun Whiteside (2004; London: Abacus, 2007).

Kaple, Deborah, 'Introduction', to Fyodor Vasilevich Mochulsky, *Gulag Boss: A Soviet Memoir*, trans. by Deborah Kaple (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011).

Kim, Richard E., *The Martyred* (London: Penguin Books 2011).

Kim, Yong with Suk-Young, Kim, *Long Road Home: Testimony of a North Korean Camp Survivor* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

Kyungwon Hong, Grace, 'Ghosts of Camptown', *MELUS*, 39:3 (2014), 49-67.

Knight, Etheridge, *Poems from Prison* (Detroit, MI: Broadside Lotus Press, 1968).

Lappe, Frances Moore, *Diet for a Small Planet* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1971).

Merridale, Catherine, 'Soviet Memories: Patriotism and Trauma in Memory', in Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz eds., *Histories, Theories, Debates* Fordham: Fordham University Press, 2010).

Miłosz, Czesław, *The Captive Mind*, trans. by Jane Zielonko (1953; London: Penguin, 2001).

Nasca, Dania Rosa, *Lights Out: A Cuban Memoir of Betrayal and Survival* (North Charleston, South Carolina: Create Space Publishing, 2016).

Nkrumah, Kwame, *Consciencism: Philosophy and Ideology for De-Colonisation* (New York: New York Press, 1964).

Nkrumah, Kwame, *Ghana: The Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah*, (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, Ltd., 1957; republished 1971 London: International Publishers Co, Inc, 1971).

Nock-Hee Park, Josephine, *Cold War Friendships: Korea, Vietnam, and Asian American Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2016).

Ondajaki, *Good Morning Comrades*, trans. by Stephen Henighan (2001; London: Biblioasis, 2008).

Prince, Anne, Laura Brown, Ross Cheit, Jennifer Freyd, Steen Gold, Kathy Pezdek, Kathryn Quina, 'Motivated Forgetting and Misremembering: Perspectives from Betrayal Trauma Theory', in R. Belli, ed., *True and False Recovered Memories. Nebraska Symposium on Motivation Volume 58* (New York: Springer 2012).

Smith, Sidonie and Shaeffer Kay, *Human Rights and Narrative Lives: The Ethics of Recognition* (New York: Palgrave, 2004).

Smith Sidonie and Watson Julia, 'Metrics of Authenticity, Collective I-Formations and the Ethics of Verification in First-Person Testimony', *Biography* 35: 4 (2012), 590-626.

Solzhenitsyn, Aleksander, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, trans. by Ralph Parker (1963; London: Penguin Books, 2000).

Sztompka, Piotr, 'The Trauma of Social Change: A Case of Postcommunist Societies', in Jeffrey Alexander, Ron Eyerman, Bernard Giesen, Neil J. Smelser and Piotr Sztompka, eds, *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (Berkeley: University of California, 2014).

Todorov, Tzvetan, *Hope and Memory: Lessons from the Twentieth Century*, trans. by David Bellows (2000; London: Atlantic Books, 2003).

Todorov, Tzvetan, ed., *Voices from the Gulag: Life and Death in Communist Bulgaria*, trans. by Robert Zaretsky (1992; University Park Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999).

Valladares, Armando, *Against all Hope: The Prison Memoirs of Armando Valladares*, trans. by Andrew Hurley (1985; London: Hamish Hamilton London, 1986).

Vilensky, Simeon, ed., *Till My Tale is Told: Women's Memoirs of the Gulag*, trans. by John Crowfoot Marjorie Farquarson, Catriona Kelly, Sally Laird and Cathy Porter (1989; London: Virago Press, 1999).

Whitlock, Gillian, *Postcolonial Life Narrative: Testimonial Transactions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

Wright, Richard, *Black Boy* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1945).

X. Malcolm with Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York: Grove Press, 1965).