

## Division Trauma of Koreans and Oral Narrative Healing\*

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### Abstract

This article looks into the reality of division trauma through various examples of recounts of war experience of Koreans, and seeks ways to heal that division trauma by focusing on oral narrative methods and contents of the tales. The sources of some irrationalities and conflicts in present day Korean society are division between South and North Korea, and the Korean War. As a result of such tragedy, politico-social conflicts still continue, leaving many scars on the lives of individuals. These scars are referred to as division trauma. Division trauma has a strong collective characteristic because it comes from the division and war experienced by the nation as a whole. Many of the recounts of Korean War experience contain such division trauma and constitute the mainstream of modern oral literature. However, these recounts, depending on how the narrator conveys the story and perceives the relevant event, take on different forms even with regard to same event. There is a coexistence between storytelling based on the narrative of division where the narrator points fingers and criticizes others as perpetrators, and storytelling seeking to become a narrative of integration by objectifying all aspects of an event and narrating it based on feelings of empathy. Oral storytelling aiming to become an integrative narrative, revealing how tragic wars are and how they negate all humanness, can contribute to healing division trauma. If stories with such narrative method can be found, be diffused throughout society and form a discursive space for an integrative narrative, oral narrative healing will become possible.

**Key Words** : division trauma, recounts of war experience, division narrative, integrative narrative, revelation, empathy, narrative method, oral narrative healing

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## 1. Introduction: Trapped in Division Trauma

This article will look into the reality of trauma carried by people on the Korean Peninsula, still maintaining the world's most oppressive and hostile system, and caused by national division, and possible ways of healing that trauma. The starting point of the approach used by this analysis is the recounts of war experience of those who had directly experienced the tragic division and the Korean War. The most adequate source for diagnosing trauma are the stories of those who had lived through it because the oral narratives of such experience contain realities of the trauma as well as elements that enable diagnosis of related symptoms.

In this article, division trauma refers to the severe psychosis shown by Koreans as a result of the division and the war, as well as of the killings, violence and state oppression committed as the regime of division stretched on. It is a concept linking trauma, a psychiatric term normally referring to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), with a historical event. Concepts such as 'mental wounds from the division' or 'scars from the division', used to explain the psychological symptoms arising from the division, are likely to dilute the severity of the situation. I also use the term under hopes that by employing a medical terminology, the wounds can be recognized as something that needs to be cured.

If complete unification is said to be a state where communication and unity between people are attained, then the foremost issue to be resolved is healing the emotional wounds of Koreans arising from the division of the country. If healing of division trauma is not prioritized, there can be no genuine unity and unification.

The concept of division trauma can be discussed within a collective framework as well as a personal one. They are wounds from the Korean War felt by the nation as a whole - collective wounds inflicted at a time when conflict was the most severe and when, in the minds of Koreans, the ambitions and desires as a nation or a state failed to materialize. Ruling regimes in both Koreas used these wounds to instigate mutual antagonism and socio-psychology of terror, causing collective forms of division trauma among Koreans (Kim, Sung-Min., and Park, Young-Kyun. 2011:173-174). On the other hand, there are also personal forms of traumas within individuals debilitated by traumatic events - people who had

directly experienced the war and terror such as combatants, massacred civilians, defectors to the North and to the South, and their families. Aspects of collective trauma can be derived from the process of categorizing personal traumas.

Division trauma continues to prevail without being healed because of institutionalized state-sponsored violence and also the narrative of division permeating throughout people's minds and in human relationships. The opposite is also true. The regime of division and the division narrative use division trauma in order to reproduce themselves. Division trauma acts as a foundation on which the regime of division and the division narrative exert enormous power over everyday lives of Koreans (Lee, Byung-Soo. 2011: 195).

Although division trauma exerts immense influence over everyday lives of Koreans in the form of individual problems, these individuals are not unique parts independently experiencing certain events. Instead, these problems should be seen as collective issues from the standpoint of the entire nation. Because there are division- and war-driven conflicts in various aspects of everyday life, it is possible to boldly diagnose that issues related to lives of Koreans are, in fact, manifestations of the division trauma.

As such, division and war are events greatly impacting all parts of Koreans' lives and thus have become topics continuously discussed among the general public. They are also themes frequently used in literary activities and appear in mass culture such as post-war novels and war movies, as the sources of conflict or tragic lives. Even without the use of a particular artistic device, stories of war and division are deeply embedded in the collective or personal narratives<sup>1)</sup> of those in their late 70's.

In other words, in present day story culture, recounts of war experience are orally handed down on the same level as historical tales, and these tales are the main repertoire of the elderly in their late 70's. They are usually double-sided in the way they are told or carried. They are gruesome tales of how Koreans killed each other when division and conflict between the two Koreas were at their peak. Sometimes they are smoothly narrated as if they were mere historical tales whereas

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1) Here, narrative refers to the 'storyline' that can be found in everyday oral narrations.

at other times, when inter-Korea relations sour, they transform into stories that represent the hostile circumstances. Such double-sided way of narrating and carrying the stories is expected to continue insofar as the country remains divided. Thus, division trauma exists deep inside the way war experiences are recounted and in their contents, negatively acting as an element consolidating divisionist consciousness.

Until now, the main approach toward war experience tales was from an oral history perspective (Kim, Gwi-Ok. 2004:1-313; Kim, Gwi-Ok et al. 2008:1-320; Park, Kyung-Ryul. 2009:233-256; Lee, Im-Hwa. 2010:1-407), leading to substantial achievement in revealing civilian massacres omitted from state-led war historiography and realities of regions that had gone through ideological conflicts (Park, Chan-Seung. 2000: 274-308; Lee, Yong-Gi. 2001:11-55; Yoon, Hyung-Sook. 2002:3-29; Park, Chan-Seung. 2010:1-320). Thanks to these researches, historical events that were once forgotten or buried have been brought to light and social awareness has been raised about the damaging effects of a war. Furthermore, in literature, many researches have been made on literary characteristics and narrative method of war experience tales (Shin, Dong-hun. 2011:7-61; Shin, Dong-hun. 2012:277-312), contributing a great deal to this article. However, whereas previous researches focus on how recounts of war experience reveal alternative realities of war and on the format and literary characteristics shown by such tales, they have not been able to go as far as analyzing the division trauma and coming up with methods to heal such trauma.

This has been the focal point of my research (Kim, Jong-Kun. 2009:211-232; Kim, Jong-Kun. 2011:37-65; Kim, Jong-Kun. 2013:107-134) i.e., to analyze aspects of division trauma as witnessed in tales of experience related to war or division, and to discuss the concept of 'oral narrative healing', which highlights oral narration of such tales as a way of healing trauma. Through my research, I have come to conclude that oral accounts of experiences may not be as effective in healing personal forms of division trauma.

Oral narrative healing is an appropriate methodology for healing traumas carried by individuals who had gone through shocking events, such as a war, of a state, a nation or a group, rather than for traumas formed from personal events. My hypothesis is that by focusing on the way a story is told during actual narration

and how its content develops, one can find the path toward healing and recovery. Also, through the process of discoursing the storytelling method and its content, and spreading them, division trauma, as a collective symptom, can be treated. The reasoning is that oral narrative healing, as a way to heal collective trauma, can take place during the process of receiving consolation, through oral narratives of others, from the fact that they too carry the same sort of pain within them. Furthermore, if such consolation gradually spreads, then a person may become brave enough to participate in the discursive space enabling empathy for the same type of trauma. If a person is able to reach this level during the process of oral narration, then he or she may be diagnosed as showing some signs of healing or prognosis of a recovery (Kim, Jong-Kun. 2013:114-115).

What, then, is the right way to discourse recounts of war experience, when the aim is to heal trauma? This article will look into the realities of division trauma through various examples of war experience tales and seek ways to heal that trauma by focusing on the storytelling method and their contents.

## 2. Characteristics of War Experience Tales and Ways They Are Narrated

Recounts of war experience refer to stories of experiences of those who lived during the period between 25th June 1950, when the Korean War broke out, and 27th July 1953, when the armistice took effect. However, circumstances are too complex for the timeframe of the stories to be limited to this period alone. From the time the Peninsula was divided along the 38th Parallel after national liberation in 1945, intense ideological confrontations took place between the left and right wings, as represented by the Jeju Incident (3rd April, 1948) and the Yeosu-Suncheon Rebellion (October, 1948), culminating in the Korean War. Also, considering that nearby the 38th Parallel, small localized warfare had continuously broken out even before the Korean War, it is misleading to set the outbreak of the war as the starting point of the timeframe. Furthermore, although the official armistice was signed in 1953, communist partisan guerrillas took hold of areas around Mount Jiri and

continued their activities for several years afterwards. Therefore, limiting the range of war experience tales to the period between the official start and end of the war is inappropriate. The timeframe has to be expanded<sup>2)</sup> to include the period after 1953 until the time guerrilla activities terminated. Moreover, considering the characteristics of some events, the timeframe should be broadened to include not just the war between the two Koreas, but also the state-sponsored violence perpetrated as a result of the ideological divide, such as the Jeju Incident and the Yeosu-Suncheon Rebellion.

Therefore, recounts of war experience can take on various forms - tales related to the Jeju Incident, those related to the Yeosu-Suncheon Rebellion, the ideological conflicts between left and right wings within local communities, the localized wars near the 38th Parallel, the actual war itself and the guerrilla counter-insurgency operations after the armistice.

Attempts to verify characteristics of war experience tales can lead to shedding light on the shame embedded in minds of Koreans, even exacerbating the wounds. Nonetheless, in order to be able to discuss ways to heal division trauma through narratives of experience, one has to zoom in on the characteristics of the stories and the way they are told. As long as the country remains divided, recounts of war experience may not reveal their entire true essence. In oral narratives of experience tales, the storyteller tells his or her story from the standpoint of one particular side, namely that of South Korea, in support of the existing system and against communism. Such nature of the narratives are symptoms of the division trauma and represent the tragedy of Koreans. Many people had repetitively experienced the situation where depending on what happens on the battlefield, perpetrators may suddenly become victims, or where someone, in the dark, flashes a torchlight onto one's face and asks, "Who's side are you on?"<sup>3)</sup> Such

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2) According to general interpretation, the finale of the guerrilla extermination operations was in September 1953, when Lee Hyun Sang was shot and killed. However, because Jeong Sun-Deok, the last known guerrilla fighter, was arrested in November 1963, it can be said that, for the local community, the terror of war carried on much longer.

3) Yi Chong-Jun's novel, *The Walls of Rumor*, depicts this kind of extreme fear. During the war, in a village alternately occupied by the guerrillas and the police, a child becomes traumatized because someone came in the middle of the night, flashing a torch in the child's face and asking, "Whose side are you on?"

circumstances are experiences of extreme fear, where one has no idea who the other person is and one wrong choice can bring about death. Therefore, anyone who had gone through the war continues to live with the perpetual fear that the world can once turn upside down.<sup>4)</sup> One war novelist refers to such fear as ‘a minefield in the mind’.<sup>5)</sup>

Because the war is still ongoing, war experience tales show abnormality because people are still not free to speak one’s mind. Furthermore, all narrators tell their stories without revealing everything. Therefore, sometimes, the narrator tells his or her story to justify one’s error and at other times, takes on a biased perspective and makes oneself into a hero.

Depending on how the war evolved, perpetrators could turn into victims and vice versa, and the ensuing changes in the attitude of neighbors and acquaintances seemed to have been most unbearable for many. As a result, distrust became widespread. So, many recounts of war experience mention not that people were scared of the People’s Army from the North, but that the cycle of revenge among local communists and their antagonists was more fearful.

All in all, oral representation of war experience tales require an objective perspective toward an event, but this is impossible when narrating one’s own story. Therefore, just as writers try to objectify events through fictional writing in war novels, narrators can also tell stories experienced by others, as heard and seen by others. In the process of telling a story not of one’s own actions but rather of someone else, one can become more objective by standing in the shoes of both the perpetrator and the victim and may even feel empathy.

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4) When I, the youngest son of my family, entered elementary school, my father wanted to belatedly donate a statue to the school. Prominent members of our village had already erected various concrete statues in the school, such as the statue of Admiral Yi Sun-Shin, of Shin Saimdang, of a reading woman and of animals in various forms and sizes. The only one missing was one of Lee Seung-Bok, the anti-communist boy. In urban areas, most schools had statues of Lee Seung-Bok, but in my elementary school located on the skirts of Mount Jiri, there was such statue. My father, after a few drinks, used to feel sorry for his youngest son. He had wanted to donate a statue to the school so that his son would receive recognition, but it was one thing he just could not do because of the fear that the world may change again.

5) This is an expression used by the writer Jeon Sang-Guk, who wrote about the realities of the Korean War and recovery from the wounds in works such as *Ah-be’s Family* and *Namisom*. The writer contributed a lot of insight about characteristics of oral narratives of war experience (Oral narrative at the Kim You Jeong House of Literature on 17th February, 2013, Researched by Shin Dong-Hun, Kim Jong-Kun etal.)

In order to pull recounts of war experience out into a space of discourse, it is necessary to highlight the fact that under tragic circumstances as a war, humans tend to act in similar ways, meaning that stories quite likely to happen tend to appear in oral narratives. For example, stories that frequently appear include ones such as parents abandoning or suffocating a crying child in the process of running from home, women falling victim to sexual violence or villagers being looted. By spreading these oral narratives containing highly probable events, it may be possible to discourse the tales in a way that gives consolation to people - that what they did during the war, a period of extremities, may not be so despicable after all. Once a space for discourse has opened up, then a person, while narrating a story, can resolve the lump inside one's heart and find one's way toward recovery.

As such, the contents or the circumstances around war experience tales attained from actual oral representations are multi-faceted. Existing researches scrupulously analyze the differences between women and men in relation to contents of narratives and how they are conveyed (Shin, Dong-hun. 2012: 277-312). However, it seems far-fetched to assert that the multi-faceted nature of oral narratives definitively depend on the gender of the narrator. Instead, the contents of the narratives and the ways they are told can be divided into those that are fixated on the narrative of division and those that are not. Experiential tales that reaffirm a divisionist consciousness and emphasize antagonism can be categorized as a division narrative, like the boastful heroic tales told mainly by war veterans on the winning or powerful side. On the other hand, there are stories that focus on the negative aspects of the war - being displaced, looted or massacred - told by the weak, revealing the destructive nature of a war. The narrators may also refuse to take sides, or sometimes take on a humanistic perspective, refrain from assigning blame and accept the circumstances. These stories are outside the division narrative and can further be referred to as a narrative that seeks integration.

Depending on the position of the narrator, stories about the same event can either be a division narrative or go beyond it. Politico-social atmosphere, as well as the personal state of the narrator, plays the biggest role in determining whether the story is divisionist or not. If politico-social factors are resolved to a certain



extent, then wouldn't other factors also become adjusted during the narrative process? In other words, if the storyteller is guided, in terms of the way the story is conveyed and which repertoire is chosen, to orally narrate toward a narrative of integration rather than that of division, and if relevant materials are accumulated in this fashion, then perhaps division trauma can be healed at least to a certain extent.

### 3. Division Trauma in Oral Recounts of War Experience and Possibilities of Healing

In general, the *raison d'être* of tales of experience in general is that they, based on facts, faithfully convey the realities of life during a certain period. Therefore, tales of war experience will render meaning if they contain vivid accounts of a war and truthfully depict the lives of people who survived the horrendous period. Clearly, a war is devastation for both the victor and the loser. Because the Korean War has not officially ended but is still ongoing under an armistice, one is quite likely to narrate one's war experience as a victim, vilifying the other side as the enemy. So the story itself and the way it is told are likely to become fixated on a division narrative. Under such circumstances, it may seem difficult to find war experience stories or narrative methods that are integrative - to find narratives that contain complete messages of harmony and peace or those narrated in such a way so as to promote reconciliation between the perpetrators and the victims. However, it is not entirely impossible. There are a few stories with contents and narrative methods that go beyond the extreme mutual hostility and are not a part of the division narrative. They can be labelled a narrative conveying empathy, or a narrative seeking disclosure.

Some stories expose the gruesomeness of the war, some legitimize changing sides to survive and some try to embrace the realities of the war from an empathetic perspective.

## a) Memories of Sexual Violence

During the Korean War, I went through such an ordeal that I want to tell someone. I had always wanted to reveal this story while I'm still alive.

During the war, there were not that many American soldiers in our village. When they first came, there was an uproar that they would rape women. So about 30 women gathered and hid in a house. We stayed there and slept together at night. The American soldiers couldn't see any girls, so they would approach old men, poke them in the stomach and say, "Hand over the women."

That's what they did. (Interviewer: The Americans?) Yes, the Americans. In the beginning. After about 20 days of hiding, it became too stifling and tiresome, so we took the risk and went out into the village.

(ellipsis)

But the Americans came, and because they fought the war for us, we are able to develop and live well (A listener: Absolutely). We mustn't be unappreciative. (Laughter) Isn't that right? Oh my, it was so scary. All sorts of things happened then (Shin, Dong-hun et al. 2009a:421-423).

It is said that the most wretched victims of a war are women and children. Some may argue that because they do not participate in combat, their lives are less threatened. However, they are vulnerable, left in dangerous circumstance without any means to escape hunger and cold. Women face even more of a deplorable situation, with their biggest fear being the constant threat of sexual violence. The narrator of the above story is a woman originally from Masan, exposing sexual violence committed by American soldiers - a wartime experience that was the most frightening for her. She begins by showing her determination to unearth the truth and tell her story because she had witnessed so many things throughout her life. She does not depict any details and avoids direct testimony of any violence, merely saying that the young village women tried to hide from danger and risked their lives running away. However, the way she narrates the story is enough for the listener to catch what is not being said. The part about the soldiers threatening old men to hand over the women and the part where the women, tired of hiding,

went out into the field only to be caught by the Americans, then fighting back the men with their might all convey truths that are unsaid.

However, the ending of war experience tales of these women tend to be rather problematic. The woman had shown strong will to reveal the truth, though without detailed description of the violence, but in the end, the woman concludes that the Americans saved Koreans, so there is nothing anyone can do. It is possible to see the psychological restraint that too much criticism is inappropriate against the Americans, who are our saviors, underneath the determination to reveal wartime atrocities. The determination to reveal can be interpreted as a message of peace the inhumane act of a war should never happen again. However, it is unfortunate that in the process of becoming a discourse, the story could not develop into a stronger message. This narrative shows us that the determination to reveal in a war experience tale still faces limitations.

We couldn't go anywhere because of the rebels (guerrillas). (Ruffling her hair) We couldn't braid our hair and just left it messy. The rebels came down in the evenings so (touching her face) we would rub soot onto our faces to look ugly or sick. The rebels were most scared of contagious diseases, so we would let our hair down, rub soot on our faces and try to look sick.

[Interviewer: Did the rebels touch young women?] Oh, they went crazy over young women. If there was a house where a young woman lived, soldiers, the police, the rebels, everyone kept their eyes on that house. I was young then and looked okay. What would have happened if the men went crazy and took me? We were so scared that (rubbing her face) we would smear soot onto our faces to look strange and mess up our hair.<sup>6)</sup>

In recounts of war experience, fear of sexual violence did not come only from American soldiers. In the case of women near Mount Jiri, who had experienced the terror of the war for a long time, it is evident that they also felt threatened by the guerrillas based in the mountains as well as the military and the police

6) Narrated by Lee Gwi-Rye, Yonggang, Hwagae, Hadong, South Gyeongsang Province, 29th December 2008. Researched by Kim Jong-Kun et al.

out on counter-insurgency operations. Thus, the narrative contains a revealing message that a war forces normal humans to act like abnormal animals.

These unspeakable events remain as the biggest trauma for relevant women. If the women are able to bring those horrible traumas, inflicted while living through the war as the socially vulnerable, out into a discursive space, then the process may be able to play the role of a device that soothes the pain. In other words, although the oral representations that expose wartime atrocities may not be able to fully become an integration narrative, they may be able to form a discourse raising awareness that a war should never happen again, and this in itself can be healing.

## b) Revealing Looting by Both Sides

Many of the stories exposing atrocities of the war are about how, during the war, both the guerrillas and the counter-insurgency forces looted civilians. In a war, when normal life is impossible, getting food can only be a difficult task, and many testimonies verify that the fear of hunger was just as terrible as fear of bullets.

Oh, it was a very scary world then. Do you think we were able to eat? We somehow found two bowls of barley, and in the evening, hid them underneath the eaves of our roof. But we woke up in the morning and found it all gone. I think they watched us through binoculars. So at sunset, at about 5 o'clock, the guerrillas would come down in large numbers. I think they used to hide somewhere near the village and come in during the night. It was unbearable. We couldn't hide the food. Really. I am just thankful that we didn't all die then, that we all lived.

Anyway, in civilian villages in the mountains, (cupping her two hands) there were no small pots to store sauce. The soldiers came and broke them all, saying we were giving soy and other sauces to the rebels. So we didn't have anything. We had to go to the mountains, get some wood, sell them to get just enough to buy some salt, make salt soup and sprinkle it on top of the rice. (Pretending to eat) We just about survived.<sup>7)</sup>

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7) Narrated by Lee Gwi-Rye, Yonggang, Hwagae, Hadong, South Gyeongsang Province, 29th December 2008. Researched by Kim Jong-Kun et al.

In this story, heard nearby Mount Jiri, the narrator describes how during the war, the guerrillas and the counter-insurgency forces all looted civilians. The partisan guerrillas, referred to as the rebels, lived in hiding in the steep rocky mountains and came down every night to procure food that villagers had hidden. The military and the police, having relatively more food, set fire to the villagers' houses, destroyed property and threatened villagers to stop the guerrillas from getting what they needed.

In other words, a war, for combatants, is a tragedy in the sense they have to kill each other, but for civilians, it is even more of a tragedy because they are looted by both the ally and the enemy. In this war where 'during the daytime the military is the perpetrator and during the nighttime the communists', people cannot help but gain the perception that all are bad and evil. Naturally, one can question whether this kind of both-sides-are-bad narrative and the way it is told can be considered an integrative narrative. However, through discoursing this kind of 'both-sides-are-bad' oral narrative, it may be possible to highlight atrocities of a war and expand the awareness that wars should not be tolerated.

### c) Legitimizing One's Actions during the War

During the war, under communist occupation, people with socialist ideology, referred to as 'ground commies', rose to power and became perpetrators while security forces or civil servants and their family members were killed or harassed. After restoration, the opposite was true - the victims became the perpetrators and went on a full-fledged revenge whereas the former perpetrators - the 'ground commies' - were killed or forced to leave home and take refuge elsewhere. Perhaps it was inevitable that both sides faced such tragedy - they were either following their ideological belief or were privileged by the state. On the other hand, among civilians unrelated to ideology or public office, there were those who were oratorically talented or performed various tasks around the village, and they continued to work in the local community under both regimes. When the war ended, their position became awkward. Such stories appear frequently in oral recounts of war experience.

They romanticize their past actions as being ‘doubly loyal’, and confess that during communist occupation, some had even served as the ‘Chair of the Women’s League’. People with such experience narrate in a way that expresses feelings that ‘things just couldn’t be helped during those times but I didn’t do anyone harm’. They tend to be more resolute compared to those who narrate a division narrative in line with the political atmosphere of the time.

Student soldiers knew it and said,

“We’ve brought the honorable doubly loyal.”

That’s when I heard my being called a ‘doubly loyal’.

“Before the war, before the communists came, he was a person teaching the ignorant public through adult education programs. He was such as loyal person working for the public. But then, under communist occupation, he became a leader of the local communist organization. So he is loyal to North Korea and he is loyal to our nation. He is doubly loyal.”

They also said, “Was your life so precious?”

[Audience laughs] Those student soldiers forced me to the ground to beat me with clubs. There was another man being beaten, and I was next. Just as I was about to be dragged out, the door creaked open and our town chief came in, held my wrist and said,

“Comrade Cho.”

Then the town chief said to the student soldiers,

“This man didn’t get communist education because his ideology was wrong. He went because he was forcefully elected. Afterwards, he acted as a leader of the local organization but hid his second cousin, who was a South Korean police, in his home. He used to hand over important information and rescued him. You students should have found out the details first before arresting him, instead of just judging from outside appearance. Comrade Cho, let’s go (Shin, Dong-hun et al. 2009a:369-370).”

In this story, ‘doubly loyal’ was a criticism against the narrator by student soldiers who had arrested him. The narrator had been elected as an officer of the

local community organization during the communist occupation and received communist education. Then the village was taken back and he was arrested. However, in the process of narrating his story, he uses the term positively and without restraint to romanticize his wartime position and actions. The narrator, though old, is a talented storyteller who orally told his life story with a lot of narrative. When the war broke out, his second cousin, a police officer, had nowhere to hide. So he came to the narrator's house, and the narrator hid him beneath the flooring of his home. In the meantime, the Chair of the People's Committee summoned him and told him to participate in the education course for officers of the local community. The narrator had no choice but to consent and work as an officer. After the village was restored, he was arrested by some youths and was criticized as a 'doubly loyal' and was about to be killed. At that moment, the town chief, who knew everything, appeared to clarify the circumstances and the narrator was saved. The narrative was quite long but because he is such a good storyteller, the story is narrated in quite an exciting way.

This story contains another aspect of oral recounts of war experience - the fact that people who had well survived the war were able to avoid danger by fulfilling their moral obligations as humans, rather than be influenced by political systems or ideologies. Of course, there is always the possibility that the story could have been exaggerated in the process of the narrator trying to legitimize his actions, however, the narrative manifests the will to integrate. It guides the listeners on how one should maneuver oneself amidst a war that broke out at the height of ideological conflict and ambition, thereby devaluing the war. The story conveys the message that even amidst a war completely destroying humane lives, if a person fulfills one's moral obligation as a human then the person can survive. This kind of war experience tale can contribute to integration.

#### **d) Sympathetic Attitude toward Others**

In the previous discussion about characteristics of recounts of war experience, I had mentioned that there was a tendency for people to narrate from one particular side - predicting that under the regime of division, they would most likely show

hostility toward the People's Army or the guerrillas. However, in actual oral accounts, members of the People's Army were, in many cases, not seen with hostility but rather considered 'simple and honest', and many felt empathetic toward them. This kind of humanitarian empathy can be seen as a hint of integrative narrative.

Jeong Sun-Deok ran away into the mountains because she didn't want to be beaten up again. The police frequently called her in and beat her up, saying her husband was a guerrilla. Why did she go into the mountains? Because she was always abused, because her husband had gone to the mountains.

'I should just go into the mountains.'

That's why Jeong Sun-Deok went into Mount Jiri. The story was reported many times in the newspaper (Shin, Dong-hun et al. 2009c:284-285).

This is the story about Jeong Sun-Deok, who was arrested in 1963 and was the last remaining guerrilla. Her story is discussed even now amongst the public. It was big news that the last guerrilla was caught, made bigger by the fact that she was a woman, and even bigger by the fact that she had become a woman guerrilla after she went into the mountains looking for her husband. The narrator said she had read about the story in the *Busan Ilbo*, narrating the story with an empathetic tone toward Jeong, saying she had become a guerrilla because of the frequent harassment she received due to her husband being a guerrilla. It is true that it is a romantic story and that it stirred up emotions of the public when being reported in the headlines, however, the way the story is being circulated shows a possibility of overcoming the division narrative. It is also possible to witness that on the level of the state or in a broader sense, events such as a war and division instill hostility but that such a heart-warming story can also stimulate feelings of empathy.

In other words, the usual empathetic reactions toward messages conveyed by novels and movies<sup>8)</sup> dealing with tragedies of a war can also be stirred up through

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8) Kim Gi-Duk's 1965 film, 'South and North', is an example of such movie.



these kinds of narratives. Wouldn't it be possible, then, for division narrative to be replaced with integrative narrative, if stories with such sentiments can be found, discoursed and diffused throughout society?

The next story also shows hints of empathy towards the last guerrilla, Jeong Sun-Deok. It is particularly reconciliatory because the story is told by a local resident who had suffered under the guerrillas.

The innocent 16 year-old bride went into the mountains in search of her 17 year-old husband. Just 20 days after they finally met, the newly-wed groom was killed by the military. The young bride became angry and vengeful, and killed many civilians during her barbaric life as a guerrilla. She herself was shot and lost a leg. I heard she continues a hard life, being moved from prison to prison, with no relatives and no acquaintances, and surviving on her one leg. She was shot but captured alive when she was 30 years old. She's 68 now.

But it probably wasn't her choice to go into the mountains, see her husband killed and live 13 years as a hardhearted communist guerrilla. A 16 year old bride, just 6 months after being wed, goes into the mountains, finds her husband and manages to spend just 20 days with him... It's part of our sad history (Hwagae Myunji Compilation Committee, 2002, 196).

#### 4. Healing of Division Trauma through Integrative Narrative

In the previous section, I analyzed a few examples of stories and oral narrative methods that go beyond the division narrative. These stories and methods have significance as integrative narratives, but it is not yet certain whether they can heal the division trauma manifested by the narratives. Nevertheless, efforts to heal the division trauma and move toward recovery must continue, which is why I intend to propose an alternative example of an integrative narrative. By discoursing such integrative narrative, it may be possible to eliminate the division narrative that collectively binds the Korean society and guide the way toward unity and reconciliation. This process can be referred to as oral narrative healing.

A person orally narrating one's life story as part of his or her recount of war experience can access the division trauma within oneself, and if the person is able to recover from the trauma in the process, then it can be considered healing. However, it is not easy to completely heal the age-old scars just through an oral narrative. Thus, it is yet too early to conclude that oral narrative healing is effective in curing personal traumas. Rather, it is more appropriate in curing collective traumas. As mentioned repetitively, this kind of healing is possible through spreading the narrative throughout society.

Recounts of war experience, composed of highly probable events, can be found throughout the nation in various forms. Even if a story is not one's own but someone else's, a person can objectively view facts through 'stories one had heard' or 'stories one had seen'<sup>9)</sup>, and expose and criticize the realities and atrocities of a war. Stories with this kind of narrative need to be spread. The process is similar to how war is dealt in war literature.

"I heard everything."

"It's not your fault."

He said to his wife,

"This woman, she is my wife. She hasn't done anything wrong."

"My mother was generous, that's all."

That's what he said.

"My mother had good intentions. The problem is me. That's all there is to it. Everyone thought I was dead, but here I am, alive."

(ellipsis)

"I'm still young. I can always marry again, so don't worry about me. This woman's relationship with me is over. It's nobody's fault. It's the war. Nobody's to blame."

It was the war. Men didn't go off to fight because they wanted to. They had to go because the country was in a crisis. That's what he thought and said to his wife,

"Don't think about anything else. Just obey your present husband and live well."

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9) Such tales of experience are not based on one's own experience, so they are sometimes called secondary recounts of experience (Shin, Dong-hun, 1997).

That'll be doing a favor for me and mother.”

(ellipsis)

He then brought her home to his mother, and his mother, his wife and himself all held each other and cried and cried (Sin, Dong-hun et al. 2009b:150-157).

This is a story narrated by a talented storyteller from Cheongju, of an actual event during the war in the nearby town of Cheongwon. During the Korean War, there was a woman, with a son, who had been widowed young. The son married but didn't yet have children. He was then sent to fight and but went missing, so a letter that her son was missing in action was sent home. The mother looked back on her life as a young widow and decided to send her lonely daughter-in-law to remarry into a rich family in the neighboring village, despite her strong objection. With the ceasefire, the missing son came back, still carrying his weapon. He found his mother all alone but couldn't get himself to ask where his wife was. After a few days, he said he was going to visit his in-laws, and that was when the mother told her son everything. That night, the son wanted to see his wife and went to the neighboring village. When he got there, a shaman exorcist was performing a ritual amidst gathered villagers because the man his wife had remarried had fallen ill. The exorcist chanted that the ghost of her ex-husband who had died in battle was haunting her new husband, making him ill. The exorcist then said she would lock up and exorcise the ex-husband's spirit. The ex-husband was shocked but remained hiding behind a haystack in the yard and continued to watch the ritual. The wife, hearing that the exorcist intended to lock up the man's spirit, she started to plead, saying she couldn't allow her husband's spirit to be locked up in the dark. The exorcist ran to the haystack and pretended to catch the ghost, and the husband was so startled that he shot his rifle into the air and the gathering turned into a chaos. With everything out in the open, the new husband told the man to take his wife back, and the former husband said he couldn't possible do that. The wife, in tears, said she would do as her former husband wanted, and the villagers, watching the scene, also encouraged the former husband to take his wife back with him. The man then brought the woman back home and with his mother, the three of them held each other and cried endlessly.

Recounts of war experience are seldom as dramatic as this one, made all the more so by the excellent storytelling skills of the narrator. But similar circumstances frequently appear in other war experience tales. There are frequent stories of people testifying the strangeness of one's fate, whereby a woman, receiving an erroneous letter that her husband had died or was missing, would remarry, but then her husband would return alive. They are stories quite likely to happen. The narrator of this particular story uses this highly probable theme and conveys the tale as a narrative of reconciliation and integration. The mother-in-law who encouraged the young woman to remarry lest she should grow old as a widow, the daughter-in-law who refused to remarry under concern for the mother who would be left all alone, and the son who returned home after several years but did not pester his mother on whereabouts of his wife are characters who are all very gentle and humane. Even the process of resolving the conflict was done in a way that sought harmony. The wife begged the exorcist not to lock up in the dark the spirit of her husband who had died a pitiful death. The new husband asked the former husband, who had returned alive, for forgiveness and told him to take her back. The former husband resigned to his fate, saying everything was his fault. The villagers, watching the scene, also encouraged the former husband to take back his wife. All these characters make the story into a narrative of harmony, tolerance and integration. In the end, the narrator makes the final emphasis that everything was a tragedy due to a war and greedy political leaders, and that we should never forget the unknown soldiers who had unjustly died in the war.

Although the story was the experience of someone else, the narrator was able to make the story into a perfect narrative of integration through his ability as a storyteller and his narrative method. Such a story can very well become an alternative story in oral narrative healing. In a war, events quite like to happen tend to appear in certain patterns. If these events are orally conveyed in the form of narrative of integration as in the above example, then they may have huge effect in healing traumas resulting from a war. Furthermore, if these stories form a discourse, spread far and become accessible to many, then the division narrative can be replaced by a narrative that aims for integration.

## 5. Conclusion

There is no doubt that the Korean War, a tragic massacre of fellow countrymen, victimized everyone on the Peninsula and exerted negative influence on Koreans living around the world. Until now, the major way of approaching and researching recounts of war experience was focusing on the realities of the war, its victims and perpetrators. In the process, yet more hostility arose, further strengthening the divisionist consciousness.

Undoubtedly, revealing historical truths through oral recounts of war experience has led to certain achievements. However, if revealing historical truths is performed in a way in which people point their fingers at others as perpetrators while the narrator asserts him or herself to be a victim, then conflicts between the two Koreas as well as that among South Koreans will evidently continue. We should not forget that in oral recounts of war experience, even with regard to similar or same events, people tend to tell their stories strictly from their perspective in order to justify themselves. As long as the country remain divided, narrators will take on a certain political or ideological stance, based on which they will narrate their stories. As a result, recounts of war experience usually have the tendency to strengthen the division narrative.

However, in some cases, there are stories narrated in a way that promotes an integrative narrative for an event quite likely to happen and similar to other stories. I believe we must pay close attention to how these stories are narrated and how the narrator interprets the events. There is a coexistence between storytelling based on the narrative of division where the narrator points fingers and criticizes others even though him or herself had gone through inexplicably horrendous events of a war, and storytelling seeking to become a narrative of integration by objectifying all aspects of an event and narrating it based on feelings of empathy. Storytelling method seeking an integration narrative, exposing how tragic wars are and how they completely deny humanness, will contribute to healing division trauma. Oral narrative healing will become possible in the process of finding examples of such storytelling, diffusing them throughout society, and creating a space of discourse that is oriented toward an integrative narrative.

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