

Abstract for UNG's Annual Research Conference:

Oppressive Heroes and Submissive Victims: How Oppression is Perpetuated in Nora Okja Keller's *Comfort Woman* and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*

Nora Okja Keller's *Comfort Woman* (1998) and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) are two novels whose narrators experience the struggle of being a woman in a male-dominated society. *Comfort Woman* follows the story of a Korean girl, kidnapped and used as a sex slave (euphemistically called a "comfort woman") by and for Japanese soldiers during World War II. My paper focuses on how Akiko is subordinated not only as a Korean but also as a woman, how the American missionaries actually keep her subordinate, and how she later becomes independent. Similarly, in *The Handmaid's Tale*, a Handmaid named Offred is being used for sex to conceive a Commander's child. In both novels, the narrators are being used for sex and can be considered what postcolonial scholar Gayatri Spivak might call the "subaltern" in that they cannot speak for themselves. My presentation explores the ways in which the narrators and their peers are situated as subaltern, the ways in which their supposed aides, such as the missionaries and the Aunts, keep them within the realm of the subaltern, and the ways in which they are able to begin to escape that realm through the acquisition of voice.

Bio:

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