

Multi-Voiced Narrative as Political Resistance and Redefinition of Identity in Han Kang's Human Acts

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ABSTRACT

The core argument of this review is to show how the polyphonic narrative used in the novel *Human Acts* by Han Kang act as a tool of political resistance that criticizes the official narratives of the Gwangju Uprising of 1980. This narrative also helps to redefine the individual and collective identities that were formed due to the violence done by the state. Through fractured narratives, embodied suffering, and the burden of witnessing, the story brings silent voices back while revealing the moral and ideological boundaries of official historiography. This review shed light on how unmerged voices convert individual traumas into counter-memory, democratic testimonies, or resistive subjectivities through citations of trauma studies (Caruth, Herman, LaCapra), polyphonic narratives (Bakhtin), theories of resistance (Fanon, Gramsci), or identity studies (Hall, Bhabha). Besides, it also argues that literature itself becomes a political or ethical act with the potential to safeguard the integrity of human dignity, redefine history against the appropriation of a post-authoritarian state, or decode memory as resistance.

Keywords: Trauma narrative, Gwangju uprising, *Human Acts*, collective memory, state violence, polyphonic narration, post-authoritarian literature, South Korean literature.

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background Context

Han Kang's *Human Acts* (2014), is a very significant literary piece in contemporary South Korean literature, particularly in historical fiction, which is usually involved with exploring the traumatic past of the nation. Born in Gwangju in 1970, the author Han Kang taps not only personal memory, but also collective memories to shed light on what is probably one of the most horrible events in contemporary Korean history, the Gwangju Uprising of May 1980, even if her family had moved to Seoul just a few months earlier (Fiaz, Nawaz and Irfan, 97). The story also views the uprising through the lens of trauma as seen in personal accounts of suffering set against the backdrop of state violence and authoritarianism. Originally starting as a response to the military coup carried out by General Chun Doo-hwan in December 1979, the May 18 Democratization Movement, also known as the Gwangju Uprising, led to

the announcement of martial law throughout the country on May 17, 1980 (Lee, 22).

In Gwangju, the provincial capital in the southwest, the initial protests were from the students regarding the closure of universities, political activity restrictions, and restrictions on the freedom of the press (Bass, 17). However, when the paratroopers resorted to violence against the protests by beating and shooting the protesters, what initially began as a peaceful protest for democracy turned violent. The final military attack on the protestants on the 27th of May utilized tanks and helicopters in crushing the resistance after the civilians armed themselves and formed militias that momentarily freed the city (Lee, 22). The number of deaths, as recorded in official government reports, stood at 200, but estimates provided by eye-witness reports, survivors, as well as other independent sources, presented a reality of possibly 2,000 civilians killed, besides the thousands that were injured, tortured, or detained. The regime described

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the incident as a “riot” provoked by communists, exercising strict censorship by making Gwangju a black box in the media, banning books and discussions, without any perpetrators being held accountable (Ambrose, 7). This systematic erasure hindered the country's national mourning and encouraged anti-American sentiment due to the assumed U.S. tacit approval of Chun's actions for the sake of geopolitical stability.

Human Acts has become a paradigmatic example of resistance against such historical amnesia in Korean literature. In terms of structure, it presents a multivocal narrative from the perspectives not only of a middle school boy called Dong-ho, who dies in the violence, but also from those of his classmates, a prisoner, a factory worker, a mother, and even from the perspective of the author herself (Fiaz, Nawaz and Irfan, 98). Through this way Han humanizes the atrocity. The polyphony of the novel challenges monolithic official stories by revealing the physical and psychological damage of government repression while affirming human dignity in the midst of terror. In a literary context, it grows out of secret testimonials and memoirs which circulated underground during the era of dictatorship to become a complex text of memory about post-democratization Korea. In a political context, it participates in ongoing discourses about truth and reconciliation by reminding its audience of how South Korea's evolution towards a democracy and its struggle in the June Democratic Struggle of 1987 was triggered by the Gwangju uprising.

As a voice and in empathy with the dehumanized, Han's relentless depiction of decayed corpses, survivor's guilt, and intergenerational trauma reframes the understanding of state violence on a different moral plane. Her writing calls also for responsibility for those who were perpetrators. *Human Acts* turns historical fiction into a moral act of witnessing by fighting the impulse to sensationalize and choosing poetic restraint. In addition to honoring the oppressed voices, it changes viewpoints on the consequences of authoritarian systems, thereby substantially adding to the global discussions on trauma, resistance, and the fragility of humans in the face of power.

1.2 Research Aim and Objectives

The aim of this study is to explore how the multi-voiced narrative used by Han Kang in *Human Acts* works as a means of identity redefinition and political resistance by actively criticising state violence and official narratives

and redefining collective and personal identities in the wake of the Gwangju Uprising. The objectives are:

- To study Han Kang's usage of multi-perspective storytelling in *Human Acts* and examine how it challenges official accounts of the Gwangju Uprising and exposes state violence via the fragmented testimonies of the victims.
- To investigate how intertwined voices help to transform personal suffering into group defiance and instill dignity in oppressive circumstances.
- To examine how polyphonic structures retain repressed memories to facilitate defiance of the political systems and assertion of identity by survivors and their descendants.

To examine the ethical work of the novel concerning the reconstruction of history where varied stories contest the authoritarian attempt for erasure.

1.3 Significance and Scope of the Study

The relevance and importance of this research appear in its timely contribution to the realm of trauma studies, memory studies, and post-authoritarian historiography in the broader South Korean democratization context. Han Kang's *Human Acts* demonstrates an audacious literary work in its attempt to reclaim the subverted historical narrative related to Gwangju Uprising. It offers a multi-voiced challenge to years of state-imposed silence and distortion. Through close analysis of how polyphonic narratives translate personal suffering into collective resistance, this research illuminates literature's role in preserving human dignity and promoting political resistance in the wake of atrocity.

At the same time, it also illustrates the potency of multi-voiced defiance as a trigger for resistance and identity recovery on a global scale, marking the importance of this novel within the contemporary context of international tensions such as authoritarian trends, repression of protests, digital censorship, or disputed memory politics in different societies. Such a transnational resonance points to the universal power of polyphonic narratives to resist oppressive structures of power and to foster communal solidarity not only in South Korea but also in other continents such as India where emergency rule, state censorship and protest crackdowns have always challenged resistance literature. It also contributes to the ongoing academic efforts made to make sense of how fiction bears the potential of counter-memory in relation to how histories have been

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erased and how national identity is rewritten in light of remaining authoritarian practices. Moreover, this study also bears in mind the ethical role of multiple narratives as a witness to the unspeakable violence, whose insight extends beyond Korea into global discourses on reconciliation and historical justice.

The scope of this study is limited to a narrative analysis that encompasses form, voice, temporality, and focalization and not around attempting to substantiate facts about the Gwangju Uprising through historical data. No comparative study is done to compare the chosen work with other contemporary authors or novels. It interprets this novel in relation to those concepts that have particular significance in trauma and memory theory to explore how narrative strategies mediate the transitional process from individual suffering to collective historical consciousness.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Gwangju Uprising in Literary and Cultural Memory

The Gwangju Uprising of May 1980 remains one of the shaping forces in the South Korean cultural memory, symbolizing an act of resistance against authoritarianism and thus the push for democratization (Lombogia, 3). This uprising, which was kept under wraps for decades under military rule and later renounced as a result of communistic instigation with the term "riot," found initial expression through illicit memoirs and eyewitness accounts which circulated underground. *Kwangju Diary: Beyond Death, Beyond the Darkness of the Age* (1985) which was edited by Lee Jae-eui and others using pseudonyms and later republished as *Gwangju Uprising: The Rebellion for Democracy in South Korea* (2022) with an introduction from Hwang Sok-yong is an example of these. This compilation of memories presents an alternative narrative to that of the state's propaganda and describes the civilian militias, repression and community-based mutual support that arose during the uprising (Jung, 5).

Moreover, memoirs such as *Called by Another Name: A Memoir of the Gwangju Uprising* written by David Lee Dolinger in 2022 also provide the reader with unique personal perspectives regarding the Gwangju incident. It is made clear through these memoirs how the international community was unconcerned with the tragedy. The silence on this issue has been broken, and awareness about it has been raised to a great extent with the help of documentaries. Films like *A Taxi Driver*

(2017), narrating the story of the protagonist in Gwangju, were made possible because of the efforts of journalist Jürgen Hinzpeter, who managed to smuggle footage of the incidents and broadcasted them all over the world to demonstrate its brutality (Shim, 457). Public reckonings that have impacted the process of truth commissions and re-investigations under progressive regimes has been assisted by independent documentaries since the late 1980s, along with UNESCO-recognized archives (inscribed 2011).

The literary fiction narrative addressing amnesia included the uprising as a common trope. *The Old Garden*, which was written in 2009 by Hwang Sok-yong, combines individual stories with political turmoil, while some earlier texts, like *There a Petal Silently Falls* (1992), by Choe Yun, explore fragmented trauma. As a strategy to achieve the collective indictment of state violence, Han Kang's *Human Acts* (2014) claims a bold presence through the use of polyphonic storytelling, which links personal narratives, victims, survivors, and even the deceased (Oh, 36). Han's novel breaks away from previous stories that had concentrated too much on victimization or narratives of heroism, it prefers to focus on the themes of bodily horror, survivor guilt, and intergenerational trauma, thus, denying closure and highlighting ongoing struggles over memory. The cultural impact can also be seen in music and films, with blockbuster movies such as *1987: When the Day Comes* (2017), *May 18* (2007), and *Peppermint Candy* (1999) (Kim, 102). The origins of democratization to the uprising are traced in these movies, progressing from sorrow to hopeful heroism. Songs such as "March for the Beloved" were turned into anthems, which were both challenged within conservative interpretations, and reified in commemorations.

2.2 Studies on Trauma Narratives in Contemporary Korean Literature

Modern Korean literature has created a significant subgenre of trauma stories that try to deal with the history of conflict, dictatorship, and modernization in Korean society from the viewpoint of political violence, censorship, and memory suppression. The writings pertaining to the Korean War, the Yushin and Chun regime, or the Gwangju Uprisings investigate how state power produces silences, fragmented subjectivities, and intergenerational trauma which cannot be easily represented (Kwon, 19). These writings often register trauma as a disturbance of both personal consciousness

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and collective historical narrative by means of fractured structures, changing focalization, and temporal dislocation. Hence, trauma theory has become a major interpretative framework in this area. The repetition, gaps, and discomfiting imagery in the novels of Korea are expressed by critics as the formal indicators of experiences that cannot be completely "known" or caught within a linear history. As stated by Cathy Caruth's argument about trauma being an unassimilated event that returns at a later time while resisting direct narration (DOUAKHA, 7), this aspect resonates with this perspective.

The clarity provided by Judith Herman's work, which identifies phases of trauma, safety, remembrance, and reconnection, has also exerted an impact on the study of stories of survivors who transform from dissociation and silence to creating testimony, establishing solidarity, and criticizing politically (Wilson, 16-17). Dominick LaCapra's distinction between "acting out" and "working through" is also employed in the differentiation between those texts which can engage the past in a critical and ethical way and those which compulsively repeat the scenes of violence (Shahzad and Hussain, 155). *Human Acts* is gradually being interpreted as one of the exemplary works of this trauma fiction in the Korean setting. Analysis of this work underlines the way this book's polyphonic narrative structure, second-person narration, and frequent retracing of the massacre stage constitute Gwangju as a wound continually opened and left raw in the national psyche, as exemplified in Caruth's belatedness and repetitive, symptomatic recall. Nonetheless, the novel's emphasis on the need of witnessing, the performance of communal rites for the departed, and the transformation of personal tragedy into a collective memory fits Herman's and LaCapra's theories of processing trauma in a way that is expressly political rather than merely therapeutic.

2.3 Multi-Voiced and Polyphonic Narratives

One powerful literary tool used in the presentation of fractured histories is the technique of multi-voiced storytelling, particularly in trauma narratives where the linear narrative mode is often inadequate in capturing the recurrent, fragmented, and elusive nature of traumatic experience (Immler, 4). As per academics, this type of fragmentation enables the coexistence of different perspectives side by side without hierarchy or closure, to embody the psychic disruption caused by violence (Patel, 17). By representing history as a place of contestation

among different voices, memories, and silences, this technique undermines monolithic interpretations of historical events. The concept of dialogism and polyphony, which was introduced in Bakhtin's work *The Dialogic Imagination* in 1981 and further developed in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, is also important in the light of the present analysis. Bakhtin describes the concept of polyphony as "a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses," where the characters possess entirely valid and independent perspectives that engage in true dialogue in opposition to serving an authorial monologue (Ramazonovna, 535). This multiplicity depends on heteroglossia, or the stratification of language into social, ideological, and historical discourses that enable texts to capture the diversity and ideological conflicts in human experience (Sharma, 7677). Giving a voice to victims, survivors, offenders, and even the dead with equal weight in trauma literature, polyphony challenges cohesive historical narratives that are imposed by power structures and expands perspectives.

Through the consideration of witnessing as something that occurs between speaker and listener, that goes beyond simple fact-telling, the work of Shoshana Felman on testimony can take this position to an even deeper level. As Felman argues, testimony often occurs along the edges of language, staging crises of address, silence, and repetition that point to the necessity for and impossibility of fully expressing trauma (Lebedeva, 7). These observations support the readings of multi-voiced stories as a collection of testimonies in which the ethical power lies in their mutual dissonance and incompleteness when paired with Bakhtinian polyphony. Polyphony in modern trauma fiction is a deliberate literary technique employed in a way that refutes authoritarian amnesia and promotes the democratization of memory. Trauma fiction featuring multiple narrative voices is employed in works about collective atrocities in order to integrate individual pain with communal archives, emphasizing how trauma disrupts language, identity, and time. For example, studies on *Human Acts* by Han Kang have revealed the ways in which the shifting narrators and testimonial modes form a litany of wounded bodies and haunted voices which subvert both the discourse on singular victimhood as well as the state-sanctioned closure.

2.4 Research Gap

Though the existing literature has meticulously examined the events of the Gwangju Uprising through biographies,

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historical narratives, and visual media, as well as the trauma narratives and the technique of polyphony individually, little emphasis has been given to the relationship between multi-voiced narration and the process of converting personal trauma to collective memory which gives rise to political resistance in *Human Acts*. Rather, many studies tend to focus either on the historical representation approach or trauma studies without delving deep into the way the pluralistic approach of the narrative translates as a mediating process between personal suffering and communal memory and resistance. This leads to a gap in the consideration of how the polyphonic approach influences cultural memory, ethical witnessing, and political resistance instead of just representing trauma.

3.0 Theoretical Framework

This study employs the use of three interrelated theoretical approaches to offer an analysis of Han Kang's *Human Acts* in the form of a multi-voiced intervention in the aftermath of the Gwangju Uprising. The primary theoretical approach employed in this review is the polyphonic narrative theory developed by Mikhail Bakhtin (Seidel, 40). Heteroglossia, a dynamic interaction of varied languages and ideologies, is the result of polyphony, which Bakhtin sees as the presence of a plurality of autonomous, unmerged voices and consciousnesses. This structure in the novel resists monolithic, state-sanctioned truths and enacts a kind of democratic testimony which refuses narrative totalization by allowing alternative perspectives from victims, survivors, a dead body, and the author to coexist without subordination. Second, literature is conceived as a counter-hegemonic practice. In this regard, the political resistance theory follows Antonio Gramsci and Frantz Fanon's ideology. While the criterion of counter-hegemony is described by Gramsci as a struggle to cultivate alternative worldviews in opposition to dominant ideologies (Sardar, 1), Fanon sees cultural production as a vital element in the process of decolonizing minds and recovering agency from repressive regimes (Nielsen, 366). In *Human Acts*, polyphony is an insurrectionary memory that turns repressed testimonies into deeds of political resistance and subverts authoritarian erasure. Third, subjectivity is understood to be fluid, relational, and constructed within the histories of violence and displacement by identity theory, informed by the work of Stuart Hall and Homi K. Bhabha. Rather than considering it as an individual

wound, trauma becomes the site where competing, hybrid identities are negotiated (Bhandari, 83). By synthesizing these theories, the analysis identifies the function of polyphony in the interaction of identity formation and political resistance, where various voices link individual suffering to collective, opposing subjectivities resisting historical erasure and state violence.

4.0 Discussion

4.1 Fragmented Voices and Narrative Polyphony

Han Kang's *Human Acts*' narrative format is drastically changing, with each chapter told in a different voice: a middle-school boy called Dong-ho; his mourning friend Jeong-dae (whose soul dwells in the corpse); a factory worker named Eun-sook; editor Seon-ju; a prisoner; a mother; and at last, in 2013, the author herself. Such a calculated fragmentation aligns with the fragmented nature of the trauma itself. Violence tears apart collective memory, linear time, and unified identity, leaving behind only pieces which are challenging to put together. By way of polyphony, Han gives each narrator complete autonomy, enabling the subjugated voices to speak without mediation or resolution. In this regard, for example, the chapter on the corpse offers a raw monologue from the point of view of the dead, which is impossible but also a necessary testimony which traditional historiography excludes. At the same time, the second-person narrations of Dong-ho position readers within the immediacy of terror, whereas Seon-ju's reflections lay bare the long-term censorship and self-censorship that have left survivors voiceless. These non-integrated voices, from a Bakhtinian perspective, create heteroglossia, a collision of social languages and ideologies, which resists the authoritative singular history imposed by the military regime.

4.2 Personal Trauma, the Burden of Witnessing, and Reshaping of Identities

In *Human Acts*, a personalized experience of trauma has been expressed through an intimate and inarticulable burden faced by each of the narrative voices. Trauma, which has been fleshed out through focalization on a survivors' narrative, like the detained activist, the factory worker, or the censored editor, has been characterized through insomnia, dissociation, bodily pain, and a pervasive feeling of survivor guilt, emphasizing how the presence of state violence continues to haunt everyday gestures, silences, and relationships long after the massacre (Finck, 10). These personal experiences of

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trauma are not just personal suffering for the characters; they also act as politically charged forms of witnessing that help in revealing the continuing aftermath of the oppression by authoritarian regimes.

Words have been circling around the unspoken instances. The novel emphasizes that trauma goes beyond the capacity of common language by frequently portraying unspeakable moments instead of directly describing them. Eun-sook's story reveals that she suffers from survivor guilt. She experiences survivor's remorse due to the trauma of leaving her friends to die during the uprising, and she wonders why she is the only one who survived. By condemning survival, she implicitly questions the political system's moral authority which, through its oppressive nature, allows for the selective survival of its people. Seen through her self-censorship, insomnia, and unrelenting sense of complicity in upholding the regime's erasure of truth, the editor Seon-ju is shown to suffer from mental trauma brought on by the uprising that persisted for years. These characters' recollections are turned into physical reactions like nausea, trembling, phantom pain, rather than being shown as coherent tales; their experiences cannot be told since this transcends ordinary language's reach (Tan, 73). In its dramatization of the struggle to say the unsayable, *Human Acts* is a novel that portrays testimony not as a cathartic release, but as a painful, ongoing labor, one that keeps faith with the dead while exposing witnesses to the possibility of renewed psychic injury. This representation resonates with the current situations prevailing in the world today, for instance, the protests taking place in various regions for resistance against state oppression, where collective resistance movements are sustained by traumatic stories of individuals. For instance, stories about detention in the emergency era in India and the guilt that stems from surviving reflect similar witnessing burdens, focusing more on how these individual struggles impact the redefinition of national identities in contemporary situations pertaining to political disputes and authoritarian legacies.

4.3 Politics of Remembrance and Collective Memory

In *Human Acts*, Han Kang transforms isolated personal narratives into powerful forms of collective evidence while enacting what Gramsci describes as counter-hegemonic practice. Through the gathering of scattered testimonies, Dong-ho's death, Eun-sook's guilt, Seon-ju's censored memories, and the mother's long-lasting grief, this novel gets to develop an alternative archive

which goes up against the military régime's official version of a communist riot. This polyphonic montage now acts as an insurrectionary memory, resisting the erasure imposed by the state and recovering the uprising as a legitimate struggle for democracy. Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia is, therefore, absolutely essential in that it allows the unmerged voices form a dialogic conflict of viewpoints, which prevents any single narrative from ever becoming dominant. The insertion of the corpse's monologue as well as the torturer's hesitant reflection lends further instability to authoritative history (Fiaz, Nawaz and Irfan, 105). It reveals the ideological repression and forces readers to face suppressed truths. Personal suffering, through this multiplicity, takes the form of communal testimony, a living counter-memory that resists forgetting. Drawing on Fanon, the book performs the decolonizing act of remembrance that releases the mind from ideological rhetoric and gives the oppressed their agency back.

The last chapter of the book has the author herself as a witness and successor, spanning the personal and collective spheres so that the voices of the deceased of Gwangju still can be heard via the bodies of the living. Strong parallels may be found between this dynamic of memory as resistance and the complex world we live in today, where authoritarian regimes and democratic regression keep down protest movements and change history. For instance, in India, there has been a legacy of resistance literature of the 1975-1977 Emergency years, where censorship and forced sterilizations took away all dissent (Subramanian, 74). This is in alignment with Han Kang's works, as contemporary writers and activists make use of polyphonic testimonies to recoup narratives about state violence in events like the 2019-2020 citizenship protests, showing how collective memory becomes a site of continuing political struggle and affirmation of identity.

4.4 The Body as Archive and Ethical Site of Memory

Han Kang, in *Human Acts*, establishes the body as an archive and an ethical space of memory, through which the suffering body serves as the definitive repository for truth. The rotting corpse in Jeong-dae's chapter testifies through its decomposing flesh, maggots, and smell, which are beyond the verbal expression of violence. This bodily engagement is echoed in Hall's (1990) concept of identity articulated through material difference because the body, in its mutilated form, defies erasure, anchoring memory in the tangible rather than the abstract. Tortured

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bodies, Dong-ho's bullet-ridden body, Eun-sook's trembling hands, and the mother's sadness are living counter-hegemonic evidence, carrying out Fanon's call to embody resistance against oppressive rhetoric. As unmerged voices speak of physical pain across time, forming heteroglossia that challenges state-imposed sanitization, polyphony grows this archive. It is through these bodily expressions that Han turns suffering and grief into literary tools that recreate memory ethically, positing that truth exists in the flesh itself, thus, forcing readers to confront the material cost of historical oppression and affirm human dignity in the face of annihilation.

4.5 Intersections of Individual and Communal Trauma and Political Resistance

Human Acts demonstrates relentlessly that individual trauma is never just personal but is inextricably linked to the greater wound of the nation. Dong-ho's death, the torture of the factory girl, and the bereavement of the mother are related as singular experiences. Still, each has a strong relationship to both the Gwangju Uprising and the general situation of authoritarian violence in South Korea. The way the book's structure starts with a boy's dead body and proceeds on to survivors and family members before finally ending with commemorative voices, shows how personal memories infiltrate public discourse, vigils, and mourning rituals. This evolution reflects global trends whereby it is observed that personal accounts of state brutality, whether in South Korea's past or in today's protest movements, serve to drive collective identity and prolonged resistance.

This interconnectedness corresponds to a fluid identity model proposed by Hall (1990), in which personal trauma is expressed in terms of communal difference, as well as a model of hybridity advanced by Bhabha (1994), where the uprising becomes a site of ambivalent, shared subjectivity. Polyphonic narrative theory helps to elucidate this relationship, since instead of canceling one another, multiple voices converge into a heteroglossic narrative about a shared event, in which every testimony is at once "mine" and "ours". Trauma and identity theory also proposes that as characters speak about their own psychic and bodily wounds, they also help to form a collective subject marked by loss but still oriented toward justice and remembrance. Thus, individual memory becomes a very significant medium for collective healing, not by eradicating pain but by realizing it as vital to a more ethically conscious national community.

5.0 Conclusion

5.1 Summary of Findings

This review establishes that the polyphonic way of storytelling in *Human Acts* makes it easy for the transformation of personal suffering into a collective memory regarding the Gwangju Uprising by focusing on fractured voices, bodily experience, and the weight of witnessing as oppositions towards authoritarian history. More importantly, the findings clearly indicate that the method of storytelling in *Human Acts* has deliberately sought to oppose state violence and disrupt formally recognized versions of history, hence playing a visible role of offering political resistance. Bakhtinian dialogism, trauma theory, and ideas on political resistance and identity all help this work to make a case about how its polyphonic character works as a form of democratic testimony and counter-memory, transforming personal wounds into communal evidence and resistant subjectivities. The study further highlights that the novel reshapes identity, not as a static national form, but rather as an ethically imbued and shared practice created through remembrance, dissent, and refusals of forgetting. The findings emphasize that Han Kang's interlaced voices do more than hold onto memories otherwise silenced and attest to dignity, but perform a living ethical and political act of history, rewriting and reclaiming agency and developing collective solidarity. These dynamics are no less vital today in contemporary global struggles against authoritarianism and suppression of memory.

5.2 Implications and Significance

These results show that literary form is critical for how historical terror is recalled and challenged, suggesting that polyphony and embodied testimony are political and moral means for re-opening silenced narratives rather than just literary strategies. The research's significance for literary studies is that it reveals how post-authoritarian memory cultures can employ narrative strategies to reframe state violence. The study also offers a framework for examining other trauma works in and beyond Korea. Particularly in light of present global politics rife with repressive governments and politicized memories, such a framework offers a useful point of view to examine how literature serves as a site for ethical witnessing and political resistance against different socio-political systems.

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5.3 Suggestions for Further Research

Future studies could compare Human Acts to other global polyphonic narratives about trauma, investigate gendered and indigenous aspects of embodied trauma experiences in Han Kang's work, and look at reception and translation, to explore how Gwangju's memory circulates transnationally through literature.

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