

‘Wrighting and Archiving’: Lessons Learned by a Survivor of Rape by a ‘Holy’  
Monk

Manee Khunphakdee  
Thammasat University, Thailand

Corresponding email: mjmanee@hotmail.com

Abstract

*“It only remained for me to give it voice, to shared it for use, that the pain not be wasted.”  
(Lorde,1997,p.14)*

As a Women’s NGO worker and recently a student in the MA program of Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies, I’d like to share the story of Oy, a girl who had been raped by a ‘holy’ monk for many years. The process of finding her own language, standing up and speaking out was not an easy process as there were many layers of unequal power between the girl and the man, an ordinary person and monk. In particular, for the latter, he had performed and was perceived as a ‘holy body’ who not only gave fortune to the villagers but also saved them from bad luck and illness through many different techniques. The girl started her story by writing petitions to the Religion Administrative Unit at both the district and provincial levels. Instead, the monk was protected by his institution. Finally, she brought her case to court along with her archive. My study of her writings and archiving process will be shared and discussed within the framework of feminist writing elaborated by Lorde and Trinh Minh Ha, respectively.

*Keywords: rape, women writing, archive, survivor*

1. Introduction

After graduation, I have worked in several Women’s NGO for over 15 years, however, I have learned that I have known very little about the theory and concept of mentally and legally giving support to battered women and feminism. Mostly what I know is about the practice of day to day routine work of physically raped cases.

The turning point which critically changed my viewpoints took place when I enrolled in the 2015 Summer School in Women’s Gender and Sexuality Studies at Thammasat University, Bangkok. This free of charge five weekend program (54 hrs during 27 June - 3 Aug, 2016) covers 3 mains subjects : Introduction to Women’s Studies, Feminist Research Method and Introduction to Queer Studies.

**3rd KANITA POSTGRADUATE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON  
GENDER STUDIES**

16 – 17 November 2016  
Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang

Personally, professionally and politically, I feel very lucky to have a chance to participate in such the prestige and radical feminist institution. After the school was over, I had no hesitation to apply to the Master Program in Women's Gender and Sexuality Studies (WGPPS). During the past two semester of 2015 (and 2016), I have furnished myself with numerous critical feminist perspectives. Our classroom is the ideal place where I could discuss and share my experience from my work and get variety of inspiring questions and feedback. Additionally, what I have learned the most is the research tools and methodology which places its focus on theoring women's experience into knowledge.

Surprisingly, during the past 15 years of working with many Women's NGO, I have never come across the concept and practice of "archiving". It was not until I come to Summer School and then the elective course entitled, "Women's History and Feminist Analysis" Such the theory and practice of "feminism and archives studies" has brought me to the new understanding of not only myself but also my society (and its history) in depth and breath. In the exercise which I was assigned to conduct "My Own Archives Project" allow me to trace back to my childhood time .Through searching for paper dolls, toys crafts , cross-stitch and etc. and putting it all together, I amazingly found that the process of how shaping me to be a woman as I am nowadays through those artifact. Such the lesson learned inspired me to utilized this lens to study the recent raped case survivor by the holy monk. She has kept her own "archives" through the long year of seeking for justice.

Politically and culturally, monks earn highly respect of holiness in Thai Society. However, the records show that many monks take advantage of their respectful status and use it to cheat the commoners in particular women. Oy was one among the many. However what is different is she stands up and fights and keeps her own archives efficiently.

## 2. Methodology

I use feminist epistemology which focus on women's experience and build up the knowledge through women's writings or oral storytelling which reflect the truth about women and their agency. This method is to reveal women's voices and thoughts through the stories women told or being interviewed or write to see how women are taught and framed in different discourses.

This research employs Feminist Methodology to study about women's life where woman is the subject of the study. (Harding,2004). This feminist method consists of reading women's writings, their testimonies and complaint letters which are the battleground they chose to counter with the monks who sexually assaulted them. These documents were analyzed in the way to reflecting their standpoint voicing out to retaliate against the men's power and monk's sacred power and also construct the knowledge from women writing and storytellings which reveals women's oppression and subordination in power relationship between men and women.

The imbalance power relation causes the abuse of power from the superior to the inferior. For examples : man's power, physical strength, economic power and cultural power.

### 3. Findings

I have never thought of archives and the construction of knowledge in feminist perspectives in the area of violence against women (vaw) until I met "Oy". In the case preparation day with the lawyer before going to the court. I saw a document of her about 100 pages. In the document there are her testimony as well as her parents and her brother's, her father's complaint, photos taken by monk as a threat, and amulets flyers. There are complaint letter to ecclesiastical sub district head, complaint letter to ecclesiastical district officer, complaint letter to ecclesiastical provincial governor, and complaint letter to Buddhist Institution, requesting an investigation on the monk's abusive behavior which is extremely against the code of monastic disciplines in term of raping boys and girls under age of 15.

The monk who is found guilty was very well respected by survivor's parents. He is a head of a monastery. He has many stories of miracles about himself. He told survivor's parents that he and their 11 year old son has very well bonded destiny. He promised the family to take care of the child and give him a scholarship to study. The parents want their child to succeed in life, they allowed their son to live with the monk. After being in the monastery for 3 days, the child was sexual harassed by the monk. He touched the child's genital and did oral sex. The next day, the child was anal raped. Sometimes the monk forced the survivor to anal intercourse him or perform an oral sex. The survivor has been abused since he was 11 years old until he was 19 years old.

The monk claimed that the daughter of a family was unfortunate. There had to be a ritual to lift up the spirit in the monk's house. With the family's belief, they let the daughter alone to participate the ritual in the monk's house while they were waiting around the temple. When she arrived the room, the monk gave her a drink, after that she was sleepy and eventually went unconscious. When she woke up, she felt the pain in her genital and felt that her uniform skirt was lifted. After the monk had an orgasm, he told the survivor to get dress and told her that he didn't rape her, he was processed by a higher spirit and claimed that he used to be her husband in the past life.

Oy had been raped from 14 years old to 20 years old. After the first rape, the monk threat her not to tell anyone with the photo he taked. Oy didn't tell anyone and tried not to go to the temple. Her parents blamed and beat her for being a bad child, not going to the temple with the family, only hanging around, so she went to the temple with them and was raped. The monk requested the parents that he needed Oy to help her brother at the monk's house. When Oy arrived at the house, her brother wasn't there, only Oy and the monk. Seeing how her parents has such faith in the monk, she was afraid of telling them. She was sad and mad at her parents for letting her being raped for a long period of time.

Oy's testimony *"On that night I was so frighten and terrified. I went to take a shower once I arrived home and found that I was bleeding and felt a sharp pain. I tried to sleep but it was very difficult. After a week, The monk called my mother and said Luang Pu )venerable father (wanted to see me and call me to see him at his place on the day time. I rejected and told my parents that I didn't want to go and I went out to see my friend instead. They were so angry and my father was about to hit me. He said "I told you to go and pay respect to the monk you don't want to go, but you prefer to go out with your friend. I want to shoot you death, you vicious!"*

When Oy's brother saw a photo that the monk had kept in his computer, he recognized her mark on her leg and knew by sudden that it was his sister. He left the temple and talked to his sister. He found that his sister was also raped by the same monk. When the parents knew the truth, they were feeling guilty for what happened and blamed themselves for pushing their children into the situation. The family sued in a court for justice but they were resist by the monk and his disciples in the province claiming that the family cheated temple money so and made up a story to slander the monk.

**3rd KANITA POSTGRADUATE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON  
GENDER STUDIES**

16 – 17 November 2016  
Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang

After knowing the truth, the father consulted his leader at work for the procedure. The leader advised that he should report to police and sue for justice. He also was advised by godmother of the children that he should sue. After he reported the police, the case went silent, nothing was proceeded. I have read the complaint letter to ecclesiastical sub district head requesting for justice. The sub district head tried to investigate but the monk refused to participate. The case was sent to ecclesiastical district officer but there was no action upon the case until the family sent the letter again. The ecclesiastical district officer requested 15 days to draft a charge, after 15 days there were no contact and answer from the district officer. The father draft a letter to request an investigation and the case track from provincial Buddhist Institute.

After being complained, the monk went to ask for justice from the provincial governor, claiming that he has lost his 33 years of reputation which was against his monk identity card that said 7 years.

*“I have not done anything wrong as accused. I want to defend this case with the truth and justice. I only want to truth to be revealed. I am in a monkhood and to fight a lawsuit with a lay person will only do harm to sangha and myself. But I need to do this anyway to protect the prestige of Buddhism.” (some part of his complaint letter to the provincial governor.)*

During the process of the case, there were police officers came to the house and threat the family to cancel the case within 15 days, or else they will not guarantee the family’s security. There was a threat at the University also for the family to cancel the case, or there will be a kidnap. The father decided to move his family away. They had to move frequently that time.

The investigation outcome has been distorted for the monk. The investigation procedure wasn’t proceed correctly. The process was biased, there was a lawyer in the investigation room while he was not a stakeholder. They were not allowed to take any photo but the lawyer was allowed to take notes and record the investigation. The lawyer also could request any document from the committee. The survivor’s family believed that some committees had involved in this unfairness. Therefore, survivor objected the process and requested for a new investigation.

Moreover, the monk disobeyed the order from the ecclesiastical district officer. He still working and proceed the ritual against the pause order without fear.

Oy and her family consulted the case process with my organization due to the rejection from the police. My organization assigned a lawyer to prosecute the case. I met Oy and her family in the preparation day before court day. The preparation day was set up to prepare Oy's confidence for answering questions in the court. I read the archive that related to the case. It took almost 3 years until the court could judge a case. The process was delayed, due to the transition of the officers who changed their position in work and the officers had many cases in their responsibility. Eventually Oy's brother case sentenced to 12 years imprisonment. Oy's case was sentenced to 198 years of imprisonment but according to Thai law the maximum imprisonment period is 50 years, the monk was sentenced to 50 years imprisonment.

#### 4. Analysis and Conclusion

If I don't have the concept and idea of "archives" from feminist perspectives, I would have just read for case facts and forget about it. I don't think that it is the transition of woman experience. Women's Studies helps me understand and see the importance of bringing experience as a center of knowledge that leads to feminism epistemology. As a women's written stories, testimony and complaints. I see how religious institution uses their power to protect criminal monks and using silence to cover rape problem in society.

In this study I am presenting as the "insider" officer who has the opportunity to listen to women's voice, reading their testimonies and complaints and also witness in her battleground in retaliate against power.

Women's writing construct the knowledge and reveal the standpoint where woman is subject. When I read Oy's writings, I saw the women's fighting methods which reveals the hierarchical power in her family.

Writing is telling the truth. "giving yourself to writing mean being in a position to do this digging of unburying. (Hélène Cixous,p.7) Women's voice also reflect the truth of the imbalance of power between monk and women, and how the patriarch monk's impunity are protected by the buddhist institution supported by patriarchal system.

*"Afterwards, The monk called me on the phone..... He was speaking filthy and told me to go to see him, I rejected and hang up. After a while, he sent me the photos of me naked which he took photograph secretly on the day he raped me. The photo show my face and my naked lower part*

3rd KANITA POSTGRADUATE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON  
GENDER STUDIES

16 – 17 November 2016  
Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang

*of the body. I was very shocked. Immediately he called again and told me to see him right away otherwise he will disgrace me by showing the photo to public.”*

In “Women, Native, Other, Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism” (Trinh T Minh-ha,1989), women’s writings were comparable to an open political battleground and a tool for crafting women’s own knowledge. This is because everytime women remain in silence their voices are always taken away from them.

*“It only remained for me to give it voice, to shared it for use, that the pain not be wasted. Lorde says in The Cancer Journals: Special Edition “Tell them about how you’re never really a whole person if you remain silent, because there’s always that one little piece inside of you that wants to be spoken out, and if you keep ignoring it, it gets madder and madder and hotter and hotter, and if you don’t speak it out one day it will just up and punch you in a mouth.” ( Lorde,1997, p.19)*

*“I swear by my women’s pride to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. As a women, it took me long time to decide to proceed in this matter. My life is at risk and also my prestige.” (Oy’s last testimony)*

Although women overcome their fear and voice out through their writing with difficulties, their writing still overlooked and were seen as not important. Oy’s story is seen as nonsense, untrue story and trying to blackmail the monk. When I read Oy’s writings I found that “rape” is not about men’s sexual drive but it’s the men’s power exercise in patriarchal system.

The Gender Binary System

|                     |                       |
|---------------------|-----------------------|
| female              | male                  |
| powerless           | powerful              |
| need to rely on men | need to protect women |
| soft and sweet      | strong and durable    |
| husband is leader   | wife is follower      |
| using emotion       | using reason/logic    |

**3rd KANITA POSTGRADUATE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON  
GENDER STUDIES**

16 – 17 November 2016  
Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang

The imbalance of power cause the power abused. Those source of power such as the privilege as a man, body strength, economic power, social - cultural power which leads to the culture of abusive behavior and become the reason the abuser use to protect themselves and put the blame on the person harmed.

This kind of study would project the women's voice. The action of relentlessly following and pushing the law case shows that woman shouldn't always be the survivor and shouldn't be voiced by others such as educator, activist or feminist. The voice of experienced woman is powerful and real, the content has its volume, it reveals the inequity power that makes man and woman different.

#### 5. References

- Harding, Sandra. (1987). *Feminism and Methodology: Social Science Issue*. Bloomington: Indiana University and Open University Press.
- Harding, Sandra. (2004). *The Feminism standpoint reader: Intellectual & political controversies*, New York: Routledge
- Hélène Cixous. )1994(. *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*. Translated by Sarah Cornell and Susan Sellers. New York: Columbia University Press
- Lorde, A. (1997). *The Cancer Journals: Special Edition*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books.
- Pollachom,Taweeluck. (2007) *Third World Women's Writing and Questionary of Feminist Epistemology*. Bangkok, Thailand: Thammasat University.
- Suksui, C. (2010). *Writing Lives: The Politic of Human Rights Report,The Case Study of Human Rights Report through License to Rape*. Bangkok, Thailand: Thammasat University.
- Trinh T. Minh-ha. (1989) *Women, Native, Other, Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism*.