

For the last two years, there have been numerous crimes based on misogyny, sexual harassment and assaults. These issues have emerged as serious social problems and they are reported in the mass media almost every day. Such problems have also existed before 2016. Maybe there is even more in the present. Previously, these issues did not attract much attention in the public. The women's movement that began in 2016 now views our society as ready to share and deal with these topics out in the open. Since this social consensus about something wrong and unjust was formed, more women have been able to have the courage to speak out.

This is a kind of document that shines light on the understanding of Jeong Ahram's solo exhibition, *Speaking for Myself*. It is almost impossible to record everything that has happened thus far, and its objectivity cannot be completely guaranteed. Nevertheless, as a blind man touches an elephant, and a couple of cases will be discussed here despite being incomplete. Please note that this text is not directly related to the exhibition or artwork.

1. A record of cases, 2016~2018

Let's start with the Gangnam murder case that took place on May 17, 2016, that directly relates to Jeong Ahram's work. This was an incident that triggered the current movement — as a 'motiveless murder case' that was based on misogyny. A 34-year-old man, surnamed Kim, stabbed a woman — who was unknown to him — four times to death at a public toilet in a karaoke bar in Seochodong, Seoul. The convicted murderer said, "I did it because I have been looked down upon by women. I don't know the woman I killed." Afterwards, hundreds of people gathered to mourn the death in front of exit 10 at Gangnam Station, as a result of a netizen's suggestion. The Supreme Court of Korea confirmed its original verdict to sentence the murderer, surnamed Kim, to 30 years in prison on April 13, 2017.

Since October 2016, a large number of 'revelations' connected to sexual violence hashtags have come out in the cultural sector. A stream of revelations was made in fields of literature, theatre, film and art and people revealed their hidden secrets online, anonymously. The media reported on such disclosures day after day, making people feel helpless and depressed, while admitting that "it was a time bomb waiting for explosion." Among those who have been named as perpetrators are many curators, professors, critics and artists. Subsequently, the Association of Women Artists (AWA) was formed and several statements were released. There were active movements made in order to break out of this vicious circle of violence.

The novel "Kim Ji-young Born in 1982" was published around the same time, and created a great sensation. The author Cho Nam-joo, who worked as a writer in a broadcasting network for a current affairs TV show for 10 years, described the entire life of a woman, a fictitious character, combining stories of discrimination towards women in our everyday lives. Kim is the most common surname in Korea and Ji-young was also one of the most popular names for a girl in the 1980s. The book deals with the topic of discrimination that Korean women face in their lives. Some have said that this novel was closer to a form of reportage than fiction. This book attracted more attention from the public after Roh Hoe-chan presented it as a gift to President Moon Jaein at the

Blue House luncheon, with a request “ Please embrace Kim Ji–young Born in 1982.” The novel is now set to be adapted into a film.

One of the biggest issues in 2018 was prosecutor Seo Ji–hyun’ s sexual harassment case that occurred within the prosecutors’ organization. On January 29, 2018, prosecutor Seo claimed in public that Ahn Tae–geun, a former senior Justice Ministry official, sexually harassed her. According to Seo, after she opened up about the experience of sexual harassment within the prosecution, she received unfair performance audits and a retaliatory transfer order. Prosecutor Seo said she decided to tell the truth after 8 years because she wanted to “let the victims of sexual violence know that it was not their faults.” Seeing many victims suffering from retaliation, secondary assaults and forms of defamation while being called a kkotbaem (literally means ‘flower snake’ referring to a seductive girl) or a prostitute, she made up her mind to make a public disclosure. Seo Ji–hyun has filed lawsuits for damages relating to sexual assault, abuse of authority and retaliatory personnel actions — they are still in court.

In May 2018, a user of Womad, a Korean online community website (which is known for its extremist feminist views and misandry tendencies), posted unauthorized photographs of a male nude model’ s face and genitalia from a life–drawing class at Hongik University. Unlike other illegal photography cases it was easy to identify the perpetrator and she was quickly arrested. In the post the male model was sexually degraded and ridiculed — it was regarded as a kind of revenge porn. Womad argues that, for the case in which the victim is male the media tends to report the cases much more often while the perpetrators face heavy criticisms and punishments, whereas for cases in which victims are female, the perpetrators are protected and receive lighter punishments, thereby heating up the battle of the genders. This incident was the genesis of the Hyehwa Station protests, which occurred five times.

On May 19, a massive protest was held nearby Hyehwa Station, Seoul. This voluntary womenonly demonstration organized by ‘Uncomfortable Courage,’ an internet community on the Daum portal site protested gender–biased and sexist investigations into the Hongik University case. The participating women, all dressed in red, held signs saying “Women are guilty but men are innocent,” “Hyehwa Station protest is a grudge, while a candlelight protest is a revolution?” and “Stop biased investigations.” Following this demonstration, four more were held on June 9, July 7, August 4 and October 6. The number of participants in each protest is estimated to be around 12000 in the first rally, 45000 in the second, 60000 in the third, 70000 in the fourth and 15000 in the fifth.

For a while all seemed calm, until another misogyny–based incident occurred on the early morning of November 13 — demonstrating that the issue was still present. The assault took place near Isu Station, Seoul. This case is still under investigation and its details are to be clarified. But it is suspected that there were assaults by both parties and then one falsely evoked misogynist public sentiments.

An investigation of the facts is the first thing to do in understanding each case. There are so many complicated relations that cannot be explained through the binary division between man and woman. Hatred against women and other gender conflicts are increasing. Perhaps such things are facilitated through the internet. Whereas derogatory comments and views are created and spread on SNS, people can anonymously tell their stories and participate in voluntary networking–based collective actions with others as well.

2. The flow of hatred on the internet reflected in neologisms

There is still a big difference in the atmosphere online and offline. One can get a lot of information and experience various atmospheres when searching with a focus on specific issues — otherwise, it would be difficult to gather information in many cases. A wide range of misogyny-related neologisms has been coined. We can understand how its logic and theory have developed only by searching and seeing for these neologisms. Most of the meanings of the words mentioned here are based on the content of open-sourced encyclopedias, including ‘femiwiki.com’ and ‘namu.wiki’ (where anybody can freely access and edit).

‘Doenjang woman’ (in Korean, 된장녀) (doenjang literally means fermented soybean paste) is a term that has been used since 2006. This expression reflects the image of women who are pretty and haughty, drink expensive coffee and prefer men who drive expensive cars — in other words, women who are inaccessible and unattainable. Giving this kind of derogatory term to such women is thoroughly based on misogyny and it is definitely inappropriate. Later, another term, ‘Kimchi woman’ (in Korean, 김치녀) was coined. It is a term that derides women who are selfish and live a luxurious life. Its meaning has expanded to refer to Korean women in general, and is a pejorative symbol given to women. Such a gendered frame has forced women to censor themselves and live up to male standards.

There are countless numbers of online phrases that degrade women as a whole. For example, ‘Kim-yeosa’ or ‘Mrs. Kim’ (in Korean, 김여사) is a derogatory term portraying clumsy (middle-aged) female drivers. ‘Momchoong’ (in Korean, 맘충) refers to thoughtless mothers with distorted maternal love who spoil their kids without blaming or admonishing them for their faults and demand other people to make sacrifices for their own children. Over time, this has become an offensive word that degrades and makes fun of ordinary moms. The word ‘Boseulachi’ (in Korean, 보슬아치) refers to women who think that female genitalia stand for a position of great influence (this originates from the Ilbe (Ilbe Storehouse) website and has started to spread).

Radical feminist online communities such as Megalia and Womad use what they call a ‘mirroring’ strategy against the male-centered online community websites such as Ilbe and DC Inside in opposition to illegal photography and file sharing based on misogyny taking place in these male-centered communities. Mirroring, which originally means ‘to copy’ or ‘to reflect,’ is employed as a way of doing the same thing unto others as they do unto me, and aims for a form of revenge. In this sense women return what they have received, namely, misogyny towards men, as it were.

Recently, many words reflecting such attitudes have appeared. For instance, ‘hannam’ (in Korean, 한남), an abbreviation for Korean men, denotes men who have misogynist views, mirroring a degrading word against women. As time has passed this word has become an expression that refers to Korean men in general. Another word ‘Naemjio (in Korean, 냐져)’ means a man and it is started to be used among the users of the Womad claiming that one should call the man Naemjio instead of Namja (in Korean, 남자) that includes two ‘ㅏ(a)’ s, whereas the word for the woman in Korean, Yeoja (in Korean, 여자), has two ‘ㅓ(uh)’ s (ㅏ+ㅓ=ㅓ): According to them, ‘ㅏ(a)’ and ‘ㅓ(o)’ have a positive meaning because they are positive vowels, however, negative vowels such as ‘ㅓ(uh)’ and ‘ㅜ(ou)’ have negative nuances. Members of Megalia use a derogatory and mocking expression, ‘Jae-gi hae’ (in Korean, 자기해라). For example, ‘Jae-gi hae from the Hannam Bridge, Hannamchoong (한남충 in Korean, a word that belittles men as worms)’ means ‘kill yourself as Sung Jae-gi.’ Sung Jae-gi was the chairman of Man of Korea who committed suicide by jumping from a bridge into the Han River, Seoul. Using such expressions obviously qualify as criminal acts.

In addition to words of mockery towards men, some derogatory terms towards women have appeared, claiming that they are not advanced or well enlightened. 'Hyoongja' (in Korean, 흥자), an abbreviation of 'Hyoongnae Jaji' (in Korean, 흥내 자지) means 'imitation of a dick.' In fact it is similar to the expression, 'honorary male.' The term is used to criticize 'women who sympathize with a patriarchal way of thinking' or 'those who are not in favor of radical feminism or criticize it.' Recently, the 'Remove-the-Corset' movement has emerged in South Korea. Its concept is based on the idea that for women, taking care of their looks and figures through gestures such as putting on makeup or dieting (not unlike wearing a corset), is a kind of labor forced upon by society. In other words, the supporters of this movement argue that women should stop all the acts and efforts to look pretty as this is a result of being influenced and brainwashed by men.

3. An unlevel playing field, and...

An unlevel playing field stands for circumstances in which a fair competition is impossible. When a system or an order is tilted in favor of one side, it is hard for the other side to win. If more women can be in a position of an influential decision maker in society, and make their voice heard and become involved in various social functions and roles, things might change little by little. Although a woman's education level and economic status continuously elevates, women's wages are lower than men's and women are given much more responsibilities and duties such as pregnancy, childbirth and childcare.

Regarding women as equal beings without subjecting them to disparagement and sexual mockery, having close ties with women, as well as recognizing and respecting their outstanding abilities. These simple rules are not observed in reality and men definitely bear the responsibility for that to some extent. On the other hand, there are also concerns at the same time about extreme feminist movements aiming at returning what they received from men, in the manner of 'mirroring.'

Recent heated controversies resulting from the confrontation between men and women seem problematic. Recognizing the problem, Jeong Ahram pays attention to the bonds among women and the way of speaking itself, instead of focusing on gender divisions. Rather than merely delivering factual information of the individual cases that has inspired her the artist intends to share her own thoughts and perspectives on multiple issues by reinterpreting and appropriating the voices of women who have accidentally 'survived,' acts of blocking holes suspected of hiding cameras in order to protect others, and the movements of the body during the suppression of public protests.

Increasing hatred toward women in general and a large number of hate crimes and incidents are urgent issues that are closely related to our daily lives in our present-day Korea of 2018. Nevertheless, it is not easy to find artists who deal with such issues in the field of art. Jeong Ahram weaves this large theme into her work as an extension of her existing interests. This exhibition addresses such issues and offers food for thought, for all people who live in present times as well as for art majors, curators and artists.