

SILENT ECHOES: THE LINGERING VOICES OF WAR IN THE NARRATIVE OF *WANDERING SOULS* BY CECILE PIN

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Abstract

Cecile Pin's Wandering Souls (2023) is a moving novel that examines war, trauma, and identity through the prism of forced migration. The novel tracks a Vietnamese family who leaves their war-torn country in the wake of the Vietnam War, only to encounter further displacement, loss, and survival struggles in the UK. Pin's narrative masterfully interlaces historical trauma with individual loss, exploring the lasting psychological and emotional impact of war on individuals and families. One of the major themes in the novel is the effect of intergenerational trauma, whereby the characters wrestle with what has happened previously while trying to create a new identity in another country. Pin uses a fractured narrative and multiple views to bring forward the haunting effects of identity crisis and show how what has happened will continue to condition the characters' current experiences. The haunting voice of the oldest brother, who dies at sea, is both a narrative tool and a symbol of untold mourning, echoing the long-term impact of war and forced migration. The novel also questions the crossroads of trauma and resilience, showing how survivors seek to regain agency in the midst of loss. By using evocative language and close-up narrative, Pin subverts prevailing discourses of migration, highlighting the psychological and personal costs that usually follow displacement. Wandering Souls is ultimately a meditation on memory as both pain and survival and how stories of war and migration still resonate across generations. This research places Pin's novel within the wider cultural conversation regarding war literature, trauma theory, and traces how Wandering Souls extends knowledge of the refugee experience and remembrance complexity in postcolonial settings.

Keywords: Impacts of war, trauma, displacement, identity, and resilience.

Introduction:

War is considered a remarkable and horrifying event that destroys not only the lands and the nations but also the individuals' lives. Survivors, who experienced war, migration, and their consequences, have catastrophic effects on the psychological and physical conditions of human beings that leave scars on the memories of the veterans and left nations in trauma. Occasionally, wars are imposed on the countries and some external forces try to dominate the country creating the situation for people to flee from their motherland. During wars and conflicts, all the ideality of the better future ruins with the person localities. The enthusiasm of the person dies with the crashing surroundings and the struggles to start a new life in a different environment (Tori De Angelis, 2023).

There are certain conditions and situations that lead to war it is such a big step to initiate a war for any nation. Sometimes it's a political agenda and sometimes it is the urge to take over the world. Considering the resources and economic conditions of

the country is the first priority which is why nations use the colonization method to suck the resources of any other country. When a war initiates, it destroys the dreams, ambition, willpower, dignity, home, and life planned by humans (Team, 2024).

According to Theisen-Womersley (2021) the migration experience itself necessarily disrupts family and cultural systems and separations from the family and ethnic community. Displacement due to war is the major cause of migration during wars and political instability. Displacement is more than just physically displaced from the homeland, it rips off the identity and thoughts of an individual. After the journey of war and migration ended the emotional scars converted into the psychological trauma. Displacement affects the belongings, relationships, and self-worth of survivors.

Displacement and homelessness is about the loss of connection from homeland, cultural, and traditional values. It is the state of not having your own place, not to feeling safe, and not becoming the part of another's community. For displaced people, memories of their homeland stay in their hearts, creating a bittersweet longing for something they can never return to. For the homeless, every day is a struggle to hold on to their dignity and identity in a world that often ignores their humanity. The emotional toll is immense. And yet, despite this, people displaced by war or homelessness often demonstrate incredible resilience. They rebuild, adapt, and find new ways to survive, even when it feels like the world is against them (Mukul, 2024).

Trauma is a response towards horrific past events that generate psychological disorders in human beings. "Any aggression evokes emotions of fear, anger, despair, horror, confusion, and hatred" (Thagard, 2018). Human psychology works under stress and how emotions fluctuate during trauma which sometimes leaves you numb. Trauma is also considered to be transferred from one generation to other consciously or unconsciously. Trauma must have several terrible reasons behind it.

Trauma does not relate to the person who experienced sufferance, it passes down from generations to generations. When the people experienced traumatic events like displacement, identity crisis and cultural assimilation they get traumatized. The children of the victims inherit trauma, they carried the burden of trauma, their parent's experience. Parents shape the way they raise their children, how they respond to stress, and even how they show love. Without realizing it, they might pass down fear, anxiety, or emotional distance, creating cycles of pain that stretch across generations. The echo of the parents has seen in the attitude of their children (DeAnglis, 2019).

Research Objective:

- To highlight the impact of war and its psychological distress in human beings.
- To explore the implication of war, trauma, and identity in the life of immigrants and in the narrative.
- To highlight the effects of memory and intergenerational trauma in building the identity of individuals.

Research Gap:

The research on the trauma and memory in the novel *Wandering Souls* by Cecile Pin lack in the academic studies. The previous studies on the novel focus on the areas of homelessness, cultural assimilation, material manifestation, and ecological resilience. There is a lack of exhaustive analysis that covers the studies related to displacement, transgenerational trauma, and effect of trauma on individual and cultural identities. Studies on exploring the historical trauma and fragmented identity also lack

in the research history. Furthermore, the research also explores how these themes affect the psychological conditions of the survivors.

Literature Review

Wars often bring shifts in politics, borders and governance in the affected region. In the case of Vietnam War, the war ended with the country's coalition under communist rule that reshaped the structure of Vietnams' political background. The United States become more hesitant in involving wars and conflicts, because the Vietnam war considered long and costly war mercilessly affecting the economy of US, it emerged the fear among the government, this is called "Vietnam Syndrome" (Hallin, 1986).

Wars are extremely priced and leave countries in destruction and survivors struggling financially for years. The Vietnam War costed the United States around \$168 billion, which would be more than a trillion dollars today. This huge expense contributed to economic problems in the 1970s (McMahon, 1999). In Vietnam, the war destroyed farms and factories, making it difficult for the country to recover and rebuild.

North Vietnamese Army (NVA) and U.S.-backed South Vietnamese forces were implicated in acts of physical violence, including torture. Civilian and insurgent used to face force beating, waterboarding and other barbaric methods while investigated by the American troops. Historical accounts (Hirschman et al., 1995) document the physical scars left on survivors, many of whom endured prolonged suffering in detention centers or re-education camps.

During the war times, only a smaller number of citizens accomplished to travel to neighboring nations. In 1978, round about 500,000 refugees attempted to flee from their countries in small groups through unfit boats. The term "boat people" was used for Vietnamese who migrated by using that method of evacuation. Due to the leakages of boats, lack of floatability, and overcrowding, "boat people" were succeeded in covering long distances.

According to Geyer & Tooze (2015), war often leads to long lasting and large-scale displacement. It effects not just the calculations of population but also reshape and enhance the ideas of new political ideologies and new government after the war. During the major crisis in Europe and Asia, global community gave a united response. This requires a great effort, and it is incredible in different ways. To put the needs of refugees in the front line, there needs to be a collaboration between government and international government as well the volunteer group. The political conditions and the experience every exile community has to face is different for everyone and that's collectively build refugees memory of life. Having minority groups and maintaining the family ties to their origin is what make their life difficult to adjust in new community.

Most of the people who migrate are either due to violence, war, and are displaced by environmental disasters but some displacements of people are due to the projects of the nation which leads them to be a displaced and homeless. The concept of forced migration is entertained, which is drastically increased during the last centuries. (Bank, A., & Fröhlich, C, 2018). Nation suffers due to poverty is something their government would take action for but when nations are destroyed and displaced due to war reasons leads to end of refugees both financially and emotionally.

Displacement leads to homelessness and marginalization of people. How host country people become superior and migrant's culture and language become dead and un-important to host country. The hypocrisy of the situation is what leads to thinking

of refugees as homeless people being the marginalized character. Homelessness is a form of displacement as in "Subalternity as Displacement: Memoirs of Homelessness and the Struggle to Be Heard," Speer (2021), analyzed her personal experience of homelessness. How homelessness caused them to face marginalization and invisibility. There are certain systematic factors and also the displacement that leads to homelessness.

Homelessness leads to an identity crisis. In a recent study by Konrady & Talarska (2024) during the observation and by assessing the life of a homeless person they got the results of the effects of being Homeless on the identity and social health of a person. The sense of being self and confidence diminished with a home that is closely related to the identity crisis. The quality of life and loss of a stable home has been taken away from the identity of a person.

Trauma, "an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape, war and natural disaster" (American Psychological Association, 2008). Trauma is an experience and every person's response is different; some people take it deeply personal and some of them show inner resilience. Over the years, researchers, psychologists, and medical professionals have sought to understand trauma's impact and how individuals can heal from it.

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is often the first condition associated with trauma, but its impact goes far beyond PTSD. Anxiety, depression, substance abuse, and even chronic illnesses have been linked to unprocessed trauma. The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) study conducted by Felitti et al. (1998) revealed a strong correlation between early trauma and long-term health risks, reinforcing the idea that trauma is not just psychological but also physiological.

Survivors of war, who faced traumatic experience often avoid discussing their past experiences, leaving their children to sense and interpret the unspoken. This silence creates confusion or a vague sense of inherited distress (Felsen, 1998). Transgenerational traumatic events even travel in silence from generation to generation and that unspoken series of events align with the physiological state of their mind. Many societies, communities and groups of different nations who suffered the pain of loss of loved one and by leaving the country which they called a home for the major part of their lives leave scars on their personalities and lives. To live a sustainable life become an issue for them. Failed to maintain a normal relationship and to live a smooth life become a burdensome act for them. That is the transgenerational trauma currently Palestinian case study example is the best to quote.

Parents, experienced trauma often show emotional responses like overprotection, emotional withdrawal, or hypervigilance, which impact their children's upbringing. Some of the studies show that unspoken tensions or excessive control in parenting can affect children's ability to control emotions and process stress (Danieli, 1998). Many of the war survivors suffer with the suppressed emotions which sometimes overpower their suppressed emotion i.e. anger, happiness, confusion. The behavioral change is not normal. The way of acting and processing the emotions is different for them. Without knowing how to react and to let out their emotions, which cause their generation to have that silent trauma pass along with them.

The idea of resilience always comes in the context of war and migration. Brett T. Litz (2014) in his research talked about resilience; he says that the concept of resilience is a heated discussion in the past few years due to the prolonged duration of wars in the history. Resilience is considered as the optimistic idea as it deteriorates the outcomes of post-traumatic stress and its pessimistic consequences among the military.

and veterans. Most of the military members go through war trauma and maintain the functioning of mind. However, very small amount of veterans develops and assist resilience in the aftermath of wars and conflicts.

Methodology & Framework:

The theoretical framework for this research is drawn from the Cathy Caruth's book *Unclaimed Experience* which helps readers to understand the trauma as repetition and temporal disruption which further explains it as realignment of time. It also includes the writer to provide reader with first-hand experience of sufferance. Her work is concerned with the moral imperative of responding and bearing the witness to the trauma stories. Key aspects of Caruth's theory employed in this research include the trauma as repetition. Much of the time, trauma agrees with the notion of memory and experience repetition where resolution has not occurred. This paper explores how *Wandering Souls* by Cecile Pin reconstruct this cycle in her characters' flashbacks and various memories of mourning and dislocation. Trauma according to Caruth is that is not fully experienced at that time but reflect in the personality of the person. She argues that trauma is characterized by a "delayed return of the event" that disrupts the continuity of time and identity (Caruth, 1996, p. 11). It can only be understood and revealed with time through symptoms and repetition. The element of fragmented storyline has been understood through narratives in the story.

In the aspect of time, Caruth denotes the way in which trauma causes the re-alignment of time. That is why the novel's disunity of the storyline, extraordinary in its interlacing of the past, can be regarded as a reflection of such disruption as past events interfere with the present as to determine characters' identities and decision-making. *Cecile pin* narrative exemplifies a complete chaos because it narrates its story in a non-linear fashion that is pathognomy of trauma. The analysis of time and perspective change should be discussed in relation to Caruth's approach by which the temporal shift indicates that the past trauma is present. Caruth emphasizes that trauma "speaks through the wound," often bypassing conscious recall and manifesting through structural and psychological ruptures (Caruth, 1996, p. 3).

The generational trauma is the point highlighted in the Cathy Caruth book as well in the novel. The cultural issue of passing the generational trauma, how the young generation inherits the wound of the previous ones. This paper aims to analyse this intergenerational transmission in *Wandering Souls* by Cecile pin with reference to the issue of healing and identity. Caruth asserts that the very telling of the trauma stories is a moral imperative. In this research the writer examines how the novel opens up empathy reading experience where the audience is a witness to the suffering and the strength of the character. The fracture sense of identity and being and belongings is presented through the fragmented timeline and narratives.

Textual Analysis

In the novel *Wandering Souls*, a renowned figure, Pin skillfully delved into themes of loss, grief, and trauma due to unexpected dislocation and homelessness. The artistic reflection of the grievance of being uprooted and displaced signifies her artwork's emotional depth and complexity. She expertly covers various aspects of challenges and trials that one has to experience due to war and forced evacuations. She not only portrayed an undiluted glimpse of refugees' conditions but also highlighted the intense repercussions of violent conflicts on an individual's mental health and identity.

The evocative style employed in her work allows readers to envision themselves in place of the characters and experience their helplessness and misery.

Individuals who have experienced armed military interventions that lead to evacuations and acts of violence undergo intense physical and psychological distress. The sudden disassociation from the familiar environment or community leaves a permanent scar on their subconscious and leads them to a lifelong trauma that haunts them forever. Utilizing the character Anh, Cecile Pin in *Wandering Souls*, (2023) sheds light on the fact that those who have been exposed to war atrocities or separation from familial relations, get traumatized by its effects for the rest of their lives. The horrific encounters shook them to the core, alter their mental and physical status, and push them to acquire a new identity in an unfamiliar land. These catastrophic situations often prompt elders to pull themselves and carry the load of survival, making them the pillars of support and resilience in the face of utter devastation.

The protagonist, Anh, being one of the victims of military conflict and displacement, has to endure more than her brothers as she is the eldest sibling. The terrible circumstances ended up leaving her in a guardianship position, demanding her to look after her brothers and provide them with the needed essentials. She has to address her younger brothers' concerns while confronting her own fears and grief, all alone. As in the text, when Minh asked her 'What if they don't let Ma and Dad's boat in? She took his arm, checking how his wound was healing underneath the bandage. 'They will,' she said. And after a pause, she said it again, more to herself than her brother. 'They will.'" (p. 24). This draws attention towards the intensity of the situation and highlights Anh's deepest fears about her parents' well-being. Despite experiencing weight due to inner chaos and apprehension, she tries to be a source of solace for her siblings. The war adversities and lack of familial assistance demanded Anh to grow ahead of time, keeping her little brothers away from any possible danger and giving them comfort and a sense of relief in full of chaos.

In the novel, Pin elucidates that the unexpected happenings reform individual identities and compel them to take on tough duties that are far beyond their strengths. They have to be the caretakers of the weaker ones while abandoning their own past selves, like Anh who has to emerge as a strong elderly figure and shoulder her siblings and providing them chances for their better growth. While her brothers were at school studying maths or geography, she took the dilapidated bus with her fellow workers to the vast, cold warehouse near the southern coast of Lantau Island. She came home long after their classes were over for the day and didn't like leaving them alone... However, they needed money; the food they were given by the camp was not enough for their growing bodies.

Through these excerpts from the text, Pin showcases the adverse conditions deeply influencing human behavioral patterns and demanding individuals to be the symbol of resilience and grit under rough settings, causing innocence and self-worth to dissipate. Cecile Pin utilizes Anh's character to illustrate the refugees' struggle with their identity in a foreign land. The author further reveals that in addition to being displaced, immigrants have to cope with resistance coming from the natives. They have to experience racial discrimination and intolerance by the inhabitants of the host region. As in *Wandering Souls*, being constrained by the obligations towards her siblings while experiencing extreme emotional breakdown due to the departed family members Anh was also dealing with the refugee crisis while simultaneously going through with the issues related to her identity. Pin reveals what immigrants encounter while living in an unfamiliar environment and how it disrupts their identity. That is why Anh stopped

touching the items after grocers had complained about it to the camp authorities and reshaped her habits to avoid the unlikeness of the locals. This depicts the miserable social standing of refugees in a land that does not belong to them.

Through Anh's character, Cecile Pin in *Wandering Souls*, (2023) tries to demonstrate that the abrupt loss of hometown, family, identity, and dreams, coupled with the weight of unexpected psychological and financial obligations, leave a devastating impact on an individual's mental health. As in the text, she came home long after their classes were over for the day and didn't like leaving them alone.

Cecile Pin's *Wandering Souls* illustrates that war atrocities cause psychic injuries that disintegrate an individual's ability to comprehend and recount unfortunate experiences coherently. As Pin' Anh was being vague on purpose, unsure of her own thoughts, what she wanted to share, and what she wanted to hide. Her English was fluent now, but she still felt there was a gap between her mind and her words, a broken bridge of translation. (p. 121-122) it verifies the horrific experiences fracturing the capacity of the cognitive system, making it difficult for the survivor to fully understand and verbalize the breadth of the pain and agony. The emotional weight of previously experienced haunted events creates barriers and leaves individuals divided between articulating their loss and preserving themselves from reliving the trauma.

The research implies that unfortunate encounters and traumatic memories of war and displacement significantly impacted Anh's understanding of self and the outside world. The psychic wounds caused by the sorrows of losing hometown, identity, and family relations, left long-lasting impressions on her consciousness which haunted her throughout her life. The character of Anh reflects the psychological discomfort and anguish experienced by those who witnessed the war atrocities, carrying their unhealed wounds wherever they go.

Throughout *Wandering Souls*, Anh's struggle with her sub-consciousness draws attention towards the awful circumstances she and her brothers experienced due to forced displacement. Anh attempts to cope up with her grief by isolating herself from her kids because she does not want to distress them. But maintaining distance fostered an emotional void between them that silently imprinted her unsettled pain in her kids. And since the children subconsciously absorb her psychological scars from the very beginning, it contributed in forming the basis of generational trauma in them. She had tried to protect her children from distress by withholding the most gruesome parts of her experiences, she realized some things must have filtered through, perhaps through her behavior, through the pores of her skin, or some untold bond between mothers and their children. (p. 137)

The study also implies that unhealed trauma is not solely a matter of individual discomfort rather it is a wound that shakes future generations. The psychological injuries caused by terrible incidents extend beyond first-hand survivors, affecting their children, their relations, and their ability to start lives from scratch in an unfamiliar region. Anh's narrative also underscores the notion that trauma damages victims on an individual level as well as strains the emotional ties between them and their children, resulting in a generational cycle of misery. Exploring the challenges faced by other characters such as Minh or Thanh, is recommended to enhance the study since it provides a deeper understanding of their inner battles and how they have to cope with their identity complexities in a foreign land.

Conclusion

In reflecting on the horrific repercussions of war, this study has explored how violence, uncertainty, and trauma brought on by war and displacement alter the lives of

refugees. Particularly, the narrative of Anh in Cecile Pin's *Wandering Souls* serves as a tragic representation of the wider migrant experience, highlighting both long-lasting psychological wounds as well as the immediate crisis experienced by those who are forced to flee. Moreover, the character of Anh offers a comprehensive exploration of unresolved trauma caused by the haunted memories of war and displacement, on Vietnamese refugees. The research manifests how distressing recollections invade everyday affairs, triggering past memories and causing flashbacks that thrust one's consciousness into the devastating moments of the past.

The applied notion of war and displacement discloses intense physical and psychological difficulties faced by three surviving siblings. The main character Anh being the eldest sibling, has to bear the additional weight of dealing with the refugee crisis while grappling with her own distorted identity. The grief caused by departed family members and the constraints of her obligations toward her younger brothers deepen her inner conflict. This concept offers an elaborative perspective for understanding identity's intricacies while exposing individual's internal struggles and societal expectations in the case of forced migration.

Furthermore, it becomes evident that Anh's thoughts, actions, and behaviors are determined by her past harrowing experiences which impair her ability to engage with the present moments. The grief of losing home, family, and identity weighs heavily on her psyche and leaves a permanent mark that fosters a sense of fragmentation in her identity. Anh's trauma is profoundly connected to her constant sorrow and her inability to overlook the violent recollections from the past. The flashbacks and nightmares due to disturbing past re-triggers the sentiments of loss and restlessness, blocking her way to healing. Anh's disturbed sleeping schedule provides quick glimpses into the past, reflecting enormous traumas and atrocities experienced by Vietnamese people. Her ceaseless inner scuffle highlights the collective suffering of Vietnamese war survivors who have been trapped between physical as well as psychological traumas.

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