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Memory of War and Trauma in Bao Ninh's *The Sorrow of War* and Naoki Hyakuta's *The Eternal Zero*❖

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ABSTRACT

In Vietnamese literature, the novel *The Sorrow of War* (1990) by writer Bao Ninh addresses the theme of soldiers with memories of horrific experiences during the war, where they constantly face death and endure both physical and psychological trauma even when they survive and return home. The memories of war haunt the soldiers, causing them pain and agony both physically and mentally. The novel *The Eternal Zero* (2006) by Japanese writer Naoki Hyakuta contains astonishing truths about Japanese *kamikaze* pilots during World War II, recounted through the vivid memories of those involved. They fight with all their might, unafraid of sacrifice, yet also deeply yearn to live and return home. The memories of war cling to the soldiers throughout their lives, making them seem like prisoners who cannot escape from those memories. The article analyzes the war experiences of soldiers through two works of Japanese and Vietnamese literature from a comparative perspective. It aims to identify the similarities and differences in how these works express memories of war, the experiences of war, and the processes of healing from traumatic memories and wounds. It examines how these experiences traumatize them mentally and how the writers use literature and art to heal these wounds. The memories of the war experiences of soldiers who directly engage in battle remain vivid and unforgettable, even decades after the war ends.

KEYWORDS: memory of war, trauma, traumatic memories, victim, *The Eternal Zero*, *The Sorrow of War*

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戰爭記憶與創傷：保寧《戰爭的悲傷》與百田尚樹《永遠的零》

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摘　要

越南文學中，作家保寧（Bao Ninh）的小說《戰爭的悲傷》（*The Sorrow of War* 1990）探討了士兵們在戰爭中可怕經歷的記憶。他們時刻面對死亡，即便倖存歸來，也要承受身體和心理上的創傷。戰爭的記憶如影隨形，不斷折磨他們，使他們在生理與心理上都深陷痛苦之中。日本作家百田尚樹（Naoki Hyakuta）的小說《永遠的零》（*The Eternal Zero* 2006）則透過相關人物生動的回憶，揭示了二戰期間日本神風特攻隊員的驚人真相。他們竭盡全力作戰，無懼犧牲，但同時也深切渴望生存與回家。戰爭的記憶伴隨這些士兵一生，使他們如同囚徒般無法逃離。本文從比較的角度，分析了越南與日本文學中士兵的戰爭經驗。研究旨在探討兩部作品如何表達戰爭記憶、戰爭體驗以及從創傷記憶與傷口中獲得療癒的過程有何異同。本文還考察了這些戰爭經歷如何在精神層面上造成創傷，以及作家如何通過文學與藝術來療癒這些傷口。對於那些親身參戰的士兵而言，戰爭經歷的記憶依然鮮活難忘，即便在戰爭結束數十年之後，依然揮之不去。

關鍵詞：戰爭記憶、創傷、創傷性記憶、受害者、《永遠的零》、《戰爭的悲傷》

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I. Introduction

First published in 2006, the novel *The Eternal Zero* (永遠の 0, [Eien no Zero]) by Naoki Hyakuta (百田尚樹, 1956-) quickly became a best seller in Japan. The book does not glorify war but poignantly, profoundly, and multi-dimensionally explores the personal struggles of Japanese soldiers. The narrative of the war and the life of the Japanese *kamikaze* pilots is told from multiple perspectives and memories of the surviving soldiers. The novel begins with the attempt of two siblings, Keiko and Kentaro, to uncover the story of their grandfather, *kamikaze* pilot Kyuzo Miyabe, who sacrificed his life in the Pacific War. Miyabe is a pilot with exceptional combat skills who always returns from challenging missions and tells everyone, "I don't want to die," (Hyakuta 159) because of a promise he makes to his wife Matsuno and daughter Kiyoko that he will survive and return after the war. However, in the end, Miyabe chooses to enlist in the suicide pilot commando unit and sacrifices himself in the final battle, giving his life for a fellow soldier. Each of his surviving comrades provides a fragment of memory, a perspective on their commander, a man full of courage and compassion. "Your grandfather was a coward" (30) this statement is revealed to ironically contain both envy and, above all, admiration and respect from the survivors for a brilliant soldier with exceptional combat skills. Through this, writer Hyakuta also discloses the hidden aspects of a soldier's life and the inhumanity and injustice of the Imperial Army.

In Vietnamese literature, *The Sorrow of War* (1990) by Bao Ninh depicts the lingering and persistent memories that haunt soldiers' lives.[1] The context of the work is the Vietnam War, which lasted from 1954 to 1975.[2] The soldier Kien, the main character in Bao Ninh's novel does not die in battle but survives, but both his body and psyche have been ravaged and crushed by the horrific days of war. Kien lives in constant fear, haunted by endless nightmares of death and pain, making it impossible for him to integrate into post-war reality. He obsessively relives the scenes of bombings and gunfire, however traumatic. The

[1] Bao Ninh (1952-) served with the Glorious 27th Youth Brigade. Of the five hundred who went to war with the Brigade in 1969, he is one of ten who survived. He lives in Hanoi.

[2] After the French military withdrew from Vietnam in 1954, the American military took their place and conducted operations in Southern Vietnam. *The Sorrow of War* is about the war between North Vietnam with South Vietnam and the United States which took place throughout Vietnam between the 1960s and mid 1970s. In 1975, the Vietnamese forces achieved victory and unified the country.

character must find a way to heal his life's traumas through writing.

The article analyzes the war experiences of soldiers who directly participate in combat through two works on the same theme of war from Japanese and Vietnamese literature from a comparative perspective. It aims to identify the similarities and differences in how these works express memories of war, the experiences of war, and the processes of healing from traumatic memories and wounds. It examines how these experiences traumatize them mentally and how the writers use literature and art to heal these wounds.

"Trauma" originates from Greek, initially meaning a wound on the body, a concept belonging to the field of medicine, describing a physiological or physical injury. In its later usage, especially in medical and psychotherapeutic texts, most notably in the works of Freud, the term trauma is understood not as a bodily wound but as a mental one. It is used to describe psychological injuries caused by a painful event. The history of trauma research gained attention from the late 20th century, with the work of prominent Yale researchers Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, and Geoffrey Hartman. These scholars used video archives and other records and literature of Holocaust witnesses to develop the first wave of trauma theory in the humanities. In their work *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (1992), Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub explored the impact of the Holocaust on contemporary literature and art. In 1995, the book *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* presented multifaceted approaches to trauma by Shoshana Felman, Dori Laub, Henry Kristal, Laura S. Brown, Harold Bloom, Kai Erikson and others. They suggest that, "trauma is not experienced as a mere repression or defense, but as a temporal delay that carries the individual beyond the shock of the first moment. The trauma is a repeated suffering of the event, but it is also a continual leaving of its site" (*Trauma* 10). In the introduction to her book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, History*, titled "The Wound and the Voice," Cathy Caruth explained that Freud used the concept of "trauma" to describe: "a pattern of suffering that is inexplicably persistent in the lives of certain individuals. Perplexed by the terrifyingly literal nightmares of battlefield survivors and the repetitive reenactments of people who have experienced painful events" (1). In this sense, Caruth mentions the recurring nightmares of war survivors. According to her, the effects of trauma never cease: "The story of trauma, then, as the narrative of a belated experience, far from telling of an escape from reality—the escape from a death, or from its referential force—rather attests to

its endless impact on a life" (7). It can be seen that trauma caused by war has a profound impact on the lives of soldiers who return from military service.

Caruth emphasizes the soldiers' experiences of war related to death and destruction. She argues:

> In its most general definition, trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena. The experience of a soldier faced with sudden and massive death around him, for example, who suffers this sight in a numbed state, only to relive it later on in repeated nightmares, is a central and recurring image of trauma in our century. (*Unclaimed Experience* 11-12)

Bao Ninh's *The Sorrow of War* and Naoki Hyakuta's *The Eternal Zero* deal with this conception of trauma. The main characters in both works are haunted by the deaths of numerous comrades, which deeply affects their psychology. Caruth has posited several fundamental points of trauma theory, including that traumatic experience and traumatic narrative are specific forms of its expression. Researchers in the early twenty-first century, such as Ruth Leys, Amos Goldberg, Dominick Lacapra, Michelle Balaev, and J. Roger Kurtz have continued to seek new approaches in trauma studies. In his work, Amos Goldberg has proposed three types of relationships between trauma and narrative. According to him, trauma is related to forms of autobiographical narration, including diaries, memories, autobiographies, and fictional works with autobiographical elements:

> "Trauma . . . is the encounter with an excessive event that evades any meaningful structure and therefore is not accessible to the traumatized subject. . . . The pencil is not just a means of writing but first and foremost an object that enables the inaccessible pain to somehow be grasped." (136)

And as Roger Kurtz notes:

> "[O]ne of the fundamental claims of trauma theory is that literary language, in its very nature, offers a uniquely effective vehicle for representing the experience of trauma in ways that ordinary language cannot. . . . There are obvious links between the language of literature and the language of trauma." (8)

Trauma literature emerged in connection with the horrifying disasters of the 20th century. In the West, they are the terror and destruction of the Jews by Nazi Germany; in the East, they are the atomic bomb disasters that the U.S. dropped on the two cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan. The emergence of trauma literature can be seen in many literary traditions in the world as a narrative of painful historical experiences of the nation. In China, the trend of trauma literature flourished after the Great Cultural Revolution (1966-76) until the mid-1980s. In world literature, many works focus on war, post-war experiences, the memories of war, and the trauma it leaves behind. Even in modern Vietnamese literature, several works portray the fate of individuals and the nation during wartime, such as *A Time Far Past* (Le Luu), *The Sorrow of War* (Bao Ninh), *Begging for the Past* (Chu Lai), *Wharf Without a Husband* (Duong Huong), *The Soldier's Footprints* (Nguyen Minh Chau). Among these, Bao Ninh's *The Sorrow of War* is regarded as a monumental work of Vietnamese literature in the post-war era, as it touches upon the profound humanistic values of individuals confronting and enduring the aftermath of war, grappling with the enormous losses of comrades, love, and personal identity, as the main character has to struggle to rediscover his sense of self and the meaning of existence.[3] The soldier in Bao Ninh's work has gained a temporal distance to look back on the war that has passed, reflecting on a national past not only filled with the glory of victory but also imbued with pain, loss, wounds that are hard to heal, and memories that cannot fade. Bao Ninh's novel *The Sorrow of War* has been translated into numerous languages, including Russian, German, French, English, Korean, Japanese, and Chinese. Bao Ninh once said: "Since I am a writer who participated in the war, I must write about it as a part of my life. War and literature go hand in hand. The flames of war always give rise to literary works"[4] (qtd. in Tran).

[3] The work is also known by another title: *The Destiny (Identity) of Love*.
[4] Translated from Vietnamese by the author.

In Japanese literature, several works focus on the theme of war, such as *Grave of the Fireflies* (Akiyuki Nosaka), *The Eternal Zero* (Naoki Hyakuta), and *Sadako's Thousand Paper Cranes* (Sasaki Masahiro). We have chosen these two works—one from Japan and one from Vietnam—based on our search for both similarities and differences in how they interpret the war memories of soldiers who directly participated in combat, as well as how the authors heal the emotional wounds of their characters. In her book *The Long Defeat: Cultural Trauma, Memory, and Identity in Japan,* Akiko Hashimoto details the various aspects of cultural trauma, memory, and identity in Japan. She argues that since the defeat of World War II,

> long-standing fissures have emerged within Japanese society over who was responsible for the war and who was guilty. These fissures continue today. Underlying the fissures are two fundamental questions: *Why did we fight an unwinable war, why did they kill and die for a lost cause* (2).

She also suggests that Japan's war memory is one of the most crucial issues of global cultural memory about war and brutality that emerged in the 1990s. Many unresolved issues such as territorial disputes, war criminal accountability, and compensation for war victims contribute to what Hashimoto calls "national trauma" due to Japan's catastrophic military defeat; and furthermore, this is "cultural trauma" as Jeffrey Alexander calls it, due to the impacts and influences of war. Cultural trauma occurs "when members of a collective feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways" (Alexander, qtd. in Hashimoto 4). The wars in Japan and in Vietnam are not an exception.

In Vietnam, the Vietnamese people had endured two wars against French colonialism and American intervention for nearly a century. Many soldiers fell on the fierce battlefields to defend the homeland. Among the works on the theme of war in Vietnam, *The Sorrow of War* is unique in offering the perspective of a soldier who directly participated in the war and survived to return. Thus, the traumas of war and the struggles of soldiers returning from war are ever-present in their minds. The works of both authors can be said to

be both autobiographical narratives of trauma (as in *The Sorrow of War*) and a fictional search for memories of war. Based on the reception of the fundamental aspects of trauma theory in literature, the article deeply analyzes the similarities and differences of trauma and narrative in the works of the two authors.

Nigel C. Hunt wrote about the difficulties that war victims face, emphasizing the horrifying memories of the war: "Many people have psychological problems as a direct consequence of war; many have terrible memories of these experiences that they find difficult to deal with; and many never do learn to deal with these memories" (2). The soldier in *The Sorrow of War* actually encountered many problems as Hunt mentioned. The victims of war are civilians, the elderly, women, children, and those who do not directly participate in fighting on the battlefield. As in Bao Ninh's novel, it is Phuong and many other people; and in Hyakuta's novel, it is the young wife and little daughter of soldier Miyabe, who suffer the pain of losing a husband and a father and have to live a life of wandering, destitution, hunger, and extreme deprivation after the war. The soldiers and pilots in the two novels are direct participants in the fierce battles; but they are also "witnesses and the victims of war", as Jay Winter has noted in *Remembering War*, because they must witness the mass deaths of their comrades every day and every hour, and imagine their own deaths (6).

II. War Experience and Traumatic Memories

In *The Sorrow of War*, writer Bao Ninh depicts people in the dreadful guise of war's devastation. The dead, victims of war, are rendered into mere flesh and bone, losing their recognizable forms, while the living are transformed to the point of being unrecognizable. In the novel, an elderly woman is described as resembling a big and plump orangutan. When soldiers capture and prepare to eat the creature, they are horrified to discover it is an elderly woman, causing them to flee in fear: "[W]hen it was killed and skinned the animal looked like a fat woman with ulcerous skin, the eyes, half-white, half-grey, still rolling" (Bao Ninh 7). Even after the war ends, when Kien and a group of men search for the remains of their fallen comrades, he still hears chilling sounds and sees figures that he cannot discern as either human or ghostly: "a hairy figure, someone with very long hair and a beard" (96) or "a ghostly figure was seen momentarily. Long hair flying. Then another bent-over shadowy figure running along behind

the first" (98-99). Meanwhile, the soldiers suffer from hunger, endless fever: "Hungry, suffering successive bouts of malaria, the troops became anemic and their bodies broke out in ulcers, showing through worn and torn clothing. They looked like lepers, not heroic forward scouts. Their faces looked moss-grown, hatched and sorrowful, without hope. It was a stinking life" (16). With a sharp pen, writer Bao Ninh vividly portrays these human-like creatures, embodying the horrors of war, amidst the mountains and forests engulfed in flames:

> After the Americans withdrew, the rainy season came, flooding the jungle floor, turning the battlefield into a marsh whose surface water turned rust-colored from the blood. Bloated human corpses, floating alongside the bodies of incinerated jungle animals, mixed with branches and trunks cut down by artillery, all drifting in a stinking marsh. When the flood receded everything dried in the heat of the sun into thick mud and stinking rotting meat. And down the bank and along the stream Kien dragged himself, bleeding from the mouth and from his body wound. The blood was cold and sticky, like blood from a corpse. Snakes and centipedes crawled over him, and he felt death's hand on him. (5-6)

Those are terrifying experiences that Kien will never forget. The soldiers in the novel endure many months of hardship and the fear of death from bombs and bullets with gambling and drugs. They gamble all night and seek refuge in opium. But the pink opium smoke could only give them a temporary respite. The obsession with brutal war is always a constant fear. Consequently, many desert from the army. Desertion spreads throughout the regiment. Kien, the main character in the novel, witnesses and experiences all the sorrows of war. For him, "war was a world with no home, no roof, no comforts. A miserable jourey, ofendless drifting. War was a world without real men, without real women, without feeling" (31). Kien is the only surviving soldier of the reconnaissance team. The corpses lay everywhere, horrifying; the living become numb and treat even the dead with brutality. At Tan Son Nhat airport, a huge helmeted soldier trips over the corpse of a female officer, causing him to fall. Angrily, he kicks the corpse repeatedly, grabs one leg of the dead body, and drags it roughly up the steps, swinging it and hurling it onto the concrete yard. The corpse spins around, tilts, and falls with a thud. War has not only

destroyed the human form but also annihilated humanity itself. The soldiers have become so accustomed to the gruesome scenes of death that they've grown indifferent. Even when tired, they eat and sleep, oblivious to the corpses lying next to them. Amos Goldberg states that trauma "is the encounter with an excessive event" (136). Even after the war has passed, the devastating consequences and enduring mental anguish continue to haunt, causing bodies and souls to become desensitized and distorted.

Different from the surviving soldier in *The Sorrow of War*, the pilot Miyabe in the novel *The Eternal Zero* chooses the path of sacrificial death and does not return. The work is not written in the pilot's own words; instead, the horrifying memories of war, the painful memories in history, are vividly recreated through the narratives of many surviving veterans, those who participated in combat with Miyabe. As described by his comrades, the "excessive event" (Goldberg 136) is witnessing the irreversible departure of his fellow pilots through each air raid, and seeing the ranks diminish. It pains him beyond words. Striving to survive in the harsh war already creates immense pressure and tension for Miyabe. Therefore, the final scenes of the war, surpassing human endurance, further erode his body and spirit. The erosion and inner turmoil within Miyabe even manifest externally, through his appearance and behavior, which are completely opposite between two stages of his life. From a person always polite, refined, with eyes full of fervent life, Miyabe gradually becomes gloomy, as if stepping halfway into the other world after the suicide mission has been underway for a while. This unusual detail also foreshadows Miyabe's eventual choice: "His cheeks sunken, unshaven, only his eyes emitting an abnormal look. He used to be meticulous, always clean-shaven" (Hyakuta 444). Even his comrades recognize that he has become a different person. At this point, the longing to return to his former family seems to be attacking Miyabe in reverse, no longer a motivation to maintain his spirit, but instead making him feel selfish. The utmost pain and inner conflict are evident in self-reproach: "My life now treads on their sacrifice;" "[b]ecause they died, I can still live" (465-66).

For those at war, witnessing the deaths of numerous comrades is an indelible memory that cannot be erased. It is "an excessive event" for them. The combatants in *The Eternal Zero* carry a lifelong sense of guilt for witnessing countless deaths of comrades, young recruits in the war, especially during the suicide attack campaign; yet they were unable to change the situation at that

time. The more they feel their own happiness in peacetime, the more they agonize when they understand that those comrades were deprived of the simplest, most primitive happiness—to return to their families, to have a complete family. Most veterans reminisce and retell the past in the novel (9 out of 10 people), clearly showing that they are haunted by the deaths of comrades, the fierceness, horror, and destruction of the war: "On the deck, many were injured, many of them lost their hands, lost their legs. The floor dyed red with blood like hell" (Hyakuta 103). Former pilots remember and recount how they always had to fight in close proximity to death; witnessing bloody, tragic, and gruesome scenes; the fragile lives of themselves and their comrades in the war: "We were ordered that if we get hit by bullets during the air raid and finding it difficult to return, we had to carry out the suicide attack. We were also taught that we could not live with the disgrace of being a prisoner" (79); "the Japanese army originally had deeply ingrained the disregard for human life. And that's the reason for the subsequent suicide attacks" (291). They realize that their lives were undervalued, as if the bullets from the gun were shot out and replaced with new rounds: "We, soldiers and junior officers, were just their tools from the beginning, for the officers, the lives of junior officers and soldiers were just like bullets from a gun" (189); "the army at that time never thought about the lives of soldiers. 4,400 young men sacrificed for the suicide attack" (357). After the war, the veterans became acutely aware of the imminent dangers faced by themselves and their comrades during the conflict. The military government completely disregarded the lives of the soldiers, leading to many unnecessary sacrifices.

In order to conceal the true atrocities behind those irrational campaigns, the government, military, and media used substitute terms, glorifying death in order to hide the pain; "In no time, newspapers were filled with sentences like 'A million people died for glory'" (Hyakuta 354). But the reality was that "the morale of the air force significantly declined" (314). From the final stages of the war, when suicide pilots from the reserve cadets knew that they had been summoned by the military for training for death instead of fighting on the battlefield, those young men could not avoid psychological shock. They might be willing to give up their lives in battle, but that did not mean they were ready for a predetermined death campaign from the outset. Being required by the military to fill out a suicide registration form surpassed the pilots' awareness, causing them constant inner conflict and pain when thinking about loved ones

left behind; they found themselves simultaneously unable and hesitant to refuse orders due to coercion and strict regulations in the military at that time. After the war, those individuals suffered even more when they realized they had been exploited by the military, betrayed by ideals they once trusted, the things they spared no effort to protect: "[W]e still try, willing to use our meager strength, to sacrifice ourselves to protect the country. Is that the thinking of a blinded patriot?" (392). Therefore, although the war ended many years ago, for veterans, the memories of war and suicide campaigns still haunt them.

The list of *kamikaze* pilots was always met with shock among the troops: "Both the chosen and the unchosen cried" (Hyakuta 361). However, there is a significant difference in the outward expression of those chosen for the suicide missions and those left behind. The suicide pilots try to maintain a calm demeanor at the time of takeoff as a means of reassuring the spirits of their comrades, while those left behind understand that and feel even more anguish having to bid farewell to their comrades for the last time. As individuals not yet named on the list of suicide attacks, not yet truly facing unavoidable death, they feel both relieved and burdened with guilt. This is especially so, as they understand that the suicide pilots are unable to bid farewell to their loved ones for the last time. This compounds their own emotional trauma during the anxious days of receiving orders for suicide attacks, as they think about their own families facing similar losses, complicating the modes of grief.

For those involved in tasks related to the suicide squadrons such as instructors and communication officers, they also have to endure immense moral crises in the final stages of the war. The instructors are veteran pilots of the Imperial Japanese Navy, and when the suicide campaign is enacted, they are tasked with training the suicide pilots. These students are all very young men, some of whom are outstanding university students who set aside their studies to enlist due to the deceitful propaganda of the militaristic government. This makes instructors like veteran Ito Kanji feel guilty for not being able to protect their students and for contributing to sending these young men with long futures ahead into the unrecoverable battlefield. Sixty years later, when recalling that training, Mr. Ito still escape the feeling of guilt, evident in his pained expression and tearful eyes as seen by the storyteller, who is also the fictional grandson of the veteran pilot Miyabe in *The Eternal Zero*.

Japanese communication officers were tasked with listening to telegram code transmitted by the suicide pilots to confirm the success of the attacks. For

former communication officer Onishi Yasuhiko in the novel, he feels deeply pained by the job he once had to do: "It is a job full of pain" (Hyakuta 456). "The moment that sound stopped, the life of a young man also ended. I don't know how to express the fear and pain I felt at that time, it felt like a dagger stabbing into my heart" (459). The operators have to confirm whether the attacks are successful or not, but on a moral level, what they are truly confirming is the death of a human being. The memories of those dreadful days still haunt him even when he recounts the story in reality sixty years later: "That sound still echoes in my ears. Even now, sometimes when I hear similar sounds, I freeze, my chest pounding violently, unable to stand up" (459). That sound triggers memories of Onishi and the guilt surrounding the missions. As Winter has mentioned in his book:

> Whatever their condition is termed, the victims of traumatic memory are "witnesses" of a special kind. Some are trapped in the past, condemned to reenact it when something trivial—smell, heat, sound—triggers something terrifying, buried in their memories. Their historical remembrance is involuntary, and their injuries are now treated by physicians and others who have made major advances in understanding the nature of this kind of remembrance. (8)

For the veteran Onishi, the sound of the telegraph is a haunting sound, a traumatic memory that could recur at any moment, even though he does not directly witness the deaths of his comrades. Soldiers' guilt arising from witnessing too many deaths of comrades leads some to a nihilistic choice; such is the case with Miyabe. His burden leads him to the final, fatal mission, perhaps in anguished guilt over the students whose lives were wasted for an irrational campaign. Miyabe accepts death both to repay the students who once saved him and as a liberation for himself. In the novel, Hyakuta also shows the perspective of the other side, when an American soldier directly witnesses the Japanese *kamikaze* pilots one by one sacrificing themselves in a heartbreaking manner. "Please don't come anymore! I don't know how many times I've begged for that" (Hyakuta 11). When recounting such fragments of memory, soldiers relive a bygone era, filled with immense pain and guilt. In the case of the war in Japan or and Vietnam, these memories are not just those of individual combatants, but

also of the entire community; these are memories that cannot be washed away, as Hashimoto mentioned in her book.

III. The Effects of Traumatic Memories on Soldiers' Lives

In *The Eternal* Zero, the resentment towards the unjust war leads surviving veterans to destruction, seeking revenge through cruel and aberrant acts. After witnessing the brutality of the Japanese military towards young soldiers in the war and directly participating in escorting *kamikaze* pilots in the irrational suicide mission, Kageura Kaizan harbors anger and contempt towards those in power. He suppresses feelings of helplessness for failing to protect Miyabe and turns his prior emotions into bitter resentment: "I cried out with all my might. Japan, you will be defeated! Imperial Navy, perish!'" (Hyakuta 447). After the war, he joins the Yakuza, claiming that he wants to seek revenge for his insane life. He has killed so many people that he is surprised he's still alive. The hatred and vendetta of the former pilot are also manifestations of psychological trauma, born from enduring a horrific, senseless war.

The trust of Japanese soldiers is exploited by the military to carry out campaigns that are irrational and inhumane, such as the *kamikaze* suicide missions toward the end of the war. However, these campaigns demonstrate the desperation of the Japanese military as they cannot stave off the inevitable defeat, yet their actions lead to countless lives being wasted meaninglessly. The *kamikaze* and *Kaiten* suicide squads consist of young soldiers, many of whom are new recruits, including students from universities. They are tasked with carrying out suicide attacks by piloting aircraft loaded with bombs into American naval fleets. After the war, when the facts come to light, they suffer a shocking collapse of trust, leaving behind significant psychological scars. Through the fictional narratives of veterans in *The Eternal Zero*, a complex portrait of Miyabe Kyuzo emerges. Miyabe understands the realities of war, the issue of human warfare, and the significance of family; he always yearns to survive and return to his own family after the war, often resisting orders from his superiors. Miyabe is often viewed with disdain by his comrades, and no one understands him. Because Miyabe can clearly see the mistakes of the war, such as the irrational *kamikaze* suicide missions that cause countless losses to many families, his anguish and torment only deepen. Throughout most of the battle, the pain simmers within him as he witnesses the deaths of many comrades.

However, it is the events that surpass his threshold of endurance, revealing the inherently inhumane and extreme nature of the war in its final stages, that leave Miyabe's psychological wounds unable to heal, constantly resurfacing. When the *kamikaze* campaign is enacted, Miyabe has to endure two painful tasks. Firstly, he has to become an instructor training prospective suicide pilots; and secondly, he has to escort his own students into the suicide attacks. This increasingly haunts Miyabe, and he becomes internally tormented and conflicted as he witnesses so many deaths without being able to protect anyone; while he himself remains alive, many young men with promising futures are forced into predetermined deaths, plunged into meaninglessness and irrationality. When the oppression, trauma, and conflicts reach their peak, Miyabe chooses to take the place of the student who had once saved him. Therefore, this choice is a liberation for Miyabe, ending a period of desperate darkness, torment, and guilt-ridden suffering with many comrades and sacrificed students, helping him clear his conscience. Furthermore, sacrificing his chance of survival for the student who once saved him is also Miyabe's way of repaying a debt, protecting the student, and imparting the desire for genuine happiness and meaning to the younger generation with open futures, like that student. The psychological traumas caused by the war push Miyabe to the brink. His death is a poignant testament to the trauma caused by the war when human life becomes cheaper than ever before. This dedicated and highly skilled Japanese pilot chooses death to liberate himself from guilt and deep spiritual wounds.

In *The Sorrow of War*, the painful experiences of war always haunt Kien's soul, even when peace has been restored: "When will I calm down? When will my heart be free of the tight grip of war? Whether pleasant or ugly memories, they are there to stay for ten, twenty years, perhaps forever" (Bao Ninh 44). Kien, like the veterans in *The Eternal Zero*, will never forget the war experiences he went through, even many years later. He confesses:

> I'm ready to jump in and mix it in the fiery scene of blood, mad killing, and brutality that warps soul and personality. The thirst for killing, the cruelty, the animal psychology, the evil desperation. I sit dizzied, shocked by the barbarous excitement of reliving close combat with bayonets and rifle butts. (47)

"Oh, my lost years and months and days! My lost era! My lost generation! Another night with bitter tears wetting the pillow" (45). Kien is completely trapped in the past, a past soaked in blood and tears from the ravages of war. Kien is lonely even when his comrades are cheering for victory. And that loneliness clings to him throughout the years, when he is alone in an empty room. Even when he wanders the streets, trying to blend in with the crowds, that loneliness still does not release him.

In his book, Hunt analyzes the situation of soldiers returning to civilian life as follows:

> Soldiers leaving the armed forces always have problems. They have to learn to adapt to civilian life, and they leave the "family" they may have known for many years. . . . Whatever the circumstances, the ex-soldier has to adapt to a new identity. For some, this is a difficult time, which may lead to them experiencing a form of war trauma, resulting not necessarily from particular combat experiences, but from the novel experience of being a civilian and being unable to adapt. (11)

Hunt's idea is true in the case of Kien in *The Sorrow of War,* when he returns from the battle to ordinary life. Kien not only suffers the trauma of war, but also suffers trauma in the form of an inability to adapt to everyday life. After the war, for Kien, "what remained was sorrow, the immense sorrow, the sorrow of having survived. The sorrow of war" (Bao Ninh 192). "Kien himself would have been dead long ago if it had not been for the sacrifice of others; he might even have killed himself to escape the psychological burden of killing others" (193). "Losses can be made good, damage can be repaired, and wounds will heal in time. But the psychological scars of the war will remain forever" (193).

The greatest trauma for Kien is the breakup of his relationship with Phuong, the girl whose image he has carried in his heart since his youth. Seventeen-year-old Phuong shone brightly at the Buoi schoolyard with her pure and innocent beauty; but it was also the beauty of suffering, of separation: "She was passionate, untamed, magnetic, with that same miraculous and unfathomable beauty, a beauty that made the heart ache; a vulnerable, innocent beauty forever on the brink of the abyss of destruction" (Bao Ninh 227). That beauty seems to foretell a fated loss. They are separated throughout the war

years, from the day Kien decides to leave Phuong behind after the incident on a cargo train following the bombing raid in Thanh Hoa. Phuong seems to have become a completely different person, and at that moment, Kien could no longer understand her. Returning after ten years apart, meeting again the beloved girl of the past, they embrace each other tightly. And the truth breaks Kien's heart; Phuong has another man, and they are planning to get married: "So, the divine war had paid him for all his suffering and losses with more suffering and loss at home" (84). Kien suffers from "dual trauma" due to the torment of war and a lost love. "His life, after ten destructive years of war, had then been punctured by the sharp thorns of love. Kien's new life with Phuong had broken both their hearts" (84). Although the two live together, those days only make them more miserable and tormented. The day Phuong leaves, Kien does not stop her, and afterward, he doesn't know what to do. Kien drifts away, unshaven, his eyes sunken, his cheeks hollow. He quietly and inexplicably gives up on his student life, drowning himself in endless alcohol and cigarettes. Kien begins to wander the streets at night, sleeping very little: "He would often awake to find himself writhing on the floor, tears streaming down his face, shivering with fear and cold. His numbed heart was seized up and his emotions overcame him" (70). He only cries, tears streaming down, longing for Phuong to return, even if it is only to relive the past suffering together. Phuong is the "untouchable" pain of Kien.

Hunt outlines the symptoms of post-traumatic stress (post-traumatic stress disorder was first introduced in 1980) in soldiers; they get bored, they get aggressive, they drink, and they cannot cope in the world:

> There is often a whole series of psychological symptoms of anxiety and depression, what we recognise as PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), and problems relating to drugs, violence or suicidal tendencies. Initially there is a slow deterioration in their psychological health. At first it is not really a problem; it is only over months or years that it becomes clinically significant. (11)

Kien is exactly that type of traumatized character. In *The Eternal Zero*, one of the former soldiers, after returning from the war, became a vengeful career criminal. According to a study by Winter: "The victims needed to find a kind of solace, a way to live with their memories. . . . Many of the witnesses, victims

of war and repression, bear traces of their injuries in subliminal ways. Some psychologists and cultural workers refer to these wounds as 'traumatic memory'" (7). Winter also mentions the victims who suffer trauma after the Vietnam war:

> "After the Vietnam war, the syndrome was officially recognized as post-traumatic stress disorder. The population affected by these injuries has grown . . . whether or not they were soldiers." (8)

All those who experience the war, whether military or civilian, suffer from PTSD symptoms. Narratives about war, therefore, are narratives of both men and women, old and young, soldiers and civilians, adults and children. Everyone, whether at home or in the field, is drawn into that war and has to endure its catastrophic consequences. The narrator in *The Sorrow of War* said that: "Our only postwar similarities stemmed from the fact that everyone had experienced difficult, painful, and different fates" (Bao Ninh 232). War entails pain, haunting presences, and indelible memories. Bao Ninh's novel explores the discourse of trauma in the case of a soldier who directly experiences the battlefield amidst the flames of war. His memories are filled with blood and tears; he is haunted endlessly by recollections of the pain of fallen comrades, and the pure love of youth with dreams and aspirations shattered and broken by war. The surviving soldier returning from war, already scarred in the soul, becomes even more isolated and fearful because he cannot return to normal life or reintegrate into the community. Kien must live with the haunting ghosts of a painful past pressing heavily on a cruel reality, seemingly obscuring any path to the future. In the work, we see the emergence of a traumatized space that is an extension of Kien's war-ravaged worldview. This is the remembered space of the battlefield, murky and dark, infiltrating the cramped, solitary space of the small room where Kien sits, writing and then tearing up and burning each page of his manuscript.

In both works, the memories of war seem to imprison the soldiers within repeated scenes of carnage. The soldier in *The Sorrow of War*, even returning decades later after the war's end, still cannot truly integrate into ordinary life. He tries to escape from the realm of those painful memories, but he cannot. He can only live with it, carry it in his life's baggage, by recounting it, reminiscing about it, through literature. As for the surviving veterans in *The Eternal Zero*,

their enduring memories of fallen comrades who made brave, heroic sacrifices are tragically intense. In the fragments of fictional memories pieced together, there are secrets they carry throughout the rest of their lives after the war, about the comrades they admire and mourn for, like Miyabe. The work is not just the memories of an individual, but of a community, of previous and subsequent generations, with the previous generation reminiscing about the past, and the subsequent generation searching and deeply understanding their ancestors. In this way, cultural memories of war are not buried and lost, but instead become traces that condition the lives of generations; moreover, they become the threads that connect the past and the present, linking the previous generations with their descendants, to enable the subsequent generation to understand, empathize, share, and appreciate the existential situations of their ancestors. Memories of war are something that cannot be forgotten, cannot be erased, no matter how hard one tries, as the German philosopher Harald Weinrich observed: as the "unforgotten" or the "not-to-be-forgotten" (4). Memories of war have a direct impact on people's lives, even when that reality has receded decades ago, as in the case of surviving soldiers after the war in both of the mentioned works.

IV. Narrative Rupture

The Eternal Zero is a mosaic of fictional memories from surviving veterans about the *kamikaze* during World War II and about the pilot Miyabe; *The Sorrow of War* consists of the writings of Kien, a soldier returning from the war, about his own life, love, and war. The narrative rupture in Bao Ninh's novel can be seen more clearly, following the character Kien's stream of consciousness as he struggles with memory; while the plot in Hyakuta's work is based on the fictional notes and collections of Miyabe's two grandchildren, that are in fact highly organized works of Hyakuta's imagination. The memories of war for Kien in *The Sorrow of War* are fragmented, not following a linear timeline. Kien writes in the flow of memories and emotions. The story is pieced together from fragments, shards of memory. He pieces together these fragments on the pages of his manuscript, writing and erasing, erasing and then writing again many times. The narrator in *The Sorrow of War* comments on Kien's manuscript: At first, it was incomprehensible because the manuscript was so chaotic, without any order, but later he understood and found that: "sometimes

the descriptions were compelling" (Bao Ninh 229). The entire novel is written through the fragmented memories of Kien. He writes in a stream of consciousness style, where the past and present, the wartime experiences of a soldier, and the struggles of a civilian in the post-war reality intertwine and blend together. On a freezing night, the faces of each member of his platoon appeared before him, reconstructing the horrific battle that wiped out his 27th battalion. His spirit is adrift, his consciousness blurs and confuses as Kien wanders restlessly, flashes of memory flickering. Stumbling, he sits down at the table; mechanically, he picks up a pen and, instead of writing a letter, writes something entirely different. He writes in a continuous flow.

The narrator refers to Kien as "the writer of our neighborhood" (Bao Ninh 228). When he leaves his apartment, papers scatter from his table, from the bookcase, and from a heap of pages in the corner. The mute woman gathers all the sheets of paper and piles them on top of the manuscript. She secretly keeps those pages of Kien's manuscript and waits for him to return. The narrator is the one who rearranges those pages. "I've copied almost everything, all the pages I acquired by chance from the woman. . . . I simply played the role of the Rubik cube player, arranging the order" (231). The narrator recognizes that inside his story are ideas, feelings and even situations that resonate within himself, and he realizes that he had known the writer during the war. He describes his struggles with the text:

> I tried to rearrange the manuscript pages into chronological order, to make the manuscript read like the sort of book I was familiar with. But it was useless. There was no chronological order at all. Any page seemed like the first, any page could have been the last. Even if the manuscript had been numbered, even if no pages had been burned, or moth-eaten, or withheld by the author, if by chance they were all there, this novel would still be a work created by turbulent, even manic inspiration. (229)

"Many would say this was a disruption of the plot, a disconnection, a loss of perspective. They'd say this style proved the writer's inherent weakness: his spirit was willing but his flesh wasn't" (230). The first-person narrator in *The Sorrow of War* is also a soldier, appearing only in the final few pages of the novel. He reflects on the writings about the story of the character Kien. Kien

can only heal himself by living with his memories, with the love and youth that have passed. He writes as a way to express himself, as if to alleviate the sorrows of the present. "All I knew was that the author had written because he had to write, not because he had to publish. He had to think on paper. Then of all things, he delivered everything to a lonely, mute woman who could easily have destroyed his turbulent revelations" (230). The narrator also expresses empathy for the character Kien through the pages of his manuscript:

> But we also shared a common sorrow, the immense sorrow of war. It was a sublime sorrow, more sublime than happiness, and beyond suffering. It was thanks to our sorrow that we were able to escape the war, escape the continual killing and fighting, the terrible conditions of battle and the unhappiness of men in fierce and violent theaters of war. (232)

It can be said that the narrative rupture in Bao Ninh's novel is clear, following the main character's memory.

V. Trauma and Healing through Literary Narration

The writings of author Bao Ninh in *The Sorrow of War* depict fear and haunting due to the bombs and vivid imagery of war: hunger, fever, wounds, flesh and bones scattered on the battlefield. Kien wanders through the night, almost sleepless. He sits motionless in a dimly lit, cramped room, and it seems he has found an escape: he must write. That is his path to redemption. Kien seems to have resurrected, he finds out his new life. Memories emerge one after another in his mind. "There is no new life, no new era, nor is it hope for a beautiful future that now drives me on, but rather the opposite. The hope is contained in the beautiful prewar past" (Bao Ninh 47). It is when he is trapped in the past and unable to escape its haunting that Kien finds spiritual support, enabling him to continue living through days filled only with alcohol, cigarettes, and nocturnal writing. Even the memory of Phuong is a sweet memory from before the war, when they were both innocent and full of romance. Phuong, in Kien's mind, remains an image of youthfulness, beauty, and perfection.

War has taken everything from him: comrades in life and death, youth, and the girl he loved all his life. Kien knows that only by writing can he release his emotions: "He continues his quest for perfection, crossing out, erasing, crossing out again, editing, tearing up some pages, then tearing up and destroying all. Then he starts over again, making out each syllable like a learner trying to spell a new word" (Bao Ninh 49). His room is almost constantly lit throughout the night. Kien feels he bears a destiny, to write about the sorrow of war, to heal the wounds in his soul: "At the bottom of his heart he believes he exists on this earth to perform some unnamed heavenly duty. A task that is sacred and noble, but secret" (50). Kien parallels the author as he writes about his own life, narrating the traumas from which he is unable to heal. And as a healing of the lost love within him, though once the greatest sorrow of his life, he finally comes to understand that: "So, despite the horrors of war, despite the cruelties, the humiliations, despite all the ridiculous prejudices and dogma which pervaded everyone's life, his Phuong would remain young forever. She would be untainted by war. She would he forever beautiful" (227). The beautiful memories have uplifted his soul. The memories of love and the memories of war merge into vitality and inspiration, helping him escape the ordinary bitterness of his fate after the war. Kien believes that writing for him is a destiny, a lifeline: "It was necessary to write about the war, to touch readers' hearts, to move them with words of love and sorrow, to bring to life the electric moments, to let them, in the reading and the telling, feel they were there, in the past, with the author" (56), Kien tells himself. Kien is the epitome of a traumatized character seeking to heal his wounds through writing. At least, through writing and reliving the painful past of his life, Kien can attempt to redeem himself, as Goldberg writes:

> The pencil is not just a means of writing but first and foremost an object that enables the inaccessible pain to somehow be grasped. The words follow. The pencil as an object could therefore be understood as opening again the essential gap between the writer and the world, allowing the chain of signifiers to emerge. (136)

Writing becomes an essential means not only to create works of art but also to relieve and heal mental anguish. Bao Ninh's *The Sorrow of War* is itself a form of therapy for the writer. He understands that writing down memories

and past emotions is the only way to free himself from them. Hynes has called this kind of writing "the soldiers' tale" (9), and Winter has described such narrative practices as "the ways soldiers represented or explained terrifying experiences to themselves and to those around them" (Winter 61).

In contrast to *The Sorrow of War*, the novel *The Eternal Zero* incorporates the perspective of the younger generation—those who did not directly engage in combat, but search for memories of their ancestors. The novel demonstrates an exploration and re-examination of the past, pointing out the atrocities of the fascist government and the Imperial Japanese Navy, while also reassessing the issues surrounding the Japanese soldiers, imagining emotional complexities not attested to in standard accounts of the war. The novel speculates on the reasons behind their views and actions in response to the government's rhetoric, presenting them in a humane light that has not gone unchallenged by readers. The novel constructs an insider's perspective through the fictional testimonies of veterans. They are presented as multidimensional individuals with deep personal feelings and love for their country and family; they have faith in the cultural traditions of loyalty and obedience but also express certain doubts and resistance to the rhetoric and orders of the government and the military. They are forced to make choices between loved ones at home and the suicidal mission demanded by the military. These psychological complexities as presented in the narrative result in intense internal conflicts, prolonged mental torment, and haunting recollections.

The Eternal Zero aims to serve as a bridge between the younger generation—those fortunate enough to be born in times of peace—and the previous generation who endured war to witness its ferocity and brutality, the scars of which are not easily erased from humanity. From this, the story embodies the desire to preserve and cherish the value of life and human relationships as well as the delicate precious peace currently enjoyed in Japan. The novel has shocked and perplexed Japanese readers with the imagined personal narratives of individuals. They are not merely emotionless machines, nor are they "suicide bombers" as perceived by the majority of the populace. They are courageous, resolute, and lead emotionally rich and meaningful lives. The memories of war are always suppressed, tearing at the psyche of surviving soldiers until they are finally able to express the truths of their lives and those of their comrades.

Literature about war exists in many countries, where the "internal" voice of the soldier is always a focal point. Winter has also addressed this issue:

> There has been a burst of interest in recent years in "war literature," understood as a genre of writing in which soldiers display the authority of direct experience in telling their "truth" about war and combat. In the process, they offer reflections on much else besides—on comradeship and masculinity, on the image of the enemy, on national sentiment, on the burden of survival when so many others failed to come back, and on the "lies" that those who were not there told about those who were. (103)

Hyakuta intends *The Eternal Zero* to vindicate the surviving veterans, also awakening the awareness of the Japanese people and future generations about the *kamikaze* pilots in World War II. In contrast, *The Sorrow of War* presents the soldier's voice, revealing another face of the war—its brutality, suffering, loss, and trauma—alongside the heroic fighting spirit of the soldiers.

In his novel, the author Bao Ninh raises questions about the changing ways of writing and perceiving war. The first challenge for the writer is how to write about war. When starting the novel, Kien asks himself: "Why choose war? Why must he write of the war?" (Bao Ninh 56). *The Sorrow of War* is written in a new style, breaking the conventions of traditional war literature by not glorifying heroes but instead focusing on the pain and loss of the soldiers. Because of this, the novel faced much criticism from critics and writers who were also soldiers at the time of its release.[5] Many other works about war often praise the fighting spirit and heroic sacrifices of soldiers, aiming to instill patriotism, uphold heroic traditions, and inspire the military and people to fight. *The Sorrow of War* is not among them. The two works converge at this point: the war has passed, yet the sorrow, loss, trauma, and memories of war remain ever-present. Kien "deeply desires to write about war in a way that is different

[5] *The Sorrow of War* was first published in Vietnam in 1990. It became one of three novels awarded by the Vietnam Writers' Association in 1991, but the award was later revoked due to public backlash. The novel faced significant criticism primarily for its fictional portrayal of offensive incidents and its alleged distortions of the Vietnamese People's Army soldiers, as well as for comments that were seen as slandering the nation's resistance against the American war.

from before." Commenting on *The Sorrow of War* (also known as *The Destiny of Love*), Goldenberg quotes the poet and translator Duong Tuong, who states:

> It was the first truthful book about the war. The writing about the war was mainly speeches about heroism and patriotism - the positive side of the war. Most of the novels about the Vietnam war praised the heroism of the soldiers, and they never delved into the innermost feelings of those who took part in the fighting. They did not look at the human side of the fighters. (qtd. in Goldenberg)

Writer Bao Ninh also states: "I write about war to oppose war, write about war is to write about peace—about love, joy, forgiveness, reconciliation, and other humanitarian ideas"[6] (qtd. in Quynh). The process of writing the novel is not only a way for him to express his personal pain and loss but also a part of his journey of recovery and self-expression. In the circumstances of the character Kien, he cannot escape the memories of war and struggles to reintegrate into society. However, perhaps remembering and writing are the best therapeutic methods for him to find peace of mind, allowing him to reconnect with his fallen comrades, recall beautiful memories, and perhaps, that is the most suitable choice for Kien.

VI. Conclusion

Two authors, in addressing the issue of war and trauma, lay bare the visceral experiences of soldiers directly involved in combat. *The Sorrow of War* constitutes a raw autobiographical account of surviving soldiers crushed under the weight of memories of war. *The Eternal Zero* posits a rewriting of history that speculatively humanizes the agents of Japanese Imperial aggression and war crimes. Miyabe embodies that act of rewriting and reimagining the unimaginable. For surviving veterans carrying both physical pain and psychological trauma, expressing their memories of war, reliving those horrific memories, is a way to heal their souls. Recounting, retelling, and reenacting trauma in order to be heard and understood is a method of healing. The two

[6] Translated from Vietnamese by the author.

works both stem from the cataclysm of war, although their respective responses are quite diverse.

Through their works, the two authors connect the younger generation with the older generation, so that the younger generation can understand and empathize with the pain that their ancestors and the nation as a whole had to endure during the war, thereby aiming for a peaceful, happy life. As Dorry Laub said: "the survivors did not only need to survive so that they could tell their story; they also needed to tell their story in order to survive" (qtd. in Felman and Laub 78). Writing is not only a practice of remembering but also a practice of humanity, marking them as human beings in the inhuman conditions of war. "Language," wrote Walter Benjamin, "shows clearly that memory is not an instrument for exploring the past, but its theatre. It is the medium of past experience, as the ground is the medium in which dead cities lie interred" (qtd. in Winter 275).

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