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Exploring Narratives of Exile and Displacement in War literature

N. Mongyung Phom

Assistant Professor

Department of English

Dimapur Government College

Dimapur

Abstract

After World War I, war literatures have been one of the genres which make the readers to connect emotionally on a deeper level. War literatures are mostly written by people who have been directly affected by war physically and physiologically. They use literature and art as a form of coping mechanism to get away from the war trauma. War literatures are mostly personal story narrations with characters that project their insecurities and fear. Narrations of war and peace makes gateway to let out the inner fear caused by the sudden trauma and to help themselves get back to reality. Exile and Displacement occur when people are forced out of their mother land, homes, culture, creating a forced Exodus.

Keywords: War Literature, Exile and displacement, physical and psychological displacement, cultural and social impact, War trauma.

I.INTRODUCTION

This work on war Literature of exile and displacement deals with narrations that have been published after WWI. Most novels and poems are heart wrenching and to know the pain they went through is un-amendable. It also centers around the physical and psychological displacement and how war and peace have an impact on culture and social changes. To also show how war literature have been a major breakthrough in post-colonial literature and how it has been a gateway to reality from the shunned out world.

To explore certain novels and poems based on war literature which have stood out and shown the world the pain and hope for a better world. This work explores themes of identity, belonging, and the impact of dislocation, providing a unique perspective on the human condition. War has never stopped since WWI and due to that it has become an important part in literature which helps to keep a record of the history. War literatures have been a major symbol of change in cultural attitudes.

War Literature

War literature is important as it shows a wide range of emotions, especially it warns about the argument of peace, armed conflict. The war was disastrous but even more disastrous for those who didn't die in the conflict because they now swing between life or death and not being able to move forward. Literature memorializes the death and brings out emotions that had been held back during war. The most common themes of War literature are courage, sacrifices, survival and the impact of war on society and humans. Literature used to be light weight, sweet and soft but war brought a drastic and cynical change of literature into pain and suffering. War has always been conducted in the name of achieving peace but in result there is only sadness and trauma. Brutalities of war have been brought out to light only through literature.

Literature on Exile and Displacement:

Displacement occurs in two stages physically and psychologically. Physical displacement occurs when people are forced to go from one place to another without any assurance of their livelihood which leads to psychological displacement causing the feel of being alone or alienated. Slavery and refugee crisis and forced migration connect with literature. In literature, displacement often manifests through characters projecting their insecurities or unresolved issues onto the characters. The concept can also illustrate societal anxieties by showing how collective fears are redirected in a narrative context. The novel "The Book of Thief" by Markus Zusak is a novel written during the WWII set in Nazi Germany this novel is about the adventures of a girl named Liesel narrated by Death. This narrative deals with death, literature and love. This story is about how she lost everyone close to heart during her childhood due to constant war. She had to lose her parents and her brother during the displacement and she even lost her foster parents and friends. This novel rounds around how war breaks Liesel each and every time when she tries to pull herself back together and adjust to the new environment.

Similarly we have “Slaughter house – five” written by Kurt Vonnegut which circles around a soldier’s story of trauma caused by displacement. This novel travels through time and circulates the soldier’s early life until the post war days, the capture by the German army, the survival of the Allied firebombing of Dresden. The main themes are war and death, religion, mental illness and postmodernism. An interesting concept of traumatic experiences of displacement caused by war is the poems of John Guzlowski. His powerful poems like “Landscape with dead horses”, “Cattle train to Magdeburg” and “Lessons of War”. Being the son of parents who met in a Nazi slave labour camp, his poems are filled with the displacement trauma, the forced migration caused by war were inspired by his parent’s experiences during the war

War literature has an abundance of writers whose writings have thrived while they were in exile. In *Reflections of Exile and Other Essays*, Edward Said claims that exile produces “rancor and regret, as well as a sharpened vision. What has been left behind can be either mourned or can be used to produce a different set of lenses”. In ancient Rome, the state council at that time had the power to exile individuals or families. One of the victims was poet Ovid. Who was forced to move to Constanta and there was where he wrote his famous work *Tristia*, who spoke about his sorrows and feelings in exile. Also Exile literature includes many artists who migrated to Europe or the US for political and economic reasons like V S Naipaul, Derek Walcott, Edwidge Danticat and Sam Selvon. Most common texts were written during and after war by ‘Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen and some poems by ‘Ivor Gurney’ ‘Edward Thomas, David Jones’ etc. Most of the war literature was written by men often from the perspective of a soldier or as a male who was forced to join the army.

Physical and Psychological Displacement

Compared to other effects of war, the impact on people’s mental health is one of the important chapters to be looked upon. Exile and displacement in war has caused many refugees to feel like living out of their body. They use this dissociation as a coping mechanism making their bodies feel numb and become emotionless. During war they are forced to get away from their country and after war when the refugees that started to adapt to live in exile are asked to come back but they mostly feel impossible to return due to the bloodshed and the trauma they had to experience physically and emotionally.

Compared to the physical displacement, psychological displacement or the invisible displacement is caused to people who live in the war zone in contact fear due to the loss of a loved one, exile, loss of livelihood and many more.

Furthermore not only the victims of war zone but the soldiers who stand at the front lines ace significant mental stress and PTSD. This emotional toll of war on civilians caused the breakdown of social unity. Due to the exposure to conflict and blood shed vulnerable people like women and children and elderly people are the mostly affected due to gender based violence like sexual abuse. Children are exposed to armed weapons and conflicts at a very young age causing stress and psychological problem which affects their growth pattern and their view on even simple things defer. Anger and loneliness are the main factors that are caused due to longer duration of exposure towards war and conflict and also the lack of basic needs like food, water and shelter. These are the main reasons that cause mental stress which also leads to decline in physical health and caused long term trauma.

In recent years a large number of books have documented about war on mental health. Some of the books are “Disaster and mental health”, “Trauma interventions in war and peace: prevention, practice and policy” and many more. After the second world, there has not been any world war but throughout these years there have been war and conflicts all over the world. There have also been studies about how war and conflict have caused more mortality rates compared to any pandemic disease. As a matter of fact the loss of life during war is less compared to the people affected by war physically and psychologically. There have been many un-documented issues caused during warfare mostly mental growth, mal-nutrition, and disability.

Cultural and Social Impact

Mass displacement causes a cultural impact where people. Forced migration of thousands of people all around the world have become the main theme for literary imaginaries. The projection of trauma and the manipulation of politics and society have been seen in many work related to war. It has even inspired to create violent displacement to future displacement and exile. Living and learning different cultures affects the continuation of one’s life. Also one would be so scared to speak up at any circumstances due to previous fear and trauma.

During the first few years of National Socialism many Jews and German artists fled into exile. Two main artists whose exile literature received credit world-wide were Klaus Mann and Anna Seghers. Klaus Mann’s “Der Vulkan” describes about the German exile and was also known as a novel among emigrants. Anna Seghers published her novel “Das SiebteKreuz”. People who have been displaced during war face many challenges like adapting to new environment and a change of social standard. Displacement and exile during war impacts the social and cultural norms of the victims. Destruction of national heritage and historical artifacts causes a loss of cultural identity.

The main cause for a conflict of war is mostly fighting for peace which results to disaster. This phase goes through a lot of emotional toll, social disruption and the loss of cultural significance.

Nationalism is one of the main factors that spark war. WWI was the first greatest armed war of the 20th century that sparked all over the world. That was when displacement and exile started to grow. There was lot of loss – many cities destroyed and many families lost their home. Not only physical loss and emotional loss, there was also loss of money since most of the money had to be used up for armed weapons, bombs etc. This war even caused changes in cities and demolishing of empires all over the world, most of the empires had no other way but to surrender, which in the later future sparked WWII. The second war was even worst than the first one which was started by Adolf Hitler which lasted nearly six years causing more bloodshed and more social and culture disruption than the previous one. An Attack on a country's cultural heritage has a direct impact on the country's identity.

One of the direct impacts of war has been touched by literature. Authors tend to write about the sacrifices and the gore of the war and try to point out the social changes that have been causing before and during war. Many writers felt the need to speak up even if their life was in danger. Some works were even banned during that time which later on was published. Even soldiers started writing poems about their experiences and used poetry as a coping mechanism to let out their stress. War took many men to itself leaving out women to take roles traditionally considered to be for men. They had to provide for the kids and make a livelihood while their husbands or sons were fighting. Some women started to speak up and take up seats in the social forum. Some women started writing, especially poems creating an opportunity to express their thoughts on female roles during war – their sacrifice and sufferings.

After the Great War the major contented – The Great Britain was the most affected socially and economically. The swift changes in social form have compelled many writers to speak out the society illness and a hope for change.

Identity Disruption and Loss of Belonging

Literature is a form of expressing past traumatic experience in a masked form. Identify disruption is a form of confusion caused due to certain traumatic experiences and certain situation they had to go through. This literary form explores themes of identity, belonging, and the impact of dislocation, providing a unique perspective on the human condition. Famous examples include works by authors such as James Joyce, who vividly portrays the struggles of expatriation and the search for self in an unfamiliar world.

Human mind always need a feel of belonging to improve and elevate themselves but the wars, things that happen during war – the killing, the torture, etc., everything can make a person break in several ways mostly losing the sense of belonging. Making them feel as though they do not belong anywhere and has to constantly live in a fear of life or death because they never know who would come after them.

People who live in exile lose their identity and involuntarily adapt a new identity to survive in the new environment which makes it difficult for them to go back home and go to their old identity. Some people who are not able to adapt to new identity or the new cultural often try to kill themselves believing that death and the unknown is where they belong, where there is no fear and no hunger. People tend to forget the conflicts and struggle caused in the past, poems and musical compositions, novels, plays etc remind people of the struggle of the past and the reason of them being where they are. Identity disruption is caused mostly in adolescents alter their major life events later in life. While enduring traumatic experience they have to take care of what's left of them and their family, hoping not to lose of what is left.

The writers during the War times were addressed as Lost Generation by Gertrude Stein because the war left them directionless and aimless. All they had in mind was the feeling of war fear and mental stress. The authors during that time, they had a cynical perspective of life which can be seen through their works. Some authors who come under the list of lost generations are Ernest Hemingway, T. S. Eliot, F. Scott Fitzgerald and John Dos Passos.

Resilience and Hope

After WWI, people were confused and stressed and were searching for a way to revive themselves. When WWII came into action, people beliefs started to navigate towards religion. We can see the religious impact as a way of believing in something is many literatures after the Second World War. A great example for this change is the conversion of W.H Auden from Marxism to Christianity; this change can be seen in his poems.

After so much war and heartbreak people needed something to hold on to and something that will keep them going on which sparked religious believes even more prominent all over the world. There were literary works having religious impact in them. We could see drastic change from the literature before war and after war. Everything was spoken about, nothing could be silenced anymore because people understood how powerful literature can be. Besides the war after effects, most of the authors were gay and bisexual which was seen in most of their texts.

Though the survivors of war are considered as heroes, they themselves cannot consider themselves as hero because all they want to do is to forget the times in war instead of remembering it because of the guilt of fighter's life being cut short. No amount of statistics can measure the true sufferings of the victims of war because emotions and sufferings can never be measured and can never be compared. The only hope is so provide physical, emotional support to those in pain post war. Society should look onto the effected family's financial and economic problems and help them which would solve at least 1% of their problems When several years of rooted believes and culture have been destroyed it will never be easy to rebuild what have been destroyed.

Resilience is not an easy thing to achieve after experiencing horrific war. But the attempt by many self-help groups, taking into refugees, feeding them and supporting them in all possible ways. Victims and soldiers after war are been effected in various way, the silence seems to be too loud and impossible to coupe up with the silence. Physical and mental resilience is important as it helps to prevent from long term mental disorder and behavioural problem. Developing resilience is usually a personal development because even though there are many ways to bring people out of their trauma, it is their personal thought and personal feel and the want to lead a proper life will be the only way to get them used to the new normal.

When hope is lost, some people rely on words specially poems, use of metaphors for hope to create a better understanding of hope to cultivate faith and the ability to bounce back and to remain determined. Some of the poems that speak the importance of hope and resilience are “won't you celebrate with me” by Lucille Clifton, ““Hope” is the thing with feathers”, by Emily Dickinson, “Psalms 150” by Jericho Brown etc.

Once faced with such conflict, there are often split reports of feeling more connected or disconnected from religion (Larsen et al., 2024).

II. CONCLUSION

Literature has been now shaped by war because it is about people's reality and how they find comfort in literature. The authors not only show the reality and suffering but also offer ideas on a brighter future giving people a hope to go on. Literature has caused many life changing experiences and has helped people to accept the reality as a part of the healing process. It is always easy to start a war but difficult to stop one. All these narratives clearly shows how war never benefitted anyone, it has always been of bloodshed and cries and loss. From WWI displacement all over the world to Syria over a decade of displacement, Democratic

Republic of Congo 20 years of displacement, Afghanistan 40 years of displacement, Palestine over 70 years of displacement and many more.

This article explains only 1% of the total war literature. Since thousands of people have been affected during war in many countries all around the world and many literary works have emerged since then. War novels and military fictions which takes place on a battlefield or which content war experiences. War has produced number of novels by writers all over the world, which have brought a drastic change in literary themes. War literature has brought in the new normal to the world making changes in every form from social reforms to traumatic experiences.

The strength of civilization is not measured by its ability to fight wars, but rather by its ability to prevent them – Gene Roddenberry.

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