

Trauma Narratives of Diasporic Journeys: Huynh's *South Wind Changing* and Nguyen's *Where the Ashes Are* as Vietnamese Diasporic Literature

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Abstract—This paper, through Jade Ngoc Quang Huynh's *South Wind Changing* and Qui Duc Nguyen's *Where the Ashes Are*, discusses traumatic experiences of the authors and other Vietnamese diasporic subjects during their journeys to the new world. As portrayed in these two autobiographies, the exodus from their homelands is laden with traumatic memories developed from horrible experiences they receive from domestic journeys to escape from war and journeys across the ocean to escape from Communist oppression and persecution. The traumatic memories are deeply engraved in the authors' imagination and later transformed to be trauma narratives which function as channels through which they share traumatic experiences with other groups in the society. Therefore, the above two autobiographies serve as a bridge to connect people in their group with other groups, as they provide readers with more understanding about their people. These narratives can also be read as a healing process to help the authors, as trauma sufferers, to recover from or cope with painful memories. The discussion of this paper indicates that Vietnamese diasporic literature is informed by traumatic memories, the collective memories of its people.

Index Terms—Vietnamese diasporic literature, traumatic memories, trauma narratives.

I. INTRODUCTION

Vietnamese diasporic literature refers to writing by Vietnamese people who are dispersed from their homelands and resettle in different parts of the globe due to desperate conditions in their country. This paper studies two autobiographies—originally written in English—by Vietnamese American writers: Jade Ngoc Quang Huynh's *South Wind Changing* and Qui Duc Nguyen's *Where the Ashes Are*. Both two authors are categorized as diasporic subjects which are defined as the minority who are dispersed from their homelands regardless of conditions and reasons for their departure [1]. Huynh and Nguyen, along with other Vietnamese people, have experienced the persecution of the Vietnam War which dispersed them from their homelands in Vietnam and relocated them to several parts of the country [2], [3]. The ensuing power of the Communist regime after the war also oppressed and persecuted them. A large number of these people lost their freedom to spend lives like normal

people and were forced to endure extreme state's policies, while a large number of them were captured and sent to re-education camps where they underwent horrible experiences [4]. These conditions resulted in the great diaspora of Vietnamese people from their country, who decided to abandon homelands in search for new lives. This group of people includes Huynh and Nguyen, the two authors of the literary texts analyzed in this study. Viewing that there was no hope in their homelands, they took diasporic journeys to abandon them and ended up in the United States, where they resettled and became writers telling stories of their people to various groups of readers.

Like other Vietnamese diasporic subjects, Huynh and Nguyen have been through many traumatic experiences during the war and later the Communist regime. It is evident that their autobiographies are largely constructed by traumatic memories, which serve as testimonies against all oppressive powers shattering their lives. As autobiographies, *South Wind Changing* and *Where the Ashes Are* offer authenticity and reliability. According to Spacks, compared with novels or other fictional works, autobiography as a genre is more realistic and reliable in terms of authenticity because it is from the author's real life [5]. Therefore, to a great extent, these two autobiographies are reliable in terms of true reflection of lives of the two authors and other Vietnamese diasporic people.

Since the above autobiographies are constructed by traumatic memories, they can be categorized as traumatic narratives. Trauma is defined as overwhelming or catastrophic experience which recurs uncontrollably in a person's imagination as intrusive phenomena which disrupt the life of that person [6]. A soldier, for example, who witnesses massive killings and deaths in a battle field can suffer from trauma which brings the memory back to his imagination in the forms of nightmares or hallucinations. He can neither control nor eradicate that memory from his being. While the narrative is an action of telling stories, when it is combined with the term trauma, the definition of trauma narrative can be drawn as the story portraying overwhelming or catastrophic experience of the narrator who suffers from trauma. Like in imagination, the traumatic memory recurs in the trauma narrative, picturing events witnessed or experienced by the narrator.

Categorizing the above autobiographies as trauma narratives, this paper discusses the authors' traumatic experiences during their diasporic journeys which include the journey during the war period and the journey across the

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ocean to escape from the oppression and persecution in their home country to refugee camps at neighboring countries and finally to the United States, their new world. This paper also explores how the two authors employ writing as a means to cope with trauma, connect people, and voice out for their own people who have to become diasporic subjects as a result of war and Communist oppression and persecution.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Vietnamese diasporic people have been through many tragic events in their homelands, during their journeys, and in the new world. Their lives are laden with painful and bitter experiences from the hardship and loss of loved ones and homelands [2], [3]. There is a number of these people who desire to tell their stories and become writers. Since most of the Vietnamese refugees resettled in the United States, prominent writers are in this country. Besides, there are other Vietnamese writers who are in other countries, such as Australia and France, which are also final destinations of their diasporic journeys.

Vietnamese diasporic writing is considered part of Southeast Asian diasporic writing as a whole. Southeast Asian diasporic literature is largely constructed by the authors' memories of homelands [7]. Compared to Asian American literature, which is a larger field, Southeast Asian diasporic literature has developed a new trend. In an earlier stage, Asian diasporic authors sought inclusion in the mainstream society of their host country. Therefore, their works focus on lives in the new world and how to promote themselves as part of that new world. In later stages, however, authors in this field, which includes Southeast Asian and Vietnamese diasporic literature, focus on the contexts in their homelands. This evolution agrees with Cheung's argument saying that the trend of Asian American literature is shifting from claiming America to connecting Asia with America [8]. That is to say, unlike the trend in the earlier stage, in which Asian American writers employed literature as a means to claim that they are fully American and want to be included as Americans, this new trend serves as a bridge to connect their Southeast Asian identity, culture, and heritage with the new identity as Asian American. Vietnamese diasporic literature, as part of Southeast Asian and Asian American literature, is also in the same direction. Memories of homelands are employed by the authors as the major content of their literary works. They represent their homelands and offer their backgrounds to the audience in the new world. In many literary works, it is evident that their authors yearn for their homelands and at the same time offer an opportunity to the audience to experience their homelands through their writing. Lan Cao's *Monkey Bridge*, for example, portrays the author's memories of the rice field which is the place where she grows up and the place where many transformations in her life take place [7].

Memories of homelands cannot be separated from the social contexts in the home countries of diasporic people. Regarding the Vietnamese group, their memories of homelands are full of war experience and its consequences, as this group of people have been through many wars and social disruptions. As a result, Vietnamese diasporic

literature is contextualized by war and its aftermath [9]. Traces of wars and its consequences are always found in Vietnamese diasporic literature. This is because Vietnamese diasporic people cannot eradicate their traumatic experiences as a result of wars and Communist oppression and persecution which they were forced to undergo.

In fact, according to Truong, Vietnamese diasporic literature emerged in the literature field long before the massive exodus of Vietnamese refugees after the Vietnam War. However, the presence of the Vietnamese and their literature was of little interest for readers and scholars in the area of literature especially in the period before the fall of Saigon in 1975, since there were a very small number of Vietnamese diasporic people. In the early stage of Vietnamese American literature, oral tradition—oral histories, folklore, song lyrics, and other oral narratives—was employed to transmit stories of Vietnamese immigrants, including memories of wars and their exodus. Many oral histories were compiled in two books, *Hearts of Sorrow* (1989) by Freeman and *Shallow Graves* (1981) by Larsen and Nga, in which Americans are either an editor or a coauthor. However, these two books are U.S.-centric; Vietnamese voices are manipulated by the American editor or coauthor and, as a consequence, lack autonomy. In the latter part of her study, Truong analyzes two autobiographies, Huynh's *South Wind Changing* and Nguyen's *Where the Ashes Are*, published in the same year, 1994. Both of them depict the exodus of Vietnamese refugees escaping from the persecution of the Communist regime. These two autobiographies are free from the tension of coauthorship or manipulation by editors. Therefore, they are regarded as true voices of Vietnamese Americans [9]. This is an important argument and reason why these two autobiographies were selected to study in this paper.

Vietnamese diasporic literature is highly politic, as political issues are often presented in many works. As can be seen in the historical contexts, political conflicts serve as the most significant root of Vietnamese diaspora. Those conflicts were developed into great wars. After the wars, a great number of people had to flee from their country simply because they had opposite or different political views. That is, those who disagreed with the Communist doctrines had no place to live in Vietnam. Political issues and conflicts have become materials for Vietnamese diasporic writers to use in their compositions. This argument is supported by Ha who studied several political issues in Vietnamese diasporic writing and found that it presents the corrupt Saigon government, the U.S. intervention of the country, and the Vietcong (Communist group) opposition of the government [10]. The political conflicts had developed to be great wars and later oppression and persecution which caused Vietnam to be an unlivable place for a large number of its people.

In his dissertation, Praphan also touches upon political issues in Vietnamese diasporic literature, as he contends that in some works readers are presented with ideologies. During the Vietnam War, apart from the physical fighting, both the United States and the Communist group also battle in the war of ideologies. Both of them want to win the hearts of Vietnamese people and gain support from them, so they try to instill their ideologies in people [7]. However, the war

between them has greatly destroyed and shattered the lives of Vietnamese people who have become political victims. Vietnamese diasporic literature also suggests that Vietnamese people in general do not want any wars, but they are victimized by political conflicts initiated by the leaders of both sides. They suffer deeply from wounds and pain which stem from loss of homelands, loved ones, freedom, and rights to spend their lives as normal people.

Overall, Vietnamese diasporic literature serves as an arena where Vietnamese people inscribe their history, experiences, trauma, and memories. It is also a place where they revisit their homelands and heal their broken souls. Vietnamese diasporic narratives portray many social dimensions. As stated by Nguyen, Vietnamese diasporic writers, through their narratives, not only provide accounts of Vietnamese refugees, but also indicate many truths related to human conditions [11]. Some of those truths are so painful that many people do not want to remember. However, they are the truths that human beings need to learn in order to understand and make sense of Vietnamese diaspora. Since *South Wind Changing* and *Where the Ashes Are* offer painful truths about Vietnamese diasporic people, it is not wrong to refer to them as trauma narratives.

III. DISCUSSION

Both *South Wind Changing* and *Where the Ashes Are* portray the authors' experiences during the Vietnam War, after the Vietnam War when the Communist regime gains control over the country, the journeys to escape from their home country, and their lives in the United States, their new world. Huynh and Nguyen inscribe their traumatic memories derived from horrible events they encounter and witness during this course. The war turns their homes to be places where they cannot find safety, as depicted in the very beginning part of the two books that they are attacked inside their own homes. Huynh's family is attacked by American helicopters which aim to shoot down Vietcong (Communist) soldiers but ignore the fact that they are shooting at innocent civilians' home [2]. Unlike Huynh's case, Nguyen's family is raided by the Vietcong which aims to search for his father, a suspected Southern military officer [3]. These two opening scenes of the two books, which indicate that there is no safety in their homes, result in the diaspora of the two authors and their families. Seeing that they can be killed at any time, since they live in war zones, they relocate to other parts of the country where they expect more safety. This is the beginning of their diaspora.

As depicted in *South Wind Changing*, during his diasporic journey to escape from war persecution, Huynh inevitably witnesses traumatic scenes on the road, in the rice field, and in the river. Those scenes are overwhelming and beyond the experience of common people. For example, after leaving his home for a while, Huynh and his family encounter the body of a dead pregnant woman with her another child who is still alive, trying to suck her nipple for milk: "I looked at her. A bullet had gone through her head and one of her eyes was dangling on the cheek. Her head was bent down towards her bosom as if she were watching her child to see if he could reach her nipple or not" [2: p. 16]. Huynh and his family help

the child who dies later of fatigue and hunger. Apart from this incident, they also suffer from the scene of dead bodies in many places as evident in the autobiography: "I saw dead bodies along the rice fields, I saw corpses floating on the creek. I saw decaying humans on the dike and on the road. Dead souls were everywhere. And everywhere the smell of gunpowder, blood, and burning houses thickened the air" [2: p. 17]. These two excerpts, along with the attack at Huynh's home, indicate the atrocity of war which robs his home and claims the lives of innocent people. Those who are still alive have to abandon their homelands and become refugees in search for a refuge from war persecution. The picture of people's leaving their homes is vivid in Huynh's imagination and described in the book:

On the road I saw thousands of refugees coming from different directions, not knowing where they were going. Men carried bags, women carried children, the elderly sat on the back of bikes for the younger to push, children ran along looking for their loved ones. People called out names, trying to find each other, while the houses and buildings burned. [2: p. 17]

It is clear that these people are dispersed from their homelands as a result of the battle which claims not only lives of people, but also their once sweet homes which are turned to be dangerous places where they cannot dwell on. Taking diasporic journey seems to be the only choice they can choose in order to survive. All of them share the trauma from the loss of homes and loved ones.

Similar to Huynh, Nguyen portrays his first-hand experience and other traumatic events he witnesses regarding the war persecution in *Where the Ashes Are*. He opens his narrative with the sentences, "'Wake up, wake up!' my mother shouted. 'We've got to get out of here! How can you sleep through all this?'" [3: p. 1]. In this opening scene, a Vietcong troop is raiding his family inside his home to search for his father. This is the first memory Nguyen offers to his audience, which indicates that the first memory about this country that comes to his mind is the incident when he has to run away from bullets showering his home. In this incident, his father is captured and sent to a re-education camp while the rest of the family have to abandon the home and move to live with their relatives in another city. The two incidents in *South Wind Changing* and *Where the Ashes Are*, as discussed above, illustrate that the homes of the two authors lose the sense of home, since they cannot offer safety to those who live in them. The missing sense of home results in diaspora of the dwellers who are dispersed to other lands.

After his father is captured and sent to re-education camps, Nguyen and the rest of his family have to move to different places. However, their new houses or residences, again, cannot provide them with safety. They have to live with terror and fear of the Vietcong all the time. This also becomes a memory they share among each other: a memory that during the war period they lack security in life, that death follows them everywhere they go. In his autobiography, Nguyen clearly explains the situation in which he and his family have to be alert at all times:

Troops would hide in the mountain during the day and at

night venture out to assemble cannons and send barrages of rockets flying into Da Nang, shocking us awake. We would all jump from our beds in what soon became a reflex, and rush to safety. Scrambling out of bed and downstairs to get to the bunker made of sandbags on the first floor, I was frightened even more by the short, urgent blares of the warning siren. [3: p. 30]

Even though Nguyen is not captured and sent to the camp like his father, it is clear that he cannot escape from the war and has to be traumatized by the situation as shown in the above excerpt. He and the rest of his family are unable to have a true restful night, and this situation exacerbates the traumatic memory implanted in their minds. Inscribing this memory in his autobiography, Nguyen is informing the audience that nowhere in Vietnam is safe for Vietnamese people during the period of war.

Apart from his own experience, Nguyen also depicts the picture of people escaping from the war in their homelands. Like his own case, these people share the diasporic journey with hope to survive the war. As the battle in the north of Vietnam is getting more intense, people have to move to the south where they expect more safety. The diaspora of these people becomes a state of turmoil which is vividly portrayed in Nguyen's autobiography:

Buses, cars, bicycles, three-wheeled vehicles fashioned out of motorcycles, and people on foot piled over the Hai Van Pass toward Da Nang. Folks wound their way south, their clothes and valuables packed in bundles and tied on top of cars or on the sides of motorcycles already laden with three or four people. Some simply carried belongings on their shoulders. [3: p. 69].

During this time, Nguyen and his friends volunteer at a center to help refugees with food and other things they can. However, the number of refugees is too huge for them to handle. Sometimes, they are even attacked by starving refugees who have walked for several days without food. The desperate conditions in their homelands force them to take a journey which is full of traumatic memories, especially when they have to run away from bombs and bullets while their stomachs are empty.

The war and domestic diaspora as portrayed in *South Wind Changing* and *Where the Ashes Are* have inflicted great wounds and pain on the bodies and minds of the two authors and other refugees. They lose their homes, loved ones, and homelands, and receive a new identity as refugees. Unfortunately, domestic diaspora is not the end of their journeys. After the Vietcong gains control over the nation, Vietnamese people suffer greater from oppression and persecution. In these two narratives, the period when the two authors, their families, and other Vietnamese people suffer from the Communist regime—the totalitarian regime—can be viewed as the transition between domestic diaspora and diaspora across the ocean to the new world. Huynh, in *South Wind Changing*, after trying to avoid being sent to the camp, is eventually captured and imprisoned. This imprisonment is also part of his journey to the new world, since the horrible experience in the camps is one of the reasons which forces him to make a decision to leave the homeland. He is

transferred to several camps where he endures hardship, hunger, and brutal punishment and has to witness many traumatic incidents during the course of his imprisonment. In *Where the Ashes Are*, Nguyen can avoid being captured, but his narrative is still full of memories of the camps which he learns from his father, who inevitably becomes a prisoner of the camp and suffers from similar traumatic experience as endured by Huynh. In addition, Nguyen, outside the camp, is also traumatized by the Communist oppression which causes great difficulty for all Vietnamese people to spend their lives. The great pressure which Nguyen and other Vietnamese people have to tolerate during this period compels them to make a decision to take the next journey to escape from their “oppressive homeland” [3: p. 195]. This period, the transition from domestic diaspora to diaspora across the ocean, indicates that the Communist regime has turned the Vietnamese mother land to be an oppressive land where a large number of people are overwhelmed with suffering. According to the history, while people all over the country suffered from poverty and the lack of right as a result of the Communist oppression, a large number of them were captured and sent to re-education camps which claimed a large number of prisoners' lives through hard work, starvation, and execution [4]. This transformation of the mother land exacerbates the wounds and pain in the hearts of these people and leads to their exodus from the nation.

As portrayed in the two autobiographies, Huynh and Nguyen eventually escape from Vietnam; both of them leave their home country as refugees but by different means. Huynh has to try two times to escape with a group of Vietnamese people who escape as boat people, or refugees who escape from Vietnam by fishing boats, before they successfully reach a refugee camp in Thailand. More fortunate, Nguyen can secure a place on an American airplane to fly to the south of Vietnam and then board an American ship to a refugee camp in Guam, so he does not suffer as much as the boat people. However, the narratives of these two authors are poignantly painted with traumatic experience of boat people. Huynh—having first-hand experience—depicts his own traumatic stories as a boat people. On the other hand, Nguyen recounts stories of other boat people he learns from a refugee camps in Indonesia, where he volunteers to work in an assisting team after his resettlement in the United States.

According to the history, there were a large number of Vietnamese people who left their country by fishing boats. This means of escape was the origin of the term “boat people” which is used to refer to these diasporic subjects. As stated by Lam, these people had been traumatized by re-education camps, communist oppression and persecution, and cannibalism in Vietnam. Moreover, during the journey in the sea, they were robbed by pirates who also raped women on the boats. Most of the boat people were robbed at least two times, and between 1980 and 1983 about 2,200 women were raped. Many of them were also captured and sold as prostitutes [12], [13]. Despite this catastrophe, during the 1980s, there were approximately 130,000 boat people who made it through and reached the American land [13]. Unfortunately, there were also a large number of the boat people who died in the sea during their diasporic journey.

The death toll was between 100,000 to 1,000,000, due to killings, drowning, starvation, and so on [11]. Those who survive also have to struggle with their traumatic memories, as can be seen in the two autobiographies in this study.

As evident in *South Wind Changing*, the traumatic memories while Huynh is escaping as a boat people are still vivid in his imagination. He clearly portrays the terrible conditions which he and other boat people have to encounter during their journey. The condition of the boat, for example, is so unimaginably poor that it is hard to believe that it can carry a large number of people and will survive the harsh journey in the sea:

It was a shabby wooden boat, four meters wide by fourteen meters long. It had to carry 124 people including food, water, oil, gas, and the engine. [...] I felt the boat slapping against the water, shaking it like a huge wave. [...] We were squeezed in like so many flowers in a small vase. [2: p. 224]

The depiction of the boat indicates the desperate conditions of the boat people who are willing to take risk in escaping from the Communist regime. Despite an acute awareness that this small boat which carries 124 people might sink into the sea at any time, they decide to take a very slim chance of having a new life rather than falling prey to the Communist persecution.

In addition to the very poor condition of the boat, Huynh and other passengers also suffer from other causes including sea conditions and hunger. As explained in his autobiography, food shortage is a very serious problem which all boat people have to tolerate. Their small boat has to save the room for people and fuel, so they cannot bring along plenty of food supply. Everyone on the boat receives a very small portion of food because they need to plan the food consumption; the limited food on the boat must be enough for the entire journey to their first destination, a refugee camp in a neighboring country. As a result, all of them have to struggle against their hunger because they receive a very small amount of food, as explained in the book, "The people in the cabin started to pass out food and water for each person. It was only a few teaspoons of food and one teaspoon of water" [2: p. 226]. Hunger becomes a traumatic memory especially for little kids who cry all the time because their empty stomachs are not satisfied. This group of boat people even reach the point when they no longer have food and drinking water and are eventually tortured by starvation and dehydration: "We had no more food, no more water, but luckily we could squeeze our wet clothes for water, drinking water given to us by the storm. [...] We drank our urine to help us bear the heat and used it to dampen our clothes" [2: p. 267]. Many of them collapse with starvation and hopelessness and wait for only luck to help them.

Apart from the above horrible experience, there is a horrible incident which leaves a greater mental wound and pain on Huynh and other boat people, exacerbating the existing trauma in their hearts. While heading to a shore of Thailand, they are robbed by a group of Thai pirates who not only snatch their valuables, but also rape young Vietnamese girls on the boat. Since they are terribly weak from traveling, starvation, and dehydration, they are defenceless against the pirates. Huynh and other people are forced to sit silently and

swallow their tears while hearing the young girls scream. As depicted in the narrative, "The pirates took turns holding the girls as they satisfied their animal thirsts" [2: p. 270]. As the victims of these animal thirsts, these girls have to live with this traumatic memory and scar throughout their lives. For other boat people, they also share the pain with those girls, as Huynh writes, "The wounds aggravated deeper hurts in our hearts more than our bodies" [2: p. 271]. This incident puts them deeper into the abyss of trauma.

As depicted in *Where the Ashes Are*, Nguyen is more fortunate than Huynh and a lot of other Vietnamese refugees, since he is from an upper class family and can secure a place on an American airplane to fly from Sai Gon to the island of Phu Quoc. Then, he is transferred to Guam, an important center of Indochinese refugees before further transportation, by an American ship. After that, he is transported to Ohio, the United States. His journey is much more pleasant than that of other refugees, especially the boat people, because he does not encounter sea storms, starvation on the boat, or the violence and brutality of Thai pirates as suffered by the boat people. However, he inevitably suffers from trauma, since his heart is full of pain and shame from leaving his home country. He explains his feelings when arriving at a refugee camp in Guam that "The bright lights of the camera crew recording our arrival seemed to shine deep into our hearts to reveal the shame of losing a war, and of fleeing home" [3: p. 141]. The feelings of shame and pain stem from his consciousness which reminds him of his guilt of abandoning his homeland and his people.

Although Nguyen does not suffer much from the journey, compared to the boat people, he has witnessed a lot of tragic experiences of these people through the stories they tell him. After reuniting with his brother in the United States, he volunteers to return to work at a refugee camp in Galang, Indonesia, teaching and training refugees before they are transferred to Western countries for resettlement. There, he learns that the number of refugees is unimaginably high, as he explains, "In the next four years Galang took in over a hundred thousand refugees who build temporary lives on the sun-drenched island while they waited for the chance to resettle in Western countries" [3: p. 195]. Galang is only one of the many places where refugee camps are situated at. When considering the amount of all refugee camps in all Vietnam's neighboring countries, the number of refugees is much higher than we can imagine. This number includes not only the Vietnamese but also the Cambodians and other Indochinese people, as discussed at the beginning of this chapter that there are more than two million refugees leaving their home countries in Indochina [13]. The boat people, in particular, suffer greatly during their voyage across the ocean. Like the other autobiography in this study, *Where the Ashes Are* recounts the stories of these people who have to leave their oppressive homeland. These two autobiographies indicate that all the boat people share the common experience of pain and tragedy. Nguyen portrays the overall traumatic experience of the boat people which he learns from the camp as follows:

Vietnamese refugees suffered the horrors of the boat trip out of the country. Large numbers perished at sea. Women

were repeatedly raped; other were attacked, robbed, and left to die by Thai pirates. Survivors were picked up adrift on the South China Sea, dehydrated, hungry, exhausted, traumatized. They would wait in Galang for long months for a chance at a new life. [3: p. 199]

As can be seen in this excerpt, the diasporic journey of the boat people is the journey of pain, wounds, and trauma which ruin them physically and psychologically. Their experiences are beyond the ability of common people to tolerate. The survivors of this cruel journey are considered very lucky.

When the boat people arrive at the refugee camps, it does not mean that the journey of suffering has ended. There are many forms of oppression and exploitation which they encounter in the camps. For example, there are many stories of women who have been raped in the sea and then are raped again by officials in the camps. These stories can be seen in Nguyen's autobiography, which includes a tragic story of a seventeen-year-old girl who has been raped by Thai pirates and then is abused and raped by an Indonesian doctor at the hospital [3]. Apart from this girl, there are also other Vietnamese women who are victimized by the officials' lust, as Nguyen writes, "the man had been forcing women to sleep with Indonesian army men" [3: p. 204]. The portrayal of this tragedy informs readers that the boat people, after leaving their oppressive homeland, are dehumanized by both pirates and the so-called saviors in the camps, who are supposed to help and heal their trauma. With the mask of the saint, those officials use female refugees' desperate conditions to sexually abuse them.

In addition to the serious issue of sexual abuse, there are also other problems and difficulties which all refugees have to tolerate in the refugee camps, which also become their traumatic memories. As explained in the autobiographies, the food is not enough for the refugees, so they have to suffer from hunger and malnutrition. The camps are also very crowded and lack sanitation. In addition, the refugees are viewed and treated as second-class people by the officials and native people in those countries. They have no rights to ask for equality or sometimes to protect themselves from exploitation or maltreatment. The camps serve as places where they have to wait to be transferred to Western countries for resettlement. Some of them might have to wait for several months, while many of them have to wait for a few years to be eligible for this opportunity. Unfortunately, instead of being refugees which offer physical and mental solace to the refugees who are deeply traumatized, many of the refugee camps are places where their wounds and pain are aggravated through many forms of abuse and maltreatment.

Although a large number of Vietnamese refugees, including Huynh and Nguyen, the authors of the autobiographies in this studies, survive their diasporic journeys and finally rebuild their lives in the new world, they still have to grapple with trauma as the aftermath of wars, the abuse by the totalitarian regimes, and horrible experience during their journeys and in the refugee camps. The wars and the totalitarian regimes have dramatically ruined their lives. They lose their loved ones, families, and homes, and have to leave their homelands. Moreover, these people also suffer from witnessing and directly experiencing violence against

themselves as well as their people in the homelands and during their escapes.

The mental and physical suffering which Huynh and Nguyen have undergone inflicts detrimental psychological effects on them in the form of post-traumatic stress disorder. As explained by Kinchin, post-traumatic stress disorder occurs when people experience an event which is beyond the ability of normal people to withstand. Such experience includes a huge threat to life of those people or their loved ones. The destruction of home or community can also cause post-traumatic stress disorder. Witnessing serious accidents, violence, or killings is also another important trigger [14]. Those who are found to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder include veterans, captives in concentration camps, rape victims, and those who are abused by totalitarian regimes. There are several symptoms showing in traumatized people. As studied by Herman, people diagnosed with war trauma, for example, suffer from both emotional breakdowns and physical shocking. They may scream and weep uncontrollably. In addition, they can become quiet and unresponsive and lose their memories and ability to feel. Many victims also suffer from flashbacks of traumatic experience and recurring traumatic nightmares; both of these symptoms are recognized as trauma intruding into consciousness. Herman also points out that Southeast Asian refugees are reported to have the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, which persists in them for many years after they have been liberated from the concentration camps under the totalitarian regimes [15]. For the Vietnamese diasporic people, it can be concluded that it is inevitable for them to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder triggered by the trauma from the Vietnam War, the oppression and persecution from the totalitarian regimes, and horrible experience during their diasporic journeys.

An important feature of Vietnamese diasporic writing, as shown in *South Wind Changing* and *Where the Ashes Are*, is that they portray traces of trauma deeply engraved in the authors' hearts and imagination. Huynh and Nguyen, as well as other Vietnamese refugees, have endured traumatic experiences during the period of war. They witness people being killed and the dreadful picture of dead bodies. Moreover, they have to run away and abandon their homelands in order to escape from war persecution. After the war, they even suffer further from oppression and persecution by the totalitarian regime. During their diasporic journeys, they also undergo a lot horrible and dreadful events, such as storms, robbery, or rape. Their experiences are in line with Kinchin's argument above that people who undergo the situations beyond the range of normal people's experiences can suffer from trauma as the aftermath of those horrible experiences. It is clear that Vietnamese refugees, especially the boat people, inevitably suffer from trauma stemming from their horrible, unbearable experiences. For Huynh, it is not difficult to imagine how deep it is in his heart, as he faces with almost everything explained above. From the discussion of his experience of war and communist oppression, it can be concluded that his life is overwhelmed with trauma. It is amazing that he can rebuild his life and become an important voice of Vietnamese refugees to reveal their traumatic memories to the world.

Traces of trauma are portrayed in Huynh's autobiography, especially after the incident when his boat is robbed by the Thai pirates. Although they try to fight back, they are defeated by the pirates who are more powerful. As a result, the only thing they can do is to swallow their tears when seeing their people being abused and the young girls being raped. Huynh and his friends are physically hurt, but the pain from trauma is much bigger than bodily injury. It is clear that they are repeatedly abused by the violence from the more powerful group. Their bodily wounds can be healed, but the mentally wounds cannot be eradicated from their hearts. Especially for the three young girls who are raped, the wounds are stigmatized in their hearts much deeper than in other refugees' hearts, since their grace and dignity are destroyed by the rapists who repeatedly gratify their lust through the victims' bodies. After the Thai police comes to rescue them, they still fear the police because they are men. The crime against their bodies and minds are committed by men, and it becomes destructive trauma in their imagination. This trauma compels them to generate the feeling of fear, even of men who come to rescue them. Overall, all the boat people on the same boat which Huynh travels on suffer from the brutality in Vietnam and during the journey. Therefore, it can be said that they cannot avoid the pain from trauma instigated by horrible experiences.

As can be noticed in the two autobiographies, Nguyen does not suffer as much as Huynh because he escapes from Vietnam by an American ship, not a fishing boat like other boat people. However, back in Vietnam, he suffers from similar situations, since he has to escape from his homeland and later endure the Communist oppression and persecution. His horrible experiences as discussed in the previous section can be assumed to cause trauma in his life. Even after he resettles in the United States, the trauma still haunts him as he explains that sometimes he suffers from nightmares—a symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder—which bring him to revisit the traumatic incidents happening to him in Vietnam:

The night mare started during this period. No particular event provoked them. My mother always appeared in them, either sick, wounded, dying, or about to be taken away. I would be too late getting to her side. Sometimes I would rush in panic though floor after floor of a hospital, stepping over the dead in corridors and stairways, always searching for her. I many of these nightmares I would reach the floor where she was, only to hear the swirling bladed of a helicopter taking off and carrying my mother away. If I did succeed in reaching her she would be on a stretcher, in a coma. She was never able to talk to me. [3: p. 159-60]

The nightmare as shown above can be construed as a symptom of trauma. As stated by Garfield, nightmares are common symptoms of trauma after experiencing tragedy. They are reaction of the mind towards trauma [16]. It is clear that Nguyen cannot eliminate the pictures of horrible experiences from his imagination. As a result, those pictures recur in his imagination in the form of nightmares with the image of dead people which refer to Vietnamese people who die as a result of the war and Communist persecution. The image of his mother appears in the nightmares can be

explained by the fact that when he resettles safely in the United States, his mother does not come with him for some reasons. Therefore, he misses her and is very worried about her safety, and such feelings are transformed into nightmares as evident in the above excerpt.

Apart from depicting his own psychological conditions, Nguyen also portrays mental problems of refugees who have experienced violence and horrible incidents before reaching the refugee camps. As he volunteers to work with the refugees, Nguyen sees that a lot of them suffer from psychological effects of trauma. For example, there is a man who frequently escapes from the hospital and wanders around the camp, yelling out "Every man Communist! Every man Communist!" [3: p. 201] from time to time. His symptom suggests that he must be severely abused by the Communist regime when he is in Vietnam and finally loses his mind and believes that everybody is Communist. In addition, there is a woman who is rumored to have been raped during the sea voyage by pirates and has a strange symptom. She keeps complaining about losing her purse. As explained in the autobiography, "She could carry on a normal conversation for a quarter of an hour, then suddenly become hysterical over her stolen of misplaced purse. [...] There was talk that she had been caught several times making love to Indonesian soldiers in bushes around the camp" [3: p. 201-02]. It is clear that this woman has a psychological problem which can be analyzed as a detrimental effect of trauma caused by an extreme sexual abuse while she is escaping from Vietnam. In addition, making love with several soldiers can be viewed as a fulfillment of something which has been damaged in her life, especially from being raped by pirates.

It is clear that both Huynh, Nguyen, and other Vietnamese diasporic subjects are deeply traumatized by their horrible experience and tormenting journeys to the new world. In particular, the title of Nguyen's autobiography, *Where the Ashes Are*, suggests an important feature about his deep trauma. His beloved sister dies and is cremated in Vietnam without a chance to escape like him. After having a new life in the United States, therefore, his sub-consciousness compels him to return to Vietnam to bring his sister's ashes to his family in the United States. Although he can bring only her ashes, the sense of family reunion helps him to cope with trauma from losing his sister. In one way or another, not only Nguyen and Huynh but also all Vietnamese diasporic subjects have to live and cope with their trauma.

Since Huynh and Nguyen suffer from trauma, they need to heal themselves and cope with it. There might be different ways which people employ in the healing process. For these two authors, they choose to tell their traumatic stories through their autobiographies, which can be read as a way to heal and cope with their trauma. According to Herman, "Remembering and telling the truth about the terrible events are prerequisites both for the restoration of the social order and for the healing process of individual victims" [15: p. 1]. Narrating traumatic events might be against the will of some trauma sufferers who do not want to re-experience the events in their imagination. In the recovering process, however, it is advised that trauma sufferers should comprehend their past so that they can live with the present and the future [15].

Telling stories of their traumatic experience provides them with an opportunity to contemplate the past events, which will lead them to a better comprehension of their past and finally help them to recover. At the same time, their stories help people in the society to better understand them and provide support, which is also very crucial for the recovering process. Therefore, their narratives function as both self-recovering process and a request for support from the society. For Huynh and Nguyen, telling their traumatic stories through their autobiographies, based on Herman, helps them to understand their own situations and make sense of what happen to them as well as other Vietnamese diasporic people. The two authors might not fully recover from their trauma, but at least they have chances to contemplate their past and have their readers to listen to their stories and share their tragic experiences.

As discussed earlier, the new trend of Asian American literature serves as a bridge to connect Asia to the new world [8]. This type of literature provides readers in the new world with understanding about its people. *South Wind Changing* and *Where the Ashes Are* are in the same vein with this argument, as they offer backgrounds of Vietnamese diasporic people who are part of Asians in the new world. Based on the discussion in this paper, these two autobiographies help readers to understand how Vietnamese diasporic subjects come to their being in the United States, their new world. They also ask for compassion from people in the new world to accept their people and not to exclude them from the society because their diaspora is by force and they need empathy. In addition, these two trauma narratives illustrate that Vietnamese diasporic subjects have been through many journeys in which they encounter tragic and traumatic experiences. These two books serve as channels through which the authors communicate with people in the new world; what they need is refuge and solace.

As the minority, Vietnamese diasporic people seem to have no voice to speak for themselves in the society. Many times, they are excluded and discriminated against by the mainstream without a chance to negotiate for their existence. These people can be categorized as the subaltern based on Spivak's concept. The subaltern, as the minority or the marginalized in the society, have no voice to speak for themselves, as they are oppressed by the power of the mainstream. Their voice is always ignored [17]. In the case of the two autobiographies, Huynh and Nguyen, as intellectuals of Vietnamese diasporic group, speak for their people through literature. Providing more understanding about Vietnamese diaspora, they serve as a bridge to connect people in the new world and their own people. They are regarded as true voices of Vietnamese diasporic people [9]. These voices speak for all Vietnamese diasporic people and assert their existence in the new world. The voices of Huynh and Nguyen are also in line with Wong's argument that an important obligation of Asian American literature is to assure that the voices of its people are heard [18]. These people need acceptance and recognition in the new world, and literature is employed to fulfill this need.

IV. CONCLUSION

Huynh's *South Wind Changing* and Nguyen's *Where the Ashes Are* indicate that the diasporic journeys of Vietnamese diasporic subjects are laden with difficulty, hardship, horror, pain, and trauma. It is clear that these two books are trauma narratives which also serve as voices of their people, informing their readers that all of them, especially the boat people, suffer greatly during their entire journeys. In spite of their survival, an important thing they share in common has to do with trauma which is an unavoidable consequence of all horrible, dreadful incidents which they are forced to undergo before they reach the new world. This trauma causes great trouble and pain in their lives as discussed above. Moreover, it seems to be impossible for them to eradicate this trauma from their lives, at least for the two authors, as it is evident that pictures and images of traumatic experiences are vividly portrayed in their autobiographies. This vivid portrayal suggests that those traumatic experiences are deeply engraved in their hearts and still clear in their imagination. It can be concluded that the diasporic journeys inside Vietnam and the journeys across the ocean offer freedom to the refugees in the end, but that freedom comes with traumatic memories, which are later turned to be trauma narratives like these two autobiographies. These two narratives also serve as voices of Vietnamese diasporic subjects which ask for understanding and recognition in the society.

As stated by Lowe, Asian American literature is a literary field which is still growing, as there are new voices emerging in the canon. These voices include those of Southeast Asians who took diasporic journeys from their home countries [19]. Huynh and Nguyen, as Southeast Asian diasporic writers, contribute to the growth of Asian American literature as a broader field. Their voices promote diversity in this literary area and most importantly represent their own people. Based on the discussion of these two autobiographies and other scholarly works, it is clear that Vietnamese diasporic literature is informed by traumatic memories, which is the collective memories of all Vietnamese diasporic subjects.

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