

## The Trace of Memories of the Vietnam War: The Struggle Facing the Trauma in Shirley Ann Grau's "Homecoming"

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### Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji representasi ingatan traumatis dalam karya sastra Shirley Ann Grau, "Homecoming", yang berfokus pada trauma akibat Perang Vietnam. Isu utamanya adalah bagaimana ingatan traumatis ini diproses dan dihadapi oleh para tokoh dalam narasi, terutama dari perspektif psikologis dan sosiokultural. Tujuan studi ini adalah untuk memahami mekanisme pemrosesan trauma, khususnya melalui proses mengingat dan berbagai strategi koping yang digunakan oleh para tokoh dalam merespons pengalaman traumatis. Metodologi yang digunakan adalah pendekatan kualitatif yang memanfaatkan analisis tekstual interdisipliner, yang mengintegrasikan studi sastra, psikologi, dan studi budaya. Temuan penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa ingatan traumatis tidak hanya ditransmisikan secara pasif tetapi juga direkonstruksi secara aktif melalui ingatan, sebuah proses yang melibatkan narasi kolektif dan refleksi sosial. Para tokoh mengatasi trauma melalui mekanisme pemblokiran ingatan buruk, dialog naratif, dan dukungan komunitas, yang berfungsi sebagai strategi koping psikologis dan sosial. Selain itu, proses ini diperkaya dengan penggunaan teknologi digital untuk memperluas ruang bagi pengungkapan trauma yang inklusif. Temuan ini menekankan bahwa kombinasi ingatan dan berbagai upaya melupakan adalah kunci untuk mengelola dan menyembuhkan trauma yang dialami oleh individu dan komunitas.

**Kata Kunci:** memori, trauma, *homecoming*, perang Vietnam

### Abstract

This research examines the representation of traumatic memories in Shirley Ann Grau's literary work "Homecoming," which focuses on trauma resulting from the Vietnam War. The main issue is how these traumatic memories are processed and dealt with by the characters in the narrative, particularly from psychological and sociocultural perspectives. The objective of the study is to understand the mechanisms of trauma processing, particularly through the process of remembrance and various coping strategies employed by the characters in response to traumatic experiences. The methodology employed is a qualitative approach that utilises interdisciplinary textual analysis, integrating literary studies, psychology, and cultural studies. The research findings reveal that traumatic memories are not merely passively transmitted but actively reconstructed through rememory, a process that involves collective narratives and social reflection. Characters cope with trauma through mechanisms of blocking bad memories, narrative dialogue, and community support, which function as psychological and social coping strategies. Additionally, this process is enriched by the use of digital technology to expand the space for inclusive trauma disclosure. These findings emphasise that the combination of rememory and various forgetting efforts is key to managing and healing trauma experienced by individuals and communities.

**Keywords:** memory, trauma, *homecoming*, Vietnam's war

## 1. INTRODUCTION

War will always be a painful memory for those who have been involved in it. Often, the cruelty and horror of war ultimately traumatise soldiers in particular. However, the effects of war do not only impact soldiers who risk

their lives on the battlefield, but also their families who lose loved ones in such incidents. The feelings of abandonment and loss bring deep sorrow and can lead to prolonged mourning. One of the wars that left deep scars,

aside from major wars like World War I and World War II, is the Vietnam War.

The Vietnam War was a cold war that took place between 1957 and 1975 in Vietnam. This war was between two major ideological camps, namely the Communists and SEATO. The two camps that fought each other were the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam) and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam). The United States, South Korea, Thailand, Australia, New Zealand, and the Philippines allied with South Vietnam, while Russia, China, North Korea, Mongolia, and Cuba supported communist North Vietnam. The estimated number of deaths was more than 280,000 on the South Vietnamese side and more than one million on the North Vietnamese side (Paula, 1991).

However, casualties were not limited to North and South Vietnam but also included allied countries. The war itself claimed the lives of approximately 50,000 American military personnel and left another 100,000 disabled due to injuries. This war was a traumatic experience for American soldiers. Some of those who returned home safely had Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). This is a kind of fear that arises spontaneously when deployed to the field. Many personnel experienced this at the time. This incident serves as an indication that the Vietnam War was indeed horrific. Seeing such events, the families of the soldiers naturally felt the impact as well. The return of their family members—soldiers who were severely depressed, disabled, or even killed in battle—was a heavy blow to the families. In cases where soldiers died, this could cause trauma and leave behind painful memories of the war, weighing heavily on those left behind.

The phenomenon of war will certainly elicit a response, for example, in the world of literature. Many writers who lived during the war poured their views on war into their works. This was also the case with Shirley Ann Grau, an American novelist and short story writer. Her works, particularly her short stories, often narrate the Vietnam War. One of her short stories that is particularly rich in this theme is Shirley Ann Grau's *Homecoming*. The story is set in the daily life of the American South during the Vietnam War. Grau explores a series of connections between life and death, the present and the past, and the concepts of remembering, forgetting, memory, and trauma. *Homecoming* is not merely a story about a father and his son, Harold, who does not return home after going to war. However, they were also seen as a bitter blow to the sentimentality of the South Vietnamese people, and the emergence of similarities or apparent repetitions in the story of a mother and her daughter, which then resulted in the same feelings of mourning for the raging war.

*Homecoming* also highlights the protagonist's struggle to free herself from the traumatic memories of

everyone who has a family member who failed to return home because they died in the war. According to Heidarizadeh (2015) trauma may cause severe negative effects on an individual, as past trauma and memories indirectly cause changes in the mind of a person. Grau describes the relationship between a mother and her daughter and how both seem haunted by the trauma of war, especially the loss of their loved ones. *Homecoming* portrays the problems that cause past events to seem like they are repeating themselves in life, thus becoming a memory. Grau focuses primarily on what remains, but never forgets to acknowledge what has been lost. It is the main reason for the interest in analysing trauma and memory related to war in this short story. Thus, this essay serves as a study of trauma and memory regarding individual and collective memory, as well as their relationship with trauma, along with the efforts and struggles made by the characters to erase bad memories and feelings of trauma related to war.

To explore the relationship between memory and trauma in the narrative, along with the characters' struggles, various theories and concepts, such as trauma, memory, and the forgetting of traumatic memories, are discussed. According to Halbwachs (1992), memories themselves can be categorized as either individual and collective. Individual memory is defined as a personal interpretation of an event in a person's life. Although the term 'individual' implies that personal views are the only ones that contribute to the formation of memory, as social beings, this is, of course, almost impossible. Regarding memory itself, memory is how minds work together in a society, how its continuity is not only mediated but also structured by social rules. In line with this, Halbwachs (1992) states, "[I]t is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories." Thus, all individual processes of remembering are inherently tied to and closely related to social material within a social context, and memory becomes a response to existing social signs. The social construction where social signs are unambiguously identified by society influences the opinions, beliefs, and attitudes of each individual.

Halbwachs also acknowledges that each individual has a memory for a specific dimension of the same event, which is referred to as individual memory or personal memory. However, individual memory can also be woven together with the past experiences of each individual to form collective (group) or shared memory. Memories created by groups or collectives often play a significant role in shaping the group's sense of identity. Memories that become collective memories can also provide group members with shared experiences, allowing individuals to have their memories, as each person has their unique

traumatic events. Thus, individual memory refers to the memory that each person possesses and is distinct from collective memory.

Furthermore, Halbwachs (1992) asserts that the collective memory of each individual is what all members of the group remember. However, each individual's memory may vary based on the group's memory experience, but that memory is familiar to everyone. Thus, collective memory is very flexible. In addition, individual memory only summarizes perspectives on collective or shared memory. Individual memory is, therefore, effectively replaced by Halbwachs and absorbed into collective memory. Collective memory is socially constructed based on shared sentiments, values, and the current circumstances in which the group finds itself.

However, there is also the concept of re-memory. When an accidental event is repeated with an almost identical case, a reenactment will spontaneously occur in the memory of specific individuals who have experienced a traumatic event. Remembering can be viewed as a creative and mental process involving the recall of past events, whereas memory is considered a conscious act of recalling past events. Alongside the terms "remembering" and "memory," another term emerges: "re-memory." Memory is a passive and static force dependent on the individual. At the same time, re-memory is an active force that is independent of the individual, even collective, and experienced or known by those who have undergone or are aware of the event (more collective and past-oriented). Therefore, it is possible to revisit memory, both physically and mentally, thereby bridging the gap between personal memory and collective memory, making the past and present more dynamic.

To understand the process of re-memory, one can refer to Paul Ricoeur's opinion that "memory must belong to the realm of interiority because individuals see themselves as the true possessors of their own memories" (Lavenne et al., 2005). However, as he later acknowledged, memory also involves "the other" and is entirely marked by it. Indeed, when memory enters the public sphere, it becomes a testimony that is always presented and received by others. This collective memory becomes the framework within which individual memories are constructed and structured.

The framework of re-memory is when an event is so deeply embedded in an individual's or collective memory that, in the present, a trigger actively causes specific individuals or groups to recall it even without being prompted. It differs from *déjà vu*, as the repeated experience occurs in another individual, and from postmemory, as there is no transmission involved, whether familial or affiliative. Re-memory is a type of memory that

arises when a trigger prompts someone to recall a specific event.

Moreover, when the memory transforms into a traumatic memory, some people might struggle to forget, be manipulated, or block it. Blocked memories, as discussed in *Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through* and *Mourning and Melancholia*, are memories that must be forgotten and suppressed, either through conscious action or by the unconscious mind. Freud explains that "Repetition amounts to forgetting. And forgetting is itself termed a work to the extent that it is the work of the compulsion to repeat, which prevents the traumatic event from becoming conscious" (Freud in Ricour, 2006:445). From this quote, it can be understood that trauma persists even when someone tries to block access to it. When a phenomenon related to a traumatic event appears before the trauma sufferer, the bad memories will inevitably resurface, unable to be prevented by the individual in question. It will lead to resistance from specific individuals to suppress the return of buried memories in the subconscious through various efforts to block them, such as avoiding anything related to the traumatic event or even refraining from discussing it.

In addition, under certain circumstances, all parts of the forgotten past can return. Therefore, psychoanalytic studies of forgetting with blocked memory are considered to be the most reliable ally in supporting efforts to forget the unforgettable. It is even one of Freud's beliefs that the past that has been experienced cannot be destroyed, but we can reduce its impact on someone who is constantly haunted by bad memories of something, so that their trauma does not worsen. This belief is inseparable from the thesis that the unconscious mind is timeless, eternal, where time is understood as the succession and coincidence of before and after in conscious awareness. In this context, one can attempt to block the access that makes the connection with the traumatic event less oppressive.

In cases where memories are suppressed, they are unconsciously blocked because they are associated with high levels of stress or trauma. It refers to the statement that even though individuals cannot consciously recall these memories, they may still unconsciously influence them, and that these memories may later resurface in consciousness. The idea that repressed memories hide trauma from consciousness is an important part of Sigmund Freud's early work on psychoanalysis. He later took a different view. If a bad memory is too oppressive for an individual, one way to deal with it is to block the memory from resurfacing. For someone experiencing mild mourning, memory blocking is typically achieved through avoidance of all objects associated with the trauma. However, if the individual is experiencing severe mourning leading to melancholia, memory blocking is

often done through hypnosis, which involves erasing or inducing amnesia regarding the traumatic event.

Furthermore, the existence of memories that cause trauma or even deep sadness for each person gives rise to various manipulations that can be used to implant false memories. On the other hand, people who want to avoid such memories can manipulate their memories by implanting memories that are slightly different from reality, and including details that make them seem credible to others. A case study conducted by Elizabeth Loftus, known as "Lost in the Mall," involved subjects given a booklet containing three accounts of real childhood events written by family members and a fourth account of an entirely fictional event: being lost in a shopping mall. A quarter of the subjects reported remembering the fictional events and described them in extensive, in-depth detail. It is also what will happen to someone who has suffered trauma and is haunted by bad memories about it; they will create a fictitious memory and accept it as something that really happened in the past. It is done to alleviate the distress of bad memories that befell them at that time.

In trauma and memory study, the more often a memory is reinforced, the stronger it becomes. "If you're trying to memorize something in a book, you sit there and repeat it over and over" (Ricour, 2006). The same thing happens with trauma: the more we try to forget painful memories, the more we remember them. However, by replacing a memory with something better, conscious recollection can also be manipulated. Memories are not always improved, but can be altered after a specific period has passed. Individuals who appear stable may revert to an unstable state when they inadvertently encounter things that bring back past wounds, so they must be stabilized again. Ricoeur explains that the best way to free oneself from trauma is to forget all the bitter memories associated with it. If we cannot do that, another option is to manipulate those memories into something more positive, even if it is essentially fictional.

## **METHOD**

Faruk (2020) defines material objects as the primary focus of investigation. In the present study, the material object under examination was The data used in this study consists of words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, and dialogues that illustrate the relationship between memory and trauma, as well as how the characters struggle with it. To obtain this data, the work was first read and understood. The source of data in this study is the short story *Homecoming* by Shirley Ann Grau (1990). This research is divided into two objects of study. The first is the material object, which is Ann Grau's short story. In contrast, the formal object is the form of memory and trauma, as well as the efforts or struggles in dealing with trauma and traumatic memories found in the work, using a literary

psychology approach that focuses on the study and concepts of memory and trauma by Paul Ricoeur, Maurice Halbwachs, and Cathy Caruth.

In the process of analyzing the collected data, the researcher will seek forms of memory and their relationship with trauma related to war, as well as the forms of efforts and struggles undertaken by the main character in facing their trauma, as depicted through the narrative or dialogue in the text, by the concepts of memory and trauma Theory from Maurice Halbwachs and Cathy Caruth.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **The Relationship Between Memory and Trauma in the Homecoming**

Memory is an idea or concept that focuses on a comparison between past and present experiences (Whitehead, 2009). Locke, as quoted in Whitehead (2009), asserts that our knowledge is acquired, not suddenly present. For example, a baby's mind is initially like a blank sheet of paper, devoid of any preconceived notions. Then the baby acquires ideas or knowledge based on the experiences it undergoes. Therefore, memory cannot be considered innate or regarded as an inherent characteristic of a person, as it requires experience to develop. These experiences shape memory, whether by implanting it in the mind based on external factors or based on a representation of the cause-and-effect process. In line with the theoretical framework outlined in the previous discussion, this analysis examines individual and collective memory in Ann Grau's *Homecoming*.

### **Trauma in Individual Memory**

Memory and identity are closely related to Susan's memory, as seen in the following excerpt: "her light voice straining over the words, just the way it always did: 'They sent me one for my husband'" (Grau, 1990, p. 116). The news of Susan's father's death came from a telegram received by Susan's mother at the time. The telegram seemed to be a common sign of death during the war at that time. Thus, the process of recalling individual memories is closely related to social material in a social context, and memory becomes a response to existing social cues. It can be said that the telegram became a social sign in this case, specifically regarding the arrival of sad news about the death of a veteran in the war.

In this case, the telegram serves as a symbol of individual memory, based on the personal experience of an individual, rather than a collective perspective that merely conveys the sad news of a veteran's death. The telegram in Susan's memory was about the death of her husband while she was pregnant. Then, this evoked an individual memory in her when her daughter, Susan, also received a telegram about the death of Harold, who was her close friend, as seen in the following quote: " 'All right,' her mother said,

'you make me put it this way. Are you going to have a baby?' Susan stared at the broken edges of the bristles, and she began to giggle. Harold left a year ago. Mother." (Grau, 1990, p. 118). This means that Susan's mother's previous experience of receiving news of her husband's death. At the same time, she was pregnant, which caused her to suddenly ask Susan if she was pregnant when she received the telegram announcing the death of Harold, who was considered a close friend of Susan's by those around her. However, it was highly unlikely that Susan was pregnant when the news of Harold's death arrived, as the telegram came a year after Harold's departure to the Vietnam War. Thus, the arrival of the telegram, closely tied to the death of a veteran, evoked a specific memory or recollection related to pregnancy.

The pain Susan's mother felt upon hearing the news of her husband's death was profound, as seen in the following quote: "When I read that telegram," Susan's mother said, "I got a pain in my heart that I never got rid of. I carried that pain in my heart from that day to this." (Grau, 1990, p. 116). Thus, this became one of the reasons why Susan's father's death became an individual memory for Susan's mother. This reason also became one of the causes of Susan's mother's deep concern for Susan's condition after receiving the sad news. She believed that what she felt at that time was also what Susan felt after receiving the news of Harold's death through the telegram. She believed that the pain of losing her husband, which she still cannot forget to this day, would also become the pain Susan felt at losing her close friend, Harold.

### **Trauma in Collective Memory**

Homecoming also describes how Americans remember the victims of the Vietnam War, one of whom is Susan's father (the main character in this short story). In other words, this is a type of history that has become a memory for Americans, as described in the following quote: "Susan had heard them come, heard their voices echo in the high-ceilinged hall, heard the boards creak with unaccustomed weight." (Grau, 1990, p. 115). It means that people collectively gathered at Susan's house as a form of respect for those who had died, especially those who died in the Vietnam War. It is in line with collective memory that is presented and reproduced in the form of narratives through various -various meanings or interpretations such as oral storytelling, literature, music, drama, film, graphic arts, monuments, memorials such as obelisks or statues, museum installations, and commemorative events such as anniversaries and holidays (Eyeran, R., Madigan, T., Ring, M., 2017). Collective memory is related to the meaning of the past that is embedded in the life of an individual who is part of a social group, such as a family member who died in a war.

Memory or recollection occurs when something happens in the present and causes an individual or subject to remember something related to the past. Thus, remembering allows an individual to demonstrate a process of memory representation, as seen in the following quote: "Mrs. Benson peered over her sherry glass at the telegram propped on the table next to the good silver coffeepot. 'I thought the Defense Department sent them,' she said, 'that's what I always heard.'" (Grau, 1990, p. 116). From this quote, the telegram is seen as a symbol of death news, especially death news from war about the death of a veteran. In other words, memory does not just focus on reproducing an image of someone's past (Whitehead, 2009). It is particularly important because memory is closely tied to the individual, who is also a member of a group.

Based on the quotation above, it can also be understood that everyone knows that receiving a telegram is a sign of the arrival of news of a veteran's death. Thus, telegrams can be categorised as a collective symbol of the sad news of a veteran's death in war, which results in a collective memory of the local community. Everyone in the area would be aware without being notified or announced, as is the case in today's era. They would immediately understand if there was a death just by seeing the telegram delivery fleet arriving at a resident's house. Without notification, the local people would go to the house that received the telegram to express their condolences.

On the other hand, individual memories can sometimes transform into collective memories. For example, when an individual experiences a traumatic event, such as the Vietnam War, this event is also indirectly known by other social groups or communities because individuals are part of a group or collective. It also means that every individual is a member of a group that remembers an event known to other members of the group. However, these individual memories or recollections are also based on the collective experiences of the group, even though these memories are common or ordinary for all group members. Furthermore, individual memory also encompasses a perspective on collective memory, which is based on the solidarity among group members.

"You're not wearing your ring," Mrs. Watkins said.

"No," she said, "No, I never did wear it."

"You must be so upset," Mrs. Benson sipped delicately at the edge of the yellow sherry. "Just like your poor mother."

"I wasn't married to him," Susan said. "It's different." (Grau, 1990: 120).

The above quote can be categorised as collective memory because the topic discussed in the quote is known to the public or generally known by other members of the group within Susan's environment. However, it can be seen as an individual memory that originates from

individual experiences but has connections with other members of the group, which makes it also a collective memory. This explanation can be linked to the concept of collective memory, which can be understood as a perspective on collective memory that changes in accordance with an individual's relationship with other groups (Halbwachs as cited in Whitehead, 1990: 129). This concept can be simplified to understanding that collective memory is an individual experience of members of a particular social group within society, in which they perceive memories shared by other group members.

Thus, by examining the definition and explanation of collective memory and its relationship to individual memory, we can conclude that the reality of facing the loss of a loved one is not limited to Susan and her mother. It is because the community and other group members can understand and empathise with the pain and suffering experienced by Susan and her mother regarding the loss of a loved one, as they too have suffered similar wounds as victims of a painful history related to memories of war, particularly the Vietnam War.

### **Trauma and Re-memory**

Toni Morrison first coined the term "re-memory" in her novel *Beloved*, when Sethe, the main character, dredged up her long-forgotten memories. Upon first reading, many readers may interpret re-memory as everyday conversational language. However, Morrison herself, as the originator of the term, emphasizes that memory and re-memory are two different things, but re-memory itself is part of memory. According to Morrison, memory is a fixed knowledge that describes moments intentionally meant to be remembered. On the other hand, re-memory refers to a memory of something that has been forgotten by someone due to the suppression of that memory. Thus, simply put, memory is the recollection of something from the past that one intentionally wants to remember. At the same time, re-memory refers to a memory that emerges when other memories are suppressed to the point of not surfacing and being recalled (Palmer, 2014).

"We are so sorry, Susan," they said one after the other. Susan started to say thank you and then decided to say nothing. Mrs. Benson peered over her sherry glass at the telegram propped on the table next to the good silver coffepot. "I thought the Defense Department sent them," she said. "that's what i always heard."

Susan's mother said emphatically, her light voice straining over the words, just the way it always did: "They sent me one for my husband." (Grau, 1990: 116).

The quotation suggests that Susan's mother relived the repressed memory that occurred in a different situation. The re-memory event occurred when Susan learned of

Harold's death, and the government was likely the source of the information. The painful experience of Susan's mother when she received the news of her husband's death, which was also conveyed via a telegram sent by the government, resurfaced in her memory as a repetition of the memory, even though the cause of the memory resurfacing was experienced by someone else. Although the memory was suppressed by Susan's mother, the trigger—the news of Harold's death in the war reaching Susan—became a spark that ignited her mother's memory, causing her to recall the same event she had experienced years ago: the news of her husband's death on the battlefield. It is the central point in the process of remembrance experienced by Susan's mother, as the same news resurfaces between her and Susan. Indirectly, this remembrance causes the feelings of mourning and trauma, which had begun to heal over time, to resurface due to the trigger of the news of death.

Furthermore, remembrance is not merely a matter of memory, nor is it about forgetting. Rather, remembrance is the fusion of memory with a significant opportunity for repetition within it. If the event being remembered is a tragic one, it can lead to the sudden resurgence of traumatic feelings in an individual. Thus, within re-memory, there is a high likelihood that an individual will suddenly recall what they have tried to forget, even in the smallest of events, through a new form of repetition based on the emergence of their memories, even if that repetition occurs in others. Additionally, Ricouer introduced the concept of remembrance as an effort to help people remember slavery by imagining it through the narrative he presented in the novel *Beloved*. (Hirsch, n.d.: 96). Thus, indirectly, the concept of re-memory is a new form of the process of remembering something that has been forced to be forgotten by recalling the traumatic event through repetition occurring around it, with or without the individual who experienced the trauma.

"You're acting very strangely. I've never seen you act like this.. Did something go on that shouldn't have? Tell me."

Susan tossed a hairbrush from hand to hand. "Maybe it's me." She said. "but i just don't know what people are talking about any more."

"All right," her mother said, "you make me put this way. Are you going to have a baby?"

Susan started at the broken edges of the bristles, and she began to giggle. "Harold left a year ago mother." "Oh," her mother said, "oh oh oh." And she backed out the door. Where there was nobody to hear them: "That was you who was pregnant. And it was another war." (Grau, 1990: 118).

The re-memory described in the above quote is experienced again by Susan's mother. It was caused by Susan's mother's misunderstanding of Susan's condition after receiving the news of Harold's death. Susan's mother

thought that Susan was pregnant, even though this was highly unlikely, given that Harold had been away at war for almost a year. Moreover, if Susan were pregnant, the baby would have already been born. It is what caused the re-memory or repetition of memories for Susan's mother, as she recalled her state of mind when she received the news of Susan's father's death while she was pregnant with Susan. Although Susan's mother eventually realised that she had unintentionally misinterpreted Susan's condition, the memory repetition that had already occurred was not something she could easily forget. The traumatic event she had tried so hard to suppress resurfaced due to a trigger from someone else.

There is a desire in Susan to forget this painful event in this short story. Susan has learned from her mother that her father died in the war. One day, news of Harold's death also reaches Susan, and she always tries to deny her grief over his death. Moreover, the news of the death, which came from a telegram, also brought back her memories of her father's death. In the inscription of the short story, Grau refers to the victims of the Vietnam War, particularly in this work, which tells the story of soldiers who died at a young age due to the war.

"Twenty's still pretty young," he said.

"This whole thing is my mother. The minute she saw the telegram  
all she could think of is how history is repeating itself.  
She's called  
everybody, even people she doesn't like." (Grau, 1990 : 9)

Based on the quotation, it can be seen that a process of re-memory is present in this work, especially with the expression "history is repeating," which refers to the recurrence of events that occurred regarding a soldier who died at a young age in battle. The process of remembering can be viewed as a creative and mental process involving the retrieval of past events, which is then referred to as remembrance or the reactivation of a memory. A re-memory differs from memory because it can be shared. The collection of characteristics associated with war triggers a re-examination of memories about the war that multiple individuals share. Even those who have never had any experience related to it can understand the suffering shared by the war victims through the shared remembrance process.

### **The Struggle of The Characters to Face The Trauma in Homecoming**

When faced with something traumatic, individuals generally defend themselves by avoiding or even erasing all bad memories of the event. Not only individuals, but large-scale traumatic events can also become collective traumas, such as slavery, war, and genocide against a particular group. On an individual level, many people are haunted by terrifying memories of such events and often experience depression. On a collective level, this becomes

a lasting wound that cannot be erased by time. As a result, each individual tries to bury or eliminate the bitter memories and trauma that linger within them. It is also what happens to the character Susan and her mother in the short story *Homecoming*. They try to push away all the bad memories and traumatic feelings that resurface when something related to their trauma reappears. Especially in this case, the trauma related to war and everything connected to the objects lost because of the war.

### **The Struggle to Block Trauma and Memories Traumatic in the Homecoming**

Ricoeur (2006) explains that one way to alleviate or even escape from trauma is to block or prevent anything that could cause bad memories to resurface and exacerbate the trauma. It requires action on the part of the individual concerned to block the memories and trauma. Generally, to block these memories, one removes objects associated with the incident that caused the trauma. These objects can be material, such as specific items related to the traumatic event, or non-material, such as conversations about the event. In this short story, the feelings of mourning, bad memories, and even trauma faced by the characters are the effects caused by the war, which has taken away the people they love. The effort to block memories is evident in Susan's actions. She seems indifferent to the war and even Harold's death, even though he was an important person in her life, even though the short story suggests that he did not significantly influence her.

However, the text reveals that the war and the character Harold do influence Susan, as several quotes in the short story show how Susan tries so hard to avoid any conversation about the war, especially if it is related to Harold, who was a soldier who died young in the war. "She made her tea. As if she was obeying a set of rules. Things were beginning to feel less strange to her. Even the talk about Harold seemed as silly as it had. She just wanted to leave the room." (Grau, 1990, p. 123). This quote illustrates Susan's dislike of when people in her house bring up Harold. Consciously trying to avoid any memories of Harold, even the pain of old memories told by her mother about her father's death in the war, Susan immediately leaves to avoid the conversation. Susan does this as a way to block out memories of the war and her memories with Harold from haunting her again. The proof that this is so influential on her is reinforced by her mother's question when Susan is in the kitchen after leaving the room.

Her mother stood in the door. "Do you feel well enough to come back in, child?" Susan chuckled, a quiet little self-contented chuckle.

"Whatever is funny, child?"

"You're having such a good time. Mother, you haven't had such

a good time in ages."

"Well, really."

"You're alive and I'm alive and Harold's not alive."

"That's horrible."

"Sure."(Grau,1990:123)

The quotation above indicates that Susan is not doing well. It is evident from her mother asking her if she is ready to return to the room where war veterans are discussing the war. Additionally, this character makes another effort to remove objects related to Harold.

That was how she got the ring. She never wore it, and he didn't

ask for it back. She didn't even see him again. His family moved away

to the north part of the state, to Laurel, and Harold went there on his

leaves. He didn't come back to town and he didn't call her. He did send

a chain to wear the ring on it—it was far too big for her finger—from

California. She wrote him a thank-you note the very same day. But he

didn't answer, and the ring and the chain hung on the back of her dresser mirror.(Grau,1990:120)

At a high school party, Susan received a ring from Harold. She still kept the ring and sometimes wore it before the telegram announcing Harold's death arrived at her house. After the young man's death, she never wore the ring again and hid it in the back of her wardrobe. The chain Harold had sent to hold the ring (since it was too large for him) was also hung discreetly alongside the ring. It suggests that Susan was still trying to keep these items, yet she seemed to avoid looking at them. However, to completely block out all memories of the matter, she considered sending the ring back to Harold's parents. "She'd send the ring back to his parents. Maybe they'd like to have it." (Grau, 1990, p. 120). It was intended to reduce the burden Susan felt in dealing with her grief and trauma.

### **The Struggle to Manipulate Trauma and Traumatic Memories in the Homecoming**

If Susan tries to block all the bad memories caused by objects related to her trauma, it is different from her mother's approach. Another way described by Ricouer is to manipulate memories into ones that are not so oppressive, for example, by manipulating terrible events into something so valuable and not wasted.

And Susan remembered her grandmother sitting on the porch in

the sun, eyes hooded like a bird's, fingers like birds' claws. Senility that

came and went, like a shade going up and down. "He don't look nothing

like the pictures," she said. She always called her dead son-in-law he,

never used his name. "Never looked like that, not dead, not alive." The

one hand that was not paralyzed waved at an invisible fly. "Died and

went to glory, that boy. Those pictures your mother likes, they're

pictures of him in glory. Nothing more nor less than glory."(Grau,1990: 119)

The quotation above recounts a memory of when Susan's grandmother was still alive, discussing her son-in-law (Susan's father). Susan's grandmother said that the photo they were looking at together was one that her mother loved very much. It was because the photo depicted a soldier who had died on the battlefield, whose death was ultimately a glorious one. Susan's mother indirectly believed that her husband did not die in vain, as he had died defending the country and was a young hero who died in glory. However, in the previous narrative, Susan's mother felt deep pain and was reminded of painful memories when looking at the same photo. "When I read that telegram and see this picture," Susan's mother said, "I felt a pain in my heart that I never got rid of. I carried that pain in my heart from that day to this." (Grau, 1990, p. 116). It can be concluded that there is a manipulation of memory, where the pain is transformed into something more acceptable. She redirects the bad memory with a thought she creates that her husband died in glory as a war veteran defending the country. However, as evidenced in the excerpt above, this manipulation process was not entirely successful, as the pain of her husband's death could not be erased despite the manipulation. Susan's statement further reinforces that neither her father nor Harold died in glory as a result of the war.

Mrs. Watkins repeated, "All the young men are so brave."

"No," Susan said abruptly. "Not my father, and not Harold. They

weren't brave, they just got caught."

In the silence she could hear the soft wheeze of their astonished

breaths, and, as she turned, the creak of old boards under her heel.

"They don't die in glory." The words came out sounding like her speech

at the Senior Debating Society. "They just die dead. Anyway, I was on

my way to fix a cup of tea."(Grau,1990:121)

It is clear how much Susan dislikes war. For her, war does not allow people to die in glory. Her father and Harold seem to have been mere pawns sacrificed in the war. Moreover, there is no recognition afterwards if they become heroes. Moreover, they were young soldiers with no rank. Their presence in the war was seen as merely increasing the number of troops. However, Susan's mother insisted that her husband did not die in vain, firmly stating, "All the brave young men who die in their glory" (Grau, 1990, p. 121) even though, as was known, even at the beginning of the narrative, how sad the mother was, she cried out loud, her sobs echoing throughout the neighborhood when the war took her husband. Once again,



this highlights the manipulation Susan's mother has imposed on the mourning she is facing.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the above analysis, there are three types of memory related to trauma concerning the Vietnam War, namely individual and collective memory and the concept of remembrance. Individual memory focuses on the personal, and in this short story, it recounts the experiences of several people who were aware of and directly experienced the war. Harold's death saddens Susan, and her mother mourns the death of her husband. However, when people experience or are part of a group or community that directly knows and experiences the event, memory transforms into collective memory. In this case, the collective memory of Vietnam involves people gathering at Susan's house to remember and honour the veterans who died in the war.

On the other hand, when some people experience trauma, many of them try to forget those painful memories. Susan's mother mourns her husband. After several years, she is still mourning him. Additionally, she tries to cope with her husband's death in the war by viewing him as having died honourably as a young soldier hailed as a hero. Conversely, Susan denies her memories of Harold. She believes that losing Harold means nothing and has no impact on her. Even in her memories, she still remembers who Harold was and always keeps his ring. When Harold died, she sent the ring back to Harold's family. That means she was trying to forget all her memories of Harold, if she still kept the ring with her. So, everyone in this short story has their way of forgetting and dealing with their painful memories.

## **SUGGESTION**

This study reveals that traumatic memories, both individual and collective, have a significant impact on shaping perceptions and interpretations of past experiences, particularly regarding the Vietnam War as depicted in Sherley Ann Grau's work "Homecoming." Therefore, it is crucial to develop practical approaches that enable individuals and communities to understand and manage traumatic memories more effectively. An interdisciplinary approach that combines psychology, literature, and cultural studies can serve as a strong foundation for designing trauma-sensitive therapy and educational programs. This method can also open up new, deeper understandings of the complexity of trauma and its healing process. The development of such integrated strategies is expected to accelerate the psychological and social recovery process. In addition, literary narratives can serve as a powerful medium for reflection for both individuals and groups. This approach can strengthen the resilience of communities affected by trauma. Thus, this research makes a significant contribution to mapping the

practical and theoretical needs within the context of trauma and memory.

The research findings also open up the possibility of developing a new Theory related to the concept of rememory, which explains how traumatic memories are not only passively passed on but actively reconstructed and processed in various forms of social and cultural narratives. This rememory process is crucial to be utilised in psychotherapy and historical Education practices to create more comprehensive and profound healing. Further research is needed to explore how these rememory techniques can be applied to strengthen individual and collective capacities in dealing with past trauma. Interdisciplinary studies, which encompass psychology, anthropology, and media studies, are crucial for this concept to evolve into a more practical application. Additionally, this Theory can expand our understanding of trauma dynamics at the community and cultural levels. This approach also enables innovation in more adaptive therapy and Education models. Further research would be highly beneficial if it examines the use of narratives and personal experiences as living sources of rememory. It has the potential to enrich understanding and psychosocial care for trauma.

From a practical perspective, it is recommended that community and educational programs actively integrate literary narratives and historical reflection as tools for psychological recovery and strengthening collective identity. Storytelling methods and open dialogue can serve as practical tools for collectively documenting traumatic experiences, thereby reinforcing solidarity and resilience within affected communities. Such programs can facilitate safe spaces for constructive discussion and memory reconstruction, ultimately accelerating the psychological recovery process. Narrative-based community approaches can also enhance collective awareness of the importance of historical memory as the foundation of identity. Educators and therapists are encouraged to adopt these methods to maximize positive impacts in trauma management contexts. Thus, communities not only become stronger but also more sensitive to traumatic experiences, and this encourages active participation in collective healing efforts. This step is a practical approach that aligns with research findings and community needs.

Finally, advancements in digital technology and social media open up significant opportunities to expand the rememory process to be more inclusive and interactive. Digital platforms can be utilised not only as a medium for documentation but also as a space for discussion and the reconstruction of dynamic collective trauma narratives. The use of this technology enables current and future generations to access, understand, and reflect on traumatic experiences in a more personal and collaborative manner.

Future research should focus on optimising the use of technology to enrich this rememory experience. Additionally, the development of interactive applications and media can serve as strategic tools in historical Education and trauma therapy. This digital approach also paves the way for preserving collective memory while transforming it into a social force. Thus, technology can act as a bridge between a traumatic past and a more empowered and resilient future. This innovation offers new hope for the dynamics of trauma healing in the modern era.

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