Silencing Trauma:
Depoliticization and the Concealment of the Political in American Veterans' Fictional Narratives of the Korean and Vietnam Wars[*]

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Abstract

Trauma studies mainly focus on the psychological mechanisms of trauma and the various ways witnesses and victims represent it. But recent approaches in the field emphasize that despite doubts about the accuracy of traumatic memories, trauma narratives could point to the socio-political issues involved because they reflect the dominant societal discourses, and connect the text to history and ideology. As such, literary narratives can potentially depict traumatic events as non-political experiences, obscure their connections to power dynamics, and "depoliticize" these events. As a result, power structures are validated, and challenges to the root causes and consequences of trauma are prevented. To identify the patterns and possibilities of depoliticization in war narratives, this article examines four nationally acclaimed literary works about the Korean and Vietnam wars, written by American veterans. Employing a combination of theoretical frameworks from trauma studies alongside Norman Fairclough and Ruth Wodak's models in critical discourse analysis, the research identified and categorized instances of depoliticization to show how they reflect or conceal broader historical and sociopolitical contexts. The results reveal that although these narratives appear to be anti-war, they conform to the dominant discourses of their time by downplaying, manipulating, or omitting political references—i.e., through depoliticization of the narrative. Given that depoliticized trauma narratives can diminish or obscure political responsibility, this study opens up extensive prospects for deeper examination of the relationship between the representation of trauma and political power. Ultimately, the findings emphasize the importance of a critical approach to analyzing trauma narratives and war literature.

Keywords: Depoliticization, Korean War, Trauma Studies, Vietnam War, War Literature

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1. Introduction

For centuries, the violence of conflict and its impact on individuals and society as a whole have inspired works of art and literature to portray the psychological trauma brought about by such violence. War literature is said to encompass different forms of artistic expression while retaining a specific essence. That essence is the trauma-sustaining narrative that revolves around the context of war as more than just a historical event or mere armed-battles; rather it depicts the devastation that war inflicts on the psyche, emotions, and society as a whole, and thus trauma becomes a recurring theme tackled throughout the work. Such a narrative serves to sustain the focus on trauma through the unyielding exploration of how individuals and communities grapple with its aftermath. Such portrayals of trauma add immense value for readers by providing insight into the experiences of people grappling with the impact of war. Thus, war literature serves as more than a testament to individual and collective suffering caused by war violence; it also enables commentary on the socio-political factors surrounding that suffering and calls for in-depth exploration.

However, there is a risk of neglect regarding the scope of politics and history entwined with the literary representation of war trauma. This tendency—which is referred to as the "depoliticization" of war narratives in this research—creates a focus on trauma in personal accounts while overlooking the broader political and historical contexts of the traumatic event and, therefore, aligning with the existing dominant power relations in placing the trauma as distinct from the larger societal forces. In this sense, depoliticization turns the trauma into an individual, disembodied experience devoid of the societal and political structures that shape such realities, thus preserving the status quo.

Silencing Trauma: Depoliticization and Concealment of the Political in American
Veterans' Fictional Narratives of the Korean and Vietnam Wars

435

Examining war narratives in light of depoliticization strategies allows a shift in focus from the commonly explored personal experience to the mechanisms that writers may employ in their works to comply with the dominant discourse of their time. This approach exposes the political relevance and implications that these literary strategies carry.

Highlighting the methods of depoliticization employed in war narratives, this study examines how these strategies shape the depiction of trauma. The claim here is that by overlooking the political roots of the conflict, such narratives can sometimes unintentionally align with broader dominant discourses, which affects how trauma is understood and remembered. In order to do that, an interdisciplinary approach is applied, which combines the pluralist model of trauma studies with critical discourse analysis to provide a more nuanced examination of this phenomenon. Through this lens, it is argued that war literature sometimes inadvertently strengthens dominant power structures and perpetuates the political dynamics responsible for trauma, contributing to cycles of violence and suffering. The central hypothesis of this research posits that through depoliticization of the narrative, the political contexts that give rise to trauma are downplayed, and thereby the prevailing political agendas are veiled over. In this manner, trauma narratives risk reinforcing the very power dynamics that ultimately create the conditions leading to conflict and suffering.

The research involved an in-depth analysis of four literary representations of warfare, namely Hooker's novel *M.A.S.H.* and Salter's *The Hunters* about the Korean War, and Heinemann's *Paco's Story* and O'Brien's *The Things They Carried* about the Vietnam war. These fictional narratives were chosen particularly because the authors were American war veterans with first-hand

experience of these conflicts, considering the fact that in the framework of Trauma Studies, the veterans are deemed as direct witnesses of trauma. A close reading approach was adapted to identify and categorize instances of depoliticization within these texts and to explore their connections to the historical and socio-political contexts in which they were produced. For the theoretical framework, the pluralistic model of trauma studies—a comprehensive approach that considers the socio-cultural factors in trauma analysis— and critical discourse analysis (CDA) were employed to focus on the socio-political and cultural forces that shape these narratives as opposed to the traditional approaches to the representation of trauma that focused on the psychological aspects of the event. By examining how trauma literature can overlook or impede political accountability, this study attempted to illuminate the complex interplay between trauma representation and political power, offering insights into the role of literature in shaping public consciousness and contributing to the discourse on war and trauma.

2. Review of Literature

2. 1. Trauma Narrative and the Politics of Depoliticization

In *A Theory of Literary Production*, Pierre Macherey argues that literary works are shaped equally by what they reveal and by the underlying assumptions they confine and deliberately leave out. He contends that these silences are intentional and substantially connect textual content to history and ideology (Macherey, 1978, pp. 86, 94). In other words, such textual silences may reflect ideological positions and contribute to their reproduction. On the other hand, dominant institutions can subtly influence public

Silencing Trauma: Depoliticization and Concealment of the Political in American
Veterans' Fictional Narratives of the Korean and Vietnam Wars

437

opinion and maintain power systems via various strategies of discourse control (Wodak & Meyer, 2001, p. 6; Angermuller, 2014, pp. 120, 150, 326; Van Dijk, 2005, p. 33), which include the imposition of silences or omissions in certain narratives that bear powerful political capacities. As a result, the omission of socio-political responsibility in American warfare narratives has notable political implications, especially when these narratives align with dominant discourses (Kagan, 2000, p. 25).

Similarly, the pluralistic model of literary trauma studies views traumatic memory as dynamic and fluid. It considers memory as something reconstructed and reshaped under the influence of social and cultural factors. Therefore, as Lawrence Kirmayer suggests, the malleability of memory means that traumatic memories change according to needs and conditions (Kirmayer, 1996, p. 13). If traumatic memory is understood as a constantly reconstructed subjectivity influenced by external forces, such as dominant discourses and cultural patterns (Balaev, 2018, p. 367), then these discourses can determine what is remembered and what remains unsaid (Kirmayer, 1996, p. 191).

Naomi Mandel critiques the attribution of "unspeakability" to traumatic memory (Mandel, 2006, pp. 4–5), arguing that narrative patterns such as forgetting or avoiding certain aspects of trauma are likely strategic choices influenced by the demands of the dominant culture (Mandel, 2006, in Balaev, 2018, p. 368). Greg Forter, who applies the pluralistic trauma theory model to postcolonial literature, claims that attributing an inaccessible nature to trauma is not due to the independence of traumatic experience from its social or historical context, but rather the result of limitations imposed by power structures (Forter, 2014, p. 77, in Balaev, 2018, p. 368). Forter demonstrates that representing trauma within the framework

of dominant discourse is a significant challenge because power institutions always strive to oversee trauma representations and preserve their own discourses. These studies prove that through selective remembrance or enforced silence, trauma narratives sometimes serve the interests of dominant forces, concealing certain consequences of traumatic events. In trauma studies, discursive, cultural, and social approaches to trauma analysis are referred to as "the politics of trauma", which is a rich arena for the examination of trauma narratives from a critical discourse analysis perspective (Davis, 2020, p. 5).

The political significance of the so-called omissions and silences is evident when meaningful patterns are detected in the bulk of literary texts produced on topics such as war and war trauma. As Richard Kagan demonstrates in his comparative study of American and Asian war narratives, American war literature shows many instances of avoidance in addressing political aspects of war. According to his analysis, American authors often seem to prioritize the depiction of their characters' internal struggles over the representation of broader political and cultural dimensions of war, while writers from Korea, Vietnam, and Japan often situate the battle within historical and cultural contexts, attempting to explore the reasons and effects of military acts (Kagan, 2000, p. 25). Kagan claims that this approach by American writers reveals a deliberate attempt to minimize the political and historical significance of war. In doing so, they unintentionally minimize the viewpoints and experiences of the "other", instead emphasizing the personal and psychological obstacles that American soldiers encounter. Political issues, such as the motivations of power structures, are conspicuously lacking in American narratives (Kagan, 2000, p. 25). These narratives criticize war management

Silencing Trauma: Depoliticization and Concealment of the Political in American
Veterans' Fictional Narratives of the Korean and Vietnam Wars

439

without addressing its underlying causes. Kagan shows that Asian writers use war memories to understand the conflict, directly confronting readers with historical and political truths. In contrast, American war narratives often blur the lines between reality and fiction, presenting a vague image of these experiences, where traumatic memories are unreliable and can only serve therapeutic analysis or the production of literary and artistic works (Kagan, 2000, p. 32). However, Kagan's research lacks a systematic categorization and classification of both the modes and frequency of political avoidance strategies. This gap prevents the development of a structured framework that could be applied not only to this genre of literature, but also to other related literary fields.

In addition to the predominant patterns of silence and omission, a significant issue in the literature on trauma studies is the role played by the witnesses of trauma and the narrative voices that articulate their experiences. The study of trauma narratives raises significant ethical and social dilemmas about witnessing, remembrance, and recognition. Arnold-de Simine notes that "trauma and the consequential victim status have acquired symbolic capital, presenting the opportunity to gain a voice and visibility in public forums" (2018, p. 142). This prompts critical questions about who is granted the authority to voice their claims, demand rights, and narrate their version of the traumatic experience. The inherent uncertainty of remembrance and recollection has led some to approach trauma narratives with skepticism, particularly when it comes to acknowledging "the larger social, political, and economic practices, including the various ways in which we are implicated in other people's trauma" (Arnold-de Simine, 2018, p. 143). This attitude increases the risk of

mystifying traumatic events to the point that they become entirely unapproachable.

The intellectual upheaval of the late twentieth century—marked by the ideas of thinkers such as Fukuyama, Jameson, and Lyotard—ushered in a shift from the "end of history" to "posthistoire" and a broader skepticism towards the validity of "grand narratives". This philosophical shift has, in part, contributed to a justified distrust of trauma narratives as well, thus, Arnold-de Simine cautions against the potential risk of reducing trauma narratives to simple binaries or stripping them off their historical and cultural aspects:

> Discourses of trauma can be ideologically instrumentalized and exploited to ignore the complexities of a historical event; they can be dehistoricized and mythologized to view the world in simple terms of good and evil, victims and perpetrators, or culturally simplified into a facile juxtaposition of nostalgia and trauma (Arnold-de Simine, 2018, p. 143).

Another critical issue is related to the notion that trauma memory can be transmitted across generations through narratives of traumatic experiences, which raises concerns about the message being conveyed, the version of traumatic memory that is represented, and the nature of witnessing and traumatization, particularly in relation to the political and cultural factors embedded in a community's dominant discourses. Given that veterans who narrate war trauma often have access to a broader audience, they can serve as potential mediators for transmitting or reinforcing dominant discourses while receiving support from power structures within their society. This support may come directly or indirectly through national awards, media coverage, and wider publication of their works. In such a context, literary

Silencing Trauma: Depoliticization and Concealment of the Political in American Veterans' Fictional Narratives of the Korean and Vietnam Wars

441

representations of trauma are influenced by external forces as they attempt to understand and describe the events.

According to Kaplan (2005, p. 68), cultures can experience trauma much like individuals, often employing mechanisms such as selective forgetting or suppression to erase disturbing historical events from collective memory—a process Freud (1895, in Kaplan, 2005, pp. 26, 43) identified as "latency", "belatedness", or *Nachträglichkeit*. However, cultural forgetting frequently has political dimensions, strategically erasing memories that are politically inconvenient or too distressing to confront. Trauma theory encourages revisiting narratives to reveal how certain historical realities are consciously or subconsciously displaced due to social or political pressures. Hollywood melodramas clearly illustrate this phenomenon by typically portraying trauma as individual amnesia rather than directly engaging with politically sensitive collective traumas, a tendency particularly evident in films made after World War II, as well as those produced following events such as 9/11 and the Iraq War (Kaplan, 2005, p.74).

2. 2. The Politics of War

Liberalism is often praised as an ideology committed to humanity, peace and justice, but the last century reveals its significant association with war and violence. Evans and Reid (2014, p. 127) note: "Rather than seeking to banish war and anxiety as liberal peace advocates would maintain, liberalism actually thrives in conditions of pure uncertainty". Brad Evans argues that liberalism acts as a "regime of power", positioning the fate of humanity within its own political strategies. Liberal wars are typically portrayed as actions necessary to protect human life and essential steps toward

peace (Evans, 2011, p. 748). Paradoxically, military interventions as a "global emancipation project" designed to save and civilize "other underdeveloped" (Evans, 2011, p. 749), usually occur away from the homeland, minimizing domestic reaction and obscuring liberalism (Evans, 2011, p. 750), suggesting that liberalism historically adapts to methods to the restoration of its legitimism.

One of the most critical aspects of liberalism is that it depoliticizes humanitarian discourses and practices. The dominant liberal discourses on life and death, the management of global resources, the prevention of global crises, and the prioritization of essential survival needs over political concerns all serve to justify liberal wars. These discourses often obscure the capitalist political incentives behind the creation of crises and military interventions (Evans, 2011, p. 753). The processes of depoliticization are not limited to the macro level of international or global humanitarian campaigns, but also extend to the linguistic processes of representation in the media.

Depoliticization in media representations helps to promote and legitimize the liberal agenda of military intervention, while absolving political authorities and decision-makers of responsibility for the atrocities committed during these wars in the name of the liberal project of emancipation.

3. Theoretical Framework

3. 1. Depoliticization

Depoliticization is a term used across various humanities fields, with its meaning varying depending on the context. In political

Silencing Trauma: Depoliticization and Concealment of the Political in American
Veterans' Fictional Narratives of the Korean and Vietnam Wars

443

science, Flinders and Buller (2006, p. 295) highlight that the common core of the term involves "shifts in political reasoning", the delegation of responsibilities to independent bodies or experts, and the exclusion of politics through the adoption of "rational" practices. They define depoliticization as "the range of tools, mechanisms, and institutions through which politicians can attempt to move to an indirect governing relationship and/or seek to persuade the demos that they can no longer be reasonably held responsible for a certain issue, policy field or specific decision" (Flinders & Buller, 2006, p. 296). Despite this shift in responsibility, they argue that this process is more about "arena shifting" rather than the removal of politics, as the core political processes remain unchanged, though they become more complex. Politicians ultimately decide which functions to depoliticize and retain indirect control through mechanisms like appointments and reserve powers (Flinders & Buller, 2006, p. 296). The primary concern with depoliticization is political accountability, as it allows politicians to maintain control while minimizing "political transaction costs", thereby insulating themselves from the negative repercussions of policy failures (Flinders & Buller, 2006, p. 296). This concept is closely related to liberalism and its methods of justification of wars and political accountability.

Employing depoliticization as a narrative strategy in fictional portrayals of war trauma is an inherently political act because it can be considered a deliberate or inadvertent compliance with the dominant discourse of the established power structures and suppression of dissent. Herman and Chomsky, in their seminal work, *Manufacturing Consent* (2002) state that mainstream media is subject to being affected by corporate owners, advertising revenue and government pressures. As a result, they prioritize

specific narratives and attitudes that align with powerful interests, while ignoring unsatisfactory voices and alternative approaches. Chomsky and Herman introduce the "Propaganda Model" (Herman & Chomsky, 2002) to elucidate this mechanism. According to their model, media organizations selectively filter and distort information to serve elite interests, including the promotion of pro-establishment narratives, the vilification of official adversaries, and the downplaying of issues challenging the status quo.

Depoliticization of trauma in war literature is a complex and versatile process that can be operated through various narrative techniques. By employing neutral language, neutralizing ideological conflicts, promoting disintegration and apathy, and normalizing cultural practices, war stories can obscure the political dimensions of trauma, presenting it as a purely personal or psychological experience. Here we detect these depoliticization techniques in depth, analyze their implications for representation of trauma in American war literature and have their ability to strengthen the major discourses of power. Through a close reading of selected texts, the purpose of this study is to highlight the subtle methods in which trauma narratives can work to portray painful events, leading to a comprehensive discourse on relationships between literature, trauma and power.

3. 2. Literary Trauma Studies

Literary trauma studies examine how literature represents trauma and explores the narrative strategies that authors use to articulate traumatic experiences. It is strongly based on psychoanalytic, cultural and historical theories, especially Freudian psychoanalysis, and contemporary trauma theory. Literary trauma studies

Silencing Trauma: Depoliticization and Concealment of the Political in American
Veterans' Fictional Narratives of the Korean and Vietnam Wars

445

investigate how traumatic experiences, which resist traditional forms of articulation, find expression through the unique narrative capacities of literature. By combining psychoanalytic, cultural and historical ideas, it reveals how literature portrays trauma, shapes collective memories and engages in ethical dialogue about suffering and recovery.

3. 2. 1. The Traditional Model: Psychoanalysis, Memory and Narrative

The traditional literary trauma theory relied on the psychoanalytic theories of Sigmund Freud and the concepts of repression, latency, and the return of repressed (Freud et al., 2003). He emphasized that the memory of a traumatic event tends to repeat itself, and trauma is often experienced only through subsequent narratives (Balaev, 2018, p. 363). Thus, the compulsion to revisit memories is the reason for the existence of trauma narratives. Traditional trauma studies theorists emphasize the unreliability of these memories as sources for historical analysis, arguing that due to the unstable and ambiguous nature of memory, trauma narratives cannot be considered reliable sources of historical truth (Caruth, 1996, p. 61). Such arguments render the details of traumatic memories, especially in their literary recording, devoid of evidentiary value, thereby invalidating trauma narratives as subjects of sociological and cultural analysis.

Still, these concepts remain central to understanding the impact of trauma on memory and narrative. Based on these ideas, Caruth (1996) formulated a seminal trauma model as an event that is not fully experienced at the moment of happening, but returns later in fragmented and compulsive forms. For Caruth (1996, p. 4), trauma resists integration into conscious understanding; It is a wound that:

> … trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature—the way it was precisely not knowing the first instance— returns to haunt the survivor later on.

Literature, in this view, becomes a place of indirect testimony, where indescribable experiences appear through narrative gaps, repetition, silence and disarticulated temporality. This traditional model - further advanced by theorists such as Felman and Laub (1992) - focuses heavily on the testimony of the Holocaust and the Ethics of Testimony. Trauma here is often figured as universal, timeless and external language. Its representational difficulty becomes the defining characteristic of trauma literature, leading to what LaCapra (2001) identifies as "acting out" - a compulsive and unresolved repetition of trauma - and the most productive process of "working through", by which historical specificity and narrative agency are gradually regained (LaCapra, 2001, pp. 20-25). However, despite its deep ideas, the traditional model was criticized for its limited scope because it often tends to privilege individual trauma, universalize western experience and neglect the sociopolitical dimensions of traumatic suffering, as Kaplan (2005, p. 36) notes:

> Trauma theory bridged the gap and enabled me to approach the political/national structures that produce catastrophe while at the same time shaping its impact according to prevailing ideological and other discourses. But it soon became clear that a more complex model than that of Caruth and many psychologists was needed.

Silencing Trauma: Depoliticization and Concealment of the Political in American
Veterans' Fictional Narratives of the Korean and Vietnam Wars

447

3. 2. 2. The Pluralistic Model: Contextual, Cultural and Political Trauma

In response to these limitations, more recent studies developed what can be called a pluralistic model of trauma studies. This approach expands analytical lenses to include historical and culturally specific trauma-a slavery, colonialism, forced migration and gender-based violence that trauma is not simply a psychic wound, but also a product of social structures and political stories (Alexander, 2004; Erikson, 1995). Scholars like Tal (1996, p. 7) argue that trauma should be understood not only as a psychological phenomenon, but also as a political and cultural construction, particularly in narratives that challenge the hegemonic representations of violence and marginalization:

> The speech of survivors, then, is highly politicized. If "telling it like it was" threatens the status quo, powerful political, economic, and social forces will pressure survivors either to keep their silence or to revise their stories. If the survivor community is a marginal one, their voices will be drowned out by those with the influence and resources to silence them, and to trumpet a revised version of their trauma. Less marginal trauma survivors can some¬ times band together as a community and retain a measure of control over the representation of their experience. Much of my work focuses upon the interaction between the survivor as individual, the community of survivors, and the wielders of political power.

This model resists the assumption that trauma is always indescribable or not representable. Instead, it recognizes the variety of narrative strategies that authors can employ —including realistic, lyrical, testimonial and hybrid forms— to represent trauma.

The pluralistic model also incorporates an intersectional understanding of trauma, aware of the way race, gender, class, and colonial history inflect both experience and the representation of suffering. Kaplan (2005) explores the cultural codification of trauma in visual and literary media, explaining the ways in which the global and feminist global perspectives can radically alter dominant narratives. Likewise, LaCapra (2001, pp. 159-160) warns against the conflicting experiences of the victims and the aggressor, asking for strict historical contextualization in any trauma analysis.

Both models converge on the recognition of the narrative challenges of trauma and their ethical bets; they differ, however, in the way they understand the potential of literature to represent, work or resist trauma. While the traditional model sees literature as a haunted space of symptomatic traits, the pluralistic approach sees it as a generative field for criticism, memory and potential healing. Alexander (2004), in his sociological theory of cultural trauma, emphasizes how societies build collective narratives around shared suffering, suggesting that trauma becomes culturally legible through mediation, public discourse and symbolic representation. Literature, therefore, not only reflects trauma, but also the participates, in shaping how it is remembered, transmitted and politically manifested.

3. 3. Critical Discourse Analysis

To investigate political discourse and depoliticization strategies in trauma narratives, critical discourse analysis offers relevant and applicable models for examining the subtle relationships among language, power, and ideology. Among these models, Norman

Silencing Trauma: Depoliticization and Concealment of the Political in American
Veterans' Fictional Narratives of the Korean and Vietnam Wars

449

Fairclough's critical discourse analysis model (Fairclough, 2015) and Ruth Wodak's historical discourse analysis model (Wodak & Meyer, 2001) are particularly relevant as they focus on the reproduction of power structures in the historical and social context of narratives. Fairclough's model provides a practical structure for research, while the Wodak model, which focuses on the historical trajectory of power and ideology, helps identify patterns in the text.

The model of critical discourse analysis presented by Norman Fairclough examines the relationship between language and the dominant power structure in terms of reinforcement or challenge. Fairclough (2015, pp. 58-59) proposes a three-part model for practical discourse analysis. This model consists of the following components:

1. Textual or Descriptive Analysis: Includes the vocabulary and linguistic tools that help eliminate political context from the narrative are examined.

2. Discursive Practice or Interpretive Analysis: Considers the author's background, experiences, and social conditions that may lead to omitting or reducing the political context.

3. Social Practice or Explanatory Analysis: Interprets and concludes by analyzing the historical and political contexts of the trauma narrative and their impacts on the reproduction of dominant ideologies

In this manner, once a body of texts is selected, it is analyzed at the textual level, then based on discursive practices, and finally through a critical lens that identifies its relation to the ideologies and systems of power in its context. Fairclough's approach to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is better understood as a

comprehensive methodology, not a fixed "method". In his model, the choice of specific analytical techniques is guided by how the research object is defined and built through theoretical ideas. In other words, instead of simply "applying methods" as isolated tools, professionals select them based on a deeper theoretical understanding of the subject. This means that theory and method are closely linked and cannot be entirely separated from the other in the Fairclough structure. However, his model does not have a strict chain of procedural stages to be followed strictly. In fact, these stages are parts of a wider theoretical order reflecting the flexible and interconnected nature of the research process; the relationship between them is dynamic, not sequential, allowing the adaption of an approach suited to the evolving requirements of the analysis (Fairclough, 2013, p. 234).

Ruth Wodak's model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), or the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA), is a comprehensive framework for analyzing discourse in relation to history, politics, and power. It is a version of the critical discourse analysis designed to explore how language is shaped and shapes historical, political and social contexts. In DHA, the focus is not only on the text or the speech itself, but on the background in which it is produced. This means the model examines word choices and linguistic structures and how discourse relates to historical events, political ideologies, and broader social dynamics. What separates DHA from other models of critical discourse analysis is that it is a problem-oriented model in nature. Instead of applying a fixed set of methods, this approach starts with a specific research problem and then selects a series of relevant texts to examine how discourse contributes to constructing identities, power relations, and cultural narratives. It paves the way for discovering subtle and often hidden relationships

Silencing Trauma: Depoliticization and Concealment of the Political in American
Veterans' Fictional Narratives of the Korean and Vietnam Wars

451

between language and society. Thus, DHA offers a comprehensive structure, integrating linguistic analysis with a profound appreciation of context to portray how discourse reflects and influences historical and sociopolitical realities.

Wodak's model proposes five discursive strategies in the analysis of discourses related to racial and ethnic issues that can be useful in the political-historical analysis of texts, although she emphasizes that these strategies can be adapted based on research topic and questions (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, p. 27; Wodak & Meyer, 2001, pp. 72–73).

1. Nomination/Referential Strategies: deal with how speakers or writers name or refer to people, groups, events, or places. The choice of words—such as labels or terms of identification— plays a significant role in shaping public perceptions.

2. Predication Strategies: Explain the qualities or characteristics associated with the nominated entities through adjectives, metaphors, comparisons, and other descriptive elements. In essence, predication assigns qualities that can positively or negatively affect how the nominated subjects are viewed.

3. Argumentation Strategies involve constructing arguments within a discourse and providing "evidence" or external reasoning to justify a particular perspective, making the overall discourse appear more valid or reasonable.

4. Perspectivization Strategies: indicate that the discourse is produced from a particular point of view or stance. Perspectivization shows that the presentation of events or entities is not neutral, but framed from a particular angle.

5. Intensification/Mitigation Strategies: These tactics modify the force or certainty of a statement. Intensification involves emphasizing a claim to make it appear firmer, whereas mitigation softens a statement to make it less direct or absolute.

While Wodak's model is especially suited for political discourse, racism, nationalism, and institutional identity, with historical depth, Fairclough's model is more theory-driven, focusing on abstract power relations and social structures, with less emphasis on historical specificity.

4. Methodology

This inquiry employs critical discourse analysis (CDA) to investigate how contemporary U.S. war fiction written by veteran authors negotiates—or displaces—political responsibility for wartime violence. Four novels constitute the analytic corpus: *The Hunters by Salter* (2012) and *M.A.S.H.* by Hooker (2009), which portray the Korean War, and *Paco's Story* by Heinemann (2010) and *The Things They Carried* by O'Brien (2009), which depict the Vietnam War. These works were chosen because their authors—American veterans who served in the conflicts they describe—are regarded in trauma studies as direct witnesses to trauma. Each novel has also received significant critical acclaim, enjoyed large print runs, and attracted substantial scholarly attention. The authors' firsthand experience lends authenticity to their narratives, and their literary achievements have secured their place in American literature.

To address the research question, and in line with Norman Fairclough's and Ruth Wodak's recommendation that analytic frameworks be adapted to a study's specific needs (Reisigl &

Silencing Trauma: Depoliticization and Concealment of the Political in American
Veterans' Fictional Narratives of the Korean and Vietnam Wars

453

Wodak, 2001, p. 27; Wodak & Meyer, 2001, pp. 72–73; Fairclough, 2013, p. 234), this project combines their two models of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Fairclough's three-part scheme— (1) textual or descriptive analysis, (2) discursive-practice or interpretive analysis, and (3) social-practice or explanatory analysis (Fairclough, 2015, pp. 58–59)—provides clear analytical levels suitable for literary texts while keeping the authors' socio-cultural backgrounds in view. Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA), meanwhile, is incorporated for its emphasis on the reciprocal shaping of language, history, politics, and power, making it well suited to the present focus on trauma narratives.

Guided by this problem-oriented framework, the study investigates the apparent absence of political debate—whether consent or dissent—in nationally acclaimed war-trauma fiction. It asks which textual strategies conceal or avoid political issues and whether recurring patterns of avoidance exist. Wodak's approach informs the first stage of the research, in which the problem is defined and the representative texts are selected. Fairclough's three analytical levels are then applied; at the explanatory stage, DHA is again used to relate textual choices to broader historical and political dynamics.

After collecting and categorizing data from the four novels, five discursive strategies emerged:

1. Depoliticization of Language – vocabulary, terms, and metaphors that downplay violence and obscure political responsibility.

2. Ideological neutralization: avoiding issues and references to the political context of war or reducing them to marginal issues.

3. Disengagement and Apathy: representing characters as individuals consumed by personal trauma, who find the political dimensions of war irrelevant, or as individuals focused on personal achievements that do not see war as a political issue.

4. Defacement and Erasure (of the Enemy): minimizing the adversary's agency and presence in trauma narratives by avoiding encounters, stereotyping or use of derogatory language.

5. Normalization of Issues: portraying war as unavoidable or unalterable or a fact of life that occasionally even serves as a vital element in personal growth.

The following sections of this article analyze and categorize textual strategies discussed above, offering a detailed examination of their role in depoliticization of war trauma narratives. By identifying these strategies and evaluating their function, this study seeks to discover how depoliticization influences trauma representation and interacts with underlying power structures. Through this analysis, broader conclusions arise about the complex relationship between narrative omissions, ideological framework and the socio-political forces at stake in the historical contexts in which these texts were produced.

5. Discussion and Analysis

5. 1. Examination of Korean and Vietnam War Literature

M.A.S.H., authored by Hooker (2009), and *The Hunters*, by Salter (2012), each present distinct narrative styles concerning the Korean War. *M.A.S.H.* draws on humor and satire to depict how a group of

Silencing Trauma: Depoliticization and Concealment of the Political in American
Veterans' Fictional Narratives of the Korean and Vietnam Wars

455

U.S. Army doctors grapple with the dehumanizing effects of war by forging group solidarity and adopting a comic outlook. This sense of camaraderie stands in stark contrast to the intimate and somber depiction found in *The Hunters*. In Salter's novel, the protagonist, Captain Cleve Connell—a fighter pilot—faces aerial combat challenges in solitude while pondering questions of courage, honor, and disillusionment with the military order.

O'Brien's (2009) *The Things They Carried* (1990) and Heinemann's (2010) *Paco's Story* (1986) similarly focus on the Vietnam War's impact on individual identity and American society. Both authors served in Vietnam, and they base their narratives on firsthand wartime experiences. O'Brien (2009) deliberately blurs the boundary between reality and fiction, suggesting a chaotic and surreal view of combat trauma. Heinemann (2010), for his part, employs linguistic ambiguity and fragmentation—along with a narrator (or narrators) who are, in fact, the deceased comrades of Paco Sullivan—to illustrate Paco's predicament. Paco, a veteran who survived a grueling combat mission, returns to an America characterized by apathy (Boulting, 2010, p. 111). Both works appeared when Vietnam had become a potent symbol of American disillusionment—widely regarded as a political and military defeat—amid a climate profoundly shaped by the anti-war movement. In that era, the literary portrayal of war gradually shed its propagandistic nature, emphasizing instead its futility and human costs. Yet even within these ostensibly critical works, one may detect a variety of linguistic strategies that effectively shift attention from the war's political and ideological aspects. Through a process of depoliticization, the Vietnam War is reframed not as a political failure for American policymakers, but rather as a deeply personal, inevitable trial for individuals, the American public, and their mutual relationships.

5. 2. Depoliticization of Language

In *M.A.S.H.,* the novel's witty dialogue and satirical episodes downplay the war's tragic reality, rendering it something absurd and almost ridiculous. Even though the protagonists, as medical personnel, confront wartime casualties and hardships, saving American soldiers' lives and offering humanitarian aid to local populations, they are not directly involved in the fighting itself. Depictions of actual conflict go missing, and the storyline remains confined to a field hospital behind the lines; the wounded appear primarily as fresh medical challenges rather than proof of war's brutality. The story thus largely avoids discussing war's nature, focusing instead on mischievous defiance of military rules deemed illogical by the characters. *The Hunters,* too, dilutes the politics of war by highlighting the adrenaline of aerial combat. Its descriptions emphasize the thrill of combat maneuvers, while neglecting the conflict's political dimensions and human costs, and its characters rarely question their nation's rationale for intervention.

In both novels, language features oblique expressions and military jargon. In *M.A.S.H.,* terms like *Meatball surgery* and *Dust off* label the hazardous and grim process of rescuing wounded soldiers from the field and performing emergency operations on severely injured bodies as if these were ordinary, nearly trivial tasks—thereby glossing over the violence of battlefield trauma. Likewise, *The Hunters* uses words such as *Scoring* and *Gone down* to describe downed planes, recasting lethal combat as if it were a competitive game. The term *Engagement* similarly conceals the lethal character of an aerial duel, drawing attention away from the underlying destruction. By evoking battle through the language of sport or play, the narrative avoids confronting the fact that each "point" corresponds to a destroyed human life. Many characters in

Silencing Trauma: Depoliticization and Concealment of the Political in American
Veterans' Fictional Narratives of the Korean and Vietnam Wars

457

The Hunters proudly overstate their "achievements", treating their flights as tangible proof of their own prowess, while comparing defeat to a lost football match (Salter, 2012, p. 74).

On the lexical level, euphemisms in both *The Things They Carried* and *Paco's Story* overlay the harsh realities of war in ways that reflect soldiers' emotional need to distance themselves from trauma (Heinemann, 2010). In O'Brien's work, soldiers refer to death with terms like "wasted" (O'Brien, 2009, pp. 147, 155) and "zapped while zipping" (O'Brien, 2009, pp. 25, 28, 148), formulas that downplay the finality of dying—so much so that, as O'Brien states, "death was no longer a merciless thing; it was as though it were just stagecraft" (O'Brien, 2009, p. 28). Through such euphemisms, O'Brien illustrates how soldiers come to terms with the constant presence of death. *Paco's Story* uses a similar vocabulary to highlight war's dehumanizing effects. Paco's injuries are described as "ruined legs" (Heinemann, 2010, p. 28), and the fallen are labeled "KIA or Killed in Action", "…for the first nineteen days it's me dusting off KIA, killed in action, dead guys, you understand? and wounded, too. We were getting contact every day good and steady", the medic will say and the term "getting contact" means enemy attacks (Heinemann, 2010, pp. 29, 31, 166), reducing his suffering to a mere medical issue while turning casualties into remote statistics devoid of emotional impact.

Metaphors and symbols in both texts highlight Vietnam War's surreal character. In *The Things They Carried,* the physical objects that soldiers carry—like Lieutenant Cross's photographs—are imbued with symbolic weight, signifying the emotional burden no one can escape (O'Brien, 2009, pp. 12, 14). These items are more than physical possessions: they stand metaphorically for the psychological weight of war and constitute an extension of the

soldiers' bodies and identities. As Emily Russell notes, "in the context of the Vietnam War, the body's boundaries are either constantly enlarged (by guns, gear, and flight suits) or diminished (through amputation and death)" (Russell, 2011, p, 98). This shift from the tangible to the metaphorical fosters distance and ambiguity, thus contributing to war's depoliticization by confining trauma to soldiers' inner concerns and private preoccupations. *Paco's Story* likewise uses metaphor to underscore an existential crisis. Paco is repeatedly referred to as a "ghost" (Heinemann, 2010, pp. 127, 128, 134, 186), a figure that conveys his estrangement from the realm of the living (Heinemann, 2010, p. 45). This metaphor extends to his life following the war, presenting Paco as a mere shadow of his former self, haunted by memories of fallen comrades. Russell underlines the novel's opening lines— "this novel is not a war story"—arguing that the author seemingly capitulates to his society's unspoken reluctance to confront "the ghastly gore and savage carnage" too directly (Russell, 2011, p. 103). By casting war in metaphorical terms, the text effectively strips it of its political dimension. Moreover, both writers employ silence and omission to convey the inexpressible facets of the Vietnam War, further intensifying the depoliticizing effect. O'Brien (2009) consistently accentuates what remains unsaid. For example, the silence surrounding certain traumatic events, like Kiowa's death in a sewage-ridden field, proves more potent than any overt description (Heinemann, 2010, pp. 141, 153). Although it evokes the soldiers' inability to articulate or interpret the trauma, it also confines that trauma to a realm beyond language—thereby limiting deeper interrogation of the war's other dimensions. In essence, if the narrative shows war's true nature as beyond words, trauma likewise remains beyond political discourse.

Silencing Trauma: Depoliticization and Concealment of the Political in American
Veterans' Fictional Narratives of the Korean and Vietnam Wars

459

5. 3. Ideological Neutralization

Characters in both *M.A.S.H.* and *The Hunters* make no mention of
championing democratic ideals or liberalism. This is particularly
striking given the heavily anti-communist climate that pervaded the
United States throughout the Korean War. By eliminating
references to ideological motives, these novels cast the soldiers'
trauma as a matter of personal ambition, survival, and
advancement—devoid of any political or even humanitarian
rationale. Characters see war as either a sort of competitive sport or
a stepping stone for furthering one's professional aspirations.

In *M.A.S.H.,* no one questions why American troops are in
Korea. The novel raises no inquiry about the political or social
motives behind the military presence, nor about its justification in
the American society. Indeed, some individuals treat military
service as a mere means of securing a better position at the
Pentagon (Hooker, 2009, p. 9), and they find it surprising that
someone like Captain Waldowski, a dentist who leads a prosperous
personal and professional life at home, would voluntarily enlist
(Hooker, 2009, p. 46). A politically driven purpose for joining the
war effort appears implausible to them.

In *The Hunters,* war's nature is broached on only one occasion,
through the meandering complaints of Major Abbott—an
embittered figure who repeatedly fakes illnesses to avoid combat
missions:

- They talked for a while longer, mostly about the enemy, what
  surprisingly good ships they flew and what a lousy war it
  was. The major repeated that despairingly several times.

- What do you mean, lousy?

- Oh, I don't know", Abbott said distractedly, "it's just no

good. I mean what are we fighting for, anyway? There's nothing for us to win. It's no good, Cleve. You'll see.

- He trailed off uncomfortably, sorry he had started on this theme (Salter, 2012, p. 28).

This unanswerable question— "Why are we fighting?"—lingers unresolved. In that very scene, which serves as the novel's initial and final political commentary, the character who dares to question the war's rationale is promptly undermined:

Abbott had been a hero once, in Europe in another war, but the years had worked an irreversible chemistry. He was heavier now, older, and somewhere along the way he had run out of compulsion. Everyone in the wing knew it. He aborted from too many missions. The airplanes he flew always developed some mechanical trouble, and he could be counted on to complete only the easiest flights (Salter, 2012, p. 28).

When Major Abbott, in a later segment, bitterly dismisses the Korean War as "this fifty-cent war they're all so proud of" (Salter, 2012, p. 77), the narrative immediately counters with: "He was alone, like a cripple facing the cruelty of running boys" (Salter, 2012, p. 77). Thus, the single individual who questions the war's cause and ideological basis is portrayed as a coward, undermining the gravity of his objections.

In *The Things They Carried,* O'Brien writes, "They carried the emotional baggage of men who might die: grief, terror, love, longing—these were intangible, but there was weight to them, a real heaviness" (O'Brien, 2009, p. 29). By foregrounding these intangible, individual burdens, O'Brien pushes the ideological dimensions of trauma to the periphery. *Paco's Story* likewise focuses on its protagonist's survival as the lone survivor of a botched military operation, making the conflict's political

Silencing Trauma: Depoliticization and Concealment of the Political in American
Veterans' Fictional Narratives of the Korean and Vietnam Wars

461

underpinnings feel secondary. Heinemann sets the tone from the opening lines: "Let's begin with one plain fact, James: This is not a war story. The era of war stories is over" (Heinemann, 2010, p. 15). Heinemann thus conveys that the war's political foundations have scant relevance to the traumatized observers themselves. He goes on to suggest that news outlets cared far more about the war's dramatic episodes than about its political angles:

> Well, James, reporters, as a gang, acted as though our whole purpose for being there was to entertain them. They'd look at you from under the snappily canted brim of an Abercrombie & Fitch Australian bush hat as much as to say, 'Come on, kid, astonish me! Say something fucked up and quotable, something evil, something bloody and nasty, and be quick about it—I ain't got all day, I'm on a deadline (Heinemann, 2010, p. 22).

Hence, the unambiguous statement "This ain't no war story" (Heinemann, 2010, p. 15). signals a conscious avoidance of narratives that normally incorporate political discourse. Moreover, when the narrator remarks, that "reporters, as a gang, acted as though our whole purpose for being there was to entertain them" (Heinemann, 2010, p. 21), in a deconstructive brush with the real, he critiques the media's focus on a sensationalized war spectacle at the expense of deeper analysis of the conflict's political core, but the issue is not discussed any further than that.

5. 4. Disengagement and Apathy

Apathy toward politics and the political process emerges differently in these two Korean War novels. In *M.A.S.H.,* characters exhibit a cynical attitude toward bureaucracy, reflecting a sense of disenchantment and indifference. Military personnel are depicted as

incompetent and not particularly bright, holding positions of authority by virtue of rank alone (Hooker, 2009, p. 14). By flouting hierarchical structures and regulations, the main characters—whose charisma stems from their disregard for authority—suggest that official military symbols lack genuine influence. Although this might appear critical, it effectively absolves institutions of political accountability for wartime outcomes, implying that these institutional systems simply cannot manage events rather than actively causing them.

In *The Hunters*, the fighter pilots, physically enclosed in their cockpits and hidden behind flight helmets, are metaphorically insulated from direct engagement with the enemy (Salter, 2012, p. 14). Preoccupied with their personal rivalry—each man intent on shooting down the highest number of enemy aircrafts—they largely forget the conflict's political and ideological underpinnings. Looking down on Korea from the sky, the protagonist muses, "nothing could be distinguished" (Salter, 2012, p. 22), an ambiguity symbolizing the war's obscured context.

In O'Brien's *The Things They Carried* (2009), soldiers' primary concern is survival rather than the ideological battles swirling around them. A deep emotional detachment pervades, conveying the emptiness many Vietnam veterans felt both during and after the war. In the chapter "Speaking of Courage", Norman Bowker aimlessly circles a lake in his hometown, struggling to make sense of what has happened. His inability to connect with anyone underscores his profound isolation. In "In the Field", the troops—including O'Brien—seem indifferent to Kiowa's death. Even though losing a comrade has clearly affected them, their main response is to press on quickly, focusing on their own survival:

They were tired and miserable; all they wanted now was to get

Silencing Trauma: Depoliticization and Concealment of the Political in American
Veterans' Fictional Narratives of the Korean and Vietnam Wars

463

it finished. Kiowa was gone. He was under the mud and water, folded in with the war, and their only thought was to find him and dig him out and then move on to someplace dry and warm. [...] The eighteen soldiers moved in silence (O'Brien, 2009, p. 153).

Paco's Story similarly highlights avoidance and apathy. Paco Sullivan, badly wounded from his time in Vietnam, arrives in a small Texas town, encountering the residents' indifference and, to some extent, distrust. They see him as a stranger, someone with whom they share neither history nor language. The novel openly depicts how the townspeople, uneasy with his presence, shun direct interaction and even discourage him from settling there (Heinemann, 2010, p. 67). Paco appears ghost-like, inwardly consumed by the unspoken memories of his lost comrades. On those rare occasions when people reach out to him, his answers remain curt, and his emotional detachment endures:

> Paco washes his dishes, digging his arms past the elbows into that lye-soap wash, smoking his Camels until the lip end is spit-soaked and the corner of his mouth is greased with nicotine, with his back to the dining room and not much minding what goes on behind him (Heinemann, 2010, p. 139).

The apathy shared by these characters in *Paco's Story* and *The Things They Carried* effectively shifts any political conversation about the Vietnam War to the sidelines. In both narratives, veterans are so estranged from their communities that any broader political discourse surrounding the conflict recedes. War appears as a cluster of personal tragedies, and this narrow focus on individual trauma diminishes any inclination to examine political causes. With its introspective style, the narrative stresses the personal nature of that suffering so strongly that questioning the war's overarching politics

may feel irrelevant compared to the immense burden of personal trauma.

5. 5. Erasure and Defacement of the Enemy

These works also shroud the enemy in vagueness, offering no meaningful character development or identity for adversaries. They remain largely unnamed or fleetingly referenced. In *The Hunters*, even though cockpit confinement and flight helmets obscure the faces of American pilots, the text still endows them with distinct backstories and personal traits, whereas the enemy pilots remain faceless and unidentified. The adversary appears inferior (Hooker, 2009, p. 40), their aircraft described merely as distant, inconsequential shapes—like bothersome insects "no bigger than flies" (Hooker, 2009, p. 72). Edward Said terms this "essentialism" (Said, 2003, p. 108): reducing the "other" to an undifferentiated, anonymous mass "lacking individuality, personal attributes, or lived experiences" (Said, 2003, p. 287).

Ultimately, just one enemy pilot shows noticeable skill and bravery, but he, too, is stripped of any genuine personal identity: the American forces label him "Casey Jones" (Hooker, 2009, p. 38), thus denying him any real sense of ethnic or cultural belonging. He emerges briefly and appears only to serve as a catalyst for the protagonist's inner revelation: "for the first time [Cleve] felt the possession of hard knowledge, the thrill and disappointment of finding an enemy to be human" (Hooker, 2009, p. 173).

In *M.A.S.H.,* the adversary likewise appears faceless and nameless. Little to no personal history or characterization is provided, and the term "Gook" is used dismissively to refer to

Silencing Trauma: Depoliticization and Concealment of the Political in American
Veterans' Fictional Narratives of the Korean and Vietnam Wars

465

enemy troops (Hooker, 2009, pp. 17, 18, 28, 44, 121, 201). By refusing to introduce any meaningful confrontation with this "other", the text aligns itself with prevailing power discourses that erase the war's political backdrop. In the absence of a compelling face-to-face encounter, questions about the war's underlying causes slip away, reinforcing a depoliticized view.

In *The Things They Carried,* the enemy is also depicted as an abstract phantom. Referred to as "VC" or "Charlie", they are portrayed less as ideologically motivated opponents and more like part of the war's ambiance. O'Brien (2009, p. 124) describes a young Vietnamese soldier's death: "He was a slim, dead, almost dainty young man of about twenty. He lays with one leg bent beneath him, his jaw in his throat, his face neither expressive nor inexpressive".

The emphasis on body and anonymity turns this enemy into yet another war fixture. *Paco's Story* similarly portrays the enemy as surreal. The narrative frequently blurs boundaries between reality and hallucination, presenting Paco's recollections of the enemy in scattered, warped form. Heinemann's narrator employs slang words such as *Zip* or *Zipper head* for the enemy and terms like *House Cats* when referring to South Vietnamese civilians (Heinemann, 2010, p. 19). This anonymity makes the enemy seem incidental, neither an ideologically coherent force nor an opponent with genuine agency. Only once does the protagonist meet the enemy in a close-range encounter. A female Vietcong fighter, brutally assaulted and killed by American soldiers, is the novel's one tangible enemy presence. As Boulting observes, "she is the only Vietnamese adversary described in detail, and consequently bears unavoidable symbolic significance" (Boulting, 2008, p. 120). The rape's savagery signifies, in Boulting's view "the formidable

resistance of 'Third World' 'female' Vietnam against 'First World', 'male' America while "The brutal beating, rape, and murder" of the girl is "metaphorically representing the devastation inflicted on Vietnam by American weaponry and defoliants" (Boulting, 2008, p. 121). This scene involves not just physical violation, but the symbolic effacement of the woman's identity and autonomy. The invading American soldiers assert their power, stripping her of her human agency. In other words, the rape of the Vietnamese girl is an extreme act of violence that reduces her to an object of power and control. This act is not just a brutal violation of her body, but also a symbolic erasure of her identity and agency. The soldiers, representing the invading force, assert their dominance and strip her of any autonomy or humanity, rendering her powerless in the face of their violence. This neutralization strips the conflict of its ideological dimensions, presenting the enemy as an indistinguishable part of the war's absurdity.

5. 6. Normalization of the Issue

These narratives depict war as an unavoidable phenomenon, akin to a natural disaster that simply happens rather than a deliberate result of governmental actions or specific institutional motivations. The characters' casual disregard for the military chain of command effectively trivializes those structures, treating them as routine irritations, which in turn normalizes war itself and obscures its political dimensions. In *M.A.S.H.,* disobedience toward military authority is not rebellious so much as pragmatic, reinforcing the notion that wartime ideology is a secondary concern. In Chapter Seven, for instance, a football game—viewed allegorically as a stand-in for war—fosters comradery and closeness, suggesting that wartime conditions may even enhance, rather than hinder,

Silencing Trauma: Depoliticization and Concealment of the Political in American
Veterans' Fictional Narratives of the Korean and Vietnam Wars

467

meaningful social bonds. War is thereby framed as a backdrop that, paradoxically, can serve constructive human interaction.

In *The Hunters,* normalization emerges through the protagonist's personal goals. For example, Chapter Three shows that Captain Connell's commitment to flying missions arises from his need for self-validation rather than political ideals. His fixation on measuring his worth and valor is treated as both instinctive and admirable, effectively displacing reflection on the war's deeper roots. Meanwhile, the competition among pilots in Chapter Eight—aimed at achieving the highest enemy plane "kill" count—may well mirror the larger competitive dynamic of the Cold War, yet it also trivializes the war into a routine pursuit, akin to a sporting match. Rather than seeing the conflict as a crisis, the characters regard it as an arena for individual achievement.

Depicting war as natural or inevitable depoliticizes these narratives by shifting attention away from the political entities and mechanisms that orchestrate such conflicts. If war is cast as essentially uncontrollable or random, accountability for its causes dissipates, stifling attempts to question the power structures responsible. In *The Things They Carried,* for instance, war appears as a fixed reality that soldiers integrate into their very existence. In *The Man I Killed*, O'Brien momentarily touches on the idea that a person might blindly accept war, yet he channels this perspective through an imagined North Vietnamese soldier, thereby avoiding an explicit critique from the American side. O'Brien (2009, p. 119) writes, "He [the Vietnamese soldier] would have been taught that to defend the land was a man's highest duty and highest privilege. He had accepted this. It was never open to question". By depicting a society that accepts war as self-evident, the novel normalizes conflict.

In *Paco's Story*, war and violence are likewise normalized. Heinemann observes, "And how many times is it, James, that people have looked over at Paco, looked down, and asked, 'What war was that?'" (Heinemann, 2010, p. 76). By populating the story with other veterans—such as Monroe, a World War II soldier, and a woman recalling her son from the Korean War—Heinemann underscores the idea that war is a constant, an accepted presence in American life. The novel's characters ultimately view war as both inevitable and impervious to scrutiny. Even Paco's suffering is construed as the predictable, almost routine, consequence of battle, so self-evident that it never invites a challenge to the legitimacy of conflict itself.

By portraying war as an ordinary, unavoidable occurrence, these texts move away from blaming political structures and instead downplay accountability for instigating and perpetuating warfare. Consequently, avenues for contesting the systems that sanction or sustain conflict become exceedingly narrow.

In the tradition of American war literature, Richard Hooker, James Salter, Tim O'Brien and Larry Heinemann are significant because they are all war veterans and their military service experiences bring profound authenticity to their narratives. Since Hooker served as a military surgeon and Salter was a fighter pilot in the Korean war and O'Brien and Heinemann served as combatant soldiers during the Vietnam war, their accounts of the conflicts hold a firsthand eye-witness credibility. The recognition they have received as acclaimed authors highlights the importance of their position in this tradition. However, it also raises questions about the extent to which their critiques of war are shaped or constrained by dominant socio-political discourses.

As Richard Severo notes, despite the United States' reputation

Silencing Trauma: Depoliticization and Concealment of the Political in American
Veterans' Fictional Narratives of the Korean and Vietnam Wars

469

for a free and expansive literary culture under the First Amendment, state and corporate powers have subtly controlled this culture for decades, effectively suppressing dissenting literature through methods that are more insidious than outright censorship (Severo, 2016, pp. 9-11). Such suppression, which includes discouraging publishers, limiting distribution, or dismissing controversial works, leads to the erasure of critical voices from public discourse and memory, particularly those that challenge official narratives of US history, such as Cold War activities, political assassinations, and corporate influence. On the other hand, analyzing the range of influence of the dominant power structures, Paul Achter, in '*Unruly Bodies: The Rhetorical Domestication of Twenty-First-Century Veterans of War*', explores the way in which dominant discourses in American media and state rhetoric often shape the representation of war veterans in media and public sphere to align with national interests. He argues that veterans' bodies are frequently symbolized as reflections of the nation's health and the state of the war, with their recovery framed as a personal triumph that obscures the origins of their injuries (Achter, 2010, pp. 47, 50-52). This focus on personal resilience effectively neutralizes the potential for veterans' bodies to serve as sites of dissent against the war, embedding them within familiar, non-threatening domestic accounts that support ongoing military efforts (Achter, 2010, pp. 59-61, 63-64). In this context, the depoliticization of war trauma narratives in award-winning literary works warrants careful consideration. If we extend this analysis to the narratives of war trauma created by veterans, these narratives can similarly be seen as subject to depoliticization, where the metaphoric 'body' of the traumatic experience in linguistic form is shaped to conform to dominant discourses or be repressed and marginalized, promoting the creation of narratives that align with the political status quo.

Both *M.A.S.H.* and *The Hunters* reinforce the dominant discourse that emerged in the U.S. after the Korean War, a discourse that sought to minimize the political significance of the conflict and portray it as a less important and a less destructive endeavor compared to World War II. By focusing on the personal and psychological dimensions of the war, these narratives obscure the geopolitical motivations, shifting the blame for the war's failures away from political and military leaders and onto the soldiers themselves. By portraying Korean War soldiers as disillusioned, cynical, and somehow less competent than their heroic World War II counterparts, these narratives reinforce the idea that the Korean War was a failure not because of flawed policies and unjustified involvement for mere pursuit of political advantage, but because of the inadequacies of those who fought in it (Blair, 1987, p. 11; Cumings, 2010; Casey, 2008). This narrative conveniently absolves the U.S. government of responsibility for the conflict's outcomes, allowing it to maintain its legitimacy and authority despite the stalemate in Korea.

The Vietnam War, in contrast to the Korean War, was marked by a different dominant discourse—one that focused on the inaccessible nature of the soldiers' experiences and the overwhelming psychological trauma they endured. This discourse effectively rendered political debates about the war redundant, shifting the focus away from the ideological and geopolitical justifications for U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia. The discussions of war were framed purely in terms of humanistic concerns—focusing on life and death—without delving into the underlying reasons for the conflict or the motivations for participating in it. The narratives create the impression that the events surrounding the characters are entirely disconnected from

Silencing Trauma: Depoliticization and Concealment of the Political in American
Veterans' Fictional Narratives of the Korean and Vietnam Wars

471

the broader political issues that shape the global and inter-country dynamics. O'Brien and Heinemann wrote during a period when the Vietnam War had become a symbol of American disillusionment. By the time they published their works, the Vietnam War had been widely recognized as a failure that the public opinion was unwilling to deal with.

6. Conclusion

This study examined the ways in which trauma narratives, particularly in war literature, contributed to the depoliticization of traumatic events. By analyzing four highly regarded literary works by American veterans of the Korean and Vietnam wars—using insights from trauma studies and critical discourse analysis—the research identified patterns of depoliticization that obscured political power structures. Although these works appeared anti-war, they ultimately aligned with dominant historical narratives by minimizing or omitting explicit political references. The findings underscored the need for a critical examination of trauma representations, as depoliticized narratives reinforced existing power dynamics while evading deeper political accountability. This highlights an important duality in assessing war literature. While trauma narratives can provide a means of expression and healing to the victims because their portrayal of suffering echoes that of others inflicted by the trauma and offers a way of processing trauma, they can also dilute rigorous political criticism and inadvertently reinforce the power structures that they appear to challenge.

In addition, the research advocates the incorporation of alternative voices, such as the non-widely published memories of

dissident soldiers, underground publications, oral stories, and marginalized communities' accounts of the traumatic events. In dealing with these various perspectives, it is possible to contest the homogenized narrative of war and shed light on its multifaceted impacts. Finally, the findings suggest that while the depoliticized narratives of war offer a window to human suffering, they also reproduce and inadvertently support the dominant power dynamics. A balanced and critical review of a larger number of similar narratives is essential not only to acknowledge the traumatic experiences of those who have suffered, but also to promote informed public discourse, challenge the structures of power, and hold the political institutions involved in the trauma accountable.

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473

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475

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