

WRITING AGAINST HISTORY, IN THE *NOVEL WITHOUT A NAME* AND *THE DISAPPEARED*

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Abstract

It raises a lot of questions when entirely fictional stories occur in real settings and situations. While Duong Thu Huong, the author of the *Novel Without a Name* (1995), explores central jungles of Vietnam towards the end of the war, Kim Echlin, the author of *The Disappeared* (2009) takes the reader to wander around in the post-genocide streets of Cambodia. Nevertheless, what they illustrate is not the official history, but the private memories of the past. This study examines each novel for their emphasis on remembering the past versus re-constructing the history in their settings. This analysis, also indicates the ways through which fiction can help relive in the reality of the past, and, hence, avoid its repetition in the future.

Keywords: Cambodian genocide, Vietnam war, collective memory, history, past

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The *Novel without a Name*, published in 1995 by Duong Thu Huong, takes no less shameful historical event than the Vietnam War into its setting. All the same, Kim Echlin's novel, *The Disappeared* (2009), takes the reader on a trip halfway around the world, along with Anne, the narrator protagonist, from Montreal to Phnom Penh, and back. The reader, in this journey, personally observe traces of the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodian life. The authors write, of the past, and about it, as it was actually remembered by the individuals, but not the historians; they write so that the real experience of the past would be realized in the present. Finally, they write to take comfort at the words on the paper, but more importantly, they write to give comfort to those who need to see them there.

Progress, George Santayana (1905) says, is determined by “retentiveness”, and infancy is perpetual, he continues, unless the experiences of the former times are “retained”; but what do *We* talk about when we talk about the past? Isn’t that the past that history wants us to remember? Why would fiction, then, bother to remind us of the past again? The past, however, speaks of the time before the present, the time that is over and cannot be experienced again; yet, there is a renowned claim that it would not be so indifferent to the people who survive it: “those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it” (Santayana 284). To answer the above questions, it is inevitable to explore the concept of ‘remembering’, its individual and collective levels, its various modes in relation to the past, as well as its literary representations.

2.0 THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Astrid Erll (2008) maintains that the notion of remembering, as a “cognitive process” that occurs in the brain of individuals, can also be metaphorically applied to a community (4). The concept of ‘collective memory’, which was carried into scholarly discussions by Maurice Halbwachs (1992) in the 1920s, is closely related to the socio—cultural context, as well as a community’s specific manner of living and interpreting life experiences (Young). The studies surrounding a nation’s national identity, or a community’s religious or literary memory are the instance of the scholarly arenas that speak of cultural memory and collective identity. In this respect, Jeffrey K. Olick asserts (1999) that it is crucial to distinguish between “culture as a subjective category of meanings contained in people’s mind,” and “culture as patterns of publically available symbols objectified in society” (336). In summary, in studies concerning memory and remembering, we need to distinguish between the individual and the cognitive level on one hand, and the collective and the social level on the other. Nevertheless, as Erll (2008) asserts that “no memory is ever purely individual, but always inherently shaped by collective context” (5). In other words, individual memories are always shaped by, and also triggered by, a variety of factors in the context, ranging from private conversations, the media and books to cultural agents and institutions. While, these social groups and institutions contribute to the construction of a shared memory among the individuals. The large body of research on this second level of collective memory has led to understanding the fact that there is an inevitable continuous interaction between both levels of memory.

The attempts made to distinguish various modes of remembering, has put memory in opposition with history. Halbwachs (1992) declares that while history is “abstract, totalizing and dead”, individual memory is “peculiar, meaningful and lived” (Young 6). A range of binary oppositions have resulted from these studies that present history as unintelligible, neutral, objective and artificial, vs. the selective, identity-related and organic individual memory. Hence, ideologically charged and officially authorized “images of history” have aroused the criticism of the actual witnesses of the past and their literary advocates. Nevertheless, Erll (2008) suggests that it would be better to assume various modes of remembering the past, as well as what is remembered in each mode (7).

There have always been a lot of controversies among the literary and cultural specialist over how Vietnam War should be remembered. While some studies directly raise the issues of memory and cultural impact on America, others would prefer to promote its literary and theoretical dimensions. Kendrick Oliver (2004) offers a new moral history for the Vietnam War, by exploring the other sides of the story, which was told by the American politicians (757). One major trend among all the scholars is the tendency to acknowledge “various depictions of war”

(Janette 785) as depicted by veterans, instead of tracing their accuracy. The *Novel without a Name* (1995), is the depiction that the author and her male her narrator-protagonist offer of the Vietnamese war. From the beginning of the narration, tired and disillusioned, Quan is taken away from the front line to observe the war scene and its side effects from a distant perspective.

While some of the studies are still trying to depict the depth and scope of the genocide, a considerable body of literature has set to demonstrate the various aspects of memory and culture after this period. James A. Tyner and his fellow essayists, criticize the “politics of memory” (585) and its highly selective approach. They believe that eliminating certain sites of violence from the public attention has shaped the contemporary remembering and forgetting. This is closely related to what Edgar Wolfrum (1999) refers to as the “politics of history” (32), which deals with “the history of a community, whose interpretation and significance is, as assumed, always disputed” (Erik Mayer 176). This statement indicates that there is a significant association between the past and the present time of a community, as well as its future.

Both narrators, however, write of a past in which speech could not be distinguished from weeping, and when the border between life and death had already disappeared. In the frame of their fictions, silence has the loudest voice and the disappeared are brought to existence. They write of the nameless consequences of ignorance and atrocity to the future generations; they write so that the voice of the victims would be heard forever.

3.0 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 WHY REMEMBERING

Nurit Bird-Davi (2004) defines ‘past’ as a concept that describes the contemporary study of the “historical or collective memory” (407). Subsequently, Santayana’s (1905) proclaim about the importance of the past would become an encyclopedic statement which counts for the past in all disciplines. When quoting this statement in his study, David Lamond (2013) asserts that by the studying the past, present is better understood and future is anticipated (1237). Nurit Bird-Davi’s (2004) conclusion is that if there were no past, there would be no present either (416). On the contrary, Stephan Landsman (2002) shows doubt about the sufficiency of remembering the past in avoiding its repetition in the future (3). Each concern, however, is highlighted by the authors of the *Novel Without A Name* (1996) and *The Disappeared* (2009).

Lamond (2013) believes that it is critical for the practitioners of all disciplines, who would like to have significant achievements in the future, to effectively incorporate their own experiences and the experiences of the people in past. Otherwise, he warns, they are not only condemned to remain in the same stage as the past, but also likely to repeat the mistakes of the people of the past (1273) and fall far behind them. In the *Novel Without a Name*, (1996) the protagonist speaks about how the war they once thought to be “a chance for resurrection” and would turn Vietnam into a “paradise for humanity” (Huong 31) proved reverse. The War turned out to be a “game” into which families were “thrown” (Huong 124), as well as a paradise for fleas and maggots (Huong 69). He indicates that it was the result of depths of “ignorance” and blind “ambition” (Huong 124). The author is, in fact, enlightening her readers about bitter realities behind the promises of ideologies. We need to remember the truth of the past, Lamond (2002) suggests, to soundly build the present on it and to be more thoughtful about our practices and plans for the future (1279). As Shari, in *The Disappeared* (2009) puts it, “we cannot build on lie and violence” (Echin 133). In the end of the narration, when Ma Rith, the chief officer asks Anne “what purpose to visit the past?” she replies “To claim the present” (Echlin 208).

As Lamond (2013) claims, in studying the dominant voices of the past, our responsibility is “to be clear about the criteria we use to judge their veracity” (1272). However, the final intention is not to own the voices but, rather, to democratize the knowledge obtained from the sound judgment of them. He believes that this knowledge not only belongs to contemporary generations, but must also be transmitted to future generations. In both novels, however, there is an emphasis on indicating how men of power specifically target younger generations. The thirst for power makes authorities abuse the mental and physical potentialities of the youth. In the *Novel Without a Name* (1995), the little fat man on the trains says: “the ideal, well, the kids need it. And it’s all we need to turn them into monks, soldiers, or cops. And it worked” (Duong 160). In *The Disappeared*, Anne asserts that whatever happened in the history and the reasons behind them, are left for the survivals and their children (Echlin 120) to discover.

With relation to the past of Vietnam, Michael Clark (1986) maintains that only historians can bring hope to the dead and survivors. He quotes Walter Benjamin to emphasize that “even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he wins. And [unfortunately] this enemy has not ceased to be victorious” (46). We would never know how the individual Vietnamese were thrown into such a fatal, costly war or how anguished and regretful they became in the years that followed, unless we read about them. Neither would we get informed of the agonizing sufferings of civilians and the traumatic aftermaths of war on the survived soldiers, by the writings of their victorious opponent. No documentary could portray the unimaginable depth and dimensions of the agony that Cambodian individuals went through, during and after the Pol Pot genocide. It is only in fiction the dead and survivors of the Vietnam War can speak to the world and to the future generations. Fiction gives them unlimited space to exist, and to live forever and everywhere. As Echlin (2009) proclaims: “someone must act in the name of the lost” (205).

However, Stephan Landsmant (2002) is more pessimistic in his interpretation of Santayana’s statement on the value of remembering the past. He believes that if one remembers the past, one “may not be condemned to repeat it” (3), because there are not always logical, effective reactions to the understanding of the real reality of the past. This statement goes specifically along with Echlin’s concerns in *The Disappeared* (2009). Anne, the protagonist, arrives ten years after the end of the Khmer Rough regime in Cambodia only to realize that things haven’t changed much. Although the atrocious regime have been overthrown ten years before she arrives, the traumatized people are still brutally frightened, threatened, and killed by the newly established government. Landsmant (2002) comments that although there have been efforts to identify the crimes of military leaders in the previous governments, International Criminal Court (“ICC”) began to prosecute and punish the criminal leaders, with considerable (5). David Chandler (2008) also declares that only in 2007, the UN agreed on establishing an international court for the crimes of Angka leaders in Phnom Penh, but the results are not clear yet (356). The *Novel Without a Name* (1996) does not directly deal with this phenomenon since it is describing the situation as it is occurring during the war. Instead, the author refers to the insincerity of the leaders and their “cynical” intentions (Huong 162). Landsmant (2002) also points to another regretting fact that not all the responsible people in this worldwide project were truly and sincerely committed (5-7). Chandler (2008) describes how some of the Angka leaders were given amnesties despite the genocide they committed in Cambodia (355). In the final pages of *The Disappeared* (2008) Anne describes the way she was tormented simply because she wanted to bury the skull of Serey and perform the appropriate rites for him (Echlin 205). The chief officer, Ma Rith, tells her: “[You are a] Fool. Mad woman. [a] Victim”(Echlin 202).

3.2 HOW TO REMEMBER

As discussed above, David Lamond (2013) suggests that one best way to study the past is to realize who was triumphal and who failed by searching for the voices that are heard or silenced (1272). Both authors of the selected novels are so concerned about the voices in their narration of the past. They disclose, as they relay, that the victorious voices are still heard and repeated by the majority, while the minorities are shut up by threat and fear. An influential scene in the *Novel Without a Name* (1996) is on the train, when the military officer arrives at the conversation between the intellectual man and his short companion. Although they were speaking against Karl Marx, the officer could not charge them, when the short man took out his “precious symbol of power” and shouted: “It’s we who are in charge of introducing Marxist thought to Vietnam. *We* are the ones who teach the people to which you belong [...] that’s *our* business not yours. Is that clear?” and later he addressed his friend and continued: “Well, Did you see that? A nation of imbeciles” (Huong 166). In *The Disappeared* (2009), Sokha, Serey’s brother, said that during the Khmer Rough regime, he pretended he could not read or write because the leaders told them that reading and writing were unnecessary under the Kampuchean revolution, and whatever Angka said was “correct, bright and wonderful”. Later, Anne recognizes that “their words were buried into him” (Echlin 118), because even after the collapse of this regime Sokha kept on repeating and practicing what their instructions. In recognizing the loud voices of the past, what is worth nothing is that although the voices of political leaders were louder, they were not necessarily more righteous. As Lamond (2013) emphasizes, it is not enough just to remember what people did, but to find the logic behind them, however, we need to pass judgments based on logical, objective criteria (1272).

Nurit Bird-Davi (2004) asserts that it is important to know which property of past should be remembered. In remembering “who”, the relations and the identities of the earlier people become significant, and they are perceived as our relations, our relatives, the unseparable parts of us (416). This is while, in remembering ‘what’, or the events and the places, we try to correspond with lifeless documents of the past. To be more precise, remembering people creates a sense of kinship and bond, which not only justifies but also brings the necessity to know past. In neither of the novels do the authors directly deal with what happened; instead, they are more concerned about the individuals, dead or alive. Anne begins her writing with Mau, she makes friend with Will and a lot more individuals. In fact, it is through them that she explains ‘what’ happened and what is happening in Cambodia now. Her writing is mainly based on her intimate interactions with ordinary people, and in her narration, she directly addresses Serey. Equally, Quan describes what each soldier does, says or feels, with precision. Even in dreams and thoughts, he holds the images of the people whom he knew or once lived with and calls them as sisters, brothers, and ancestors.

3.3 WHAT TO REMEMBER

In both novels, the people of the past are united with the contemporary people using such pronouns as our, us, we, my. A dead soldier’s mother reminds Quan of his own mother, when he says: “We sons are good for nothing” (Huong 416). In another instance, he considers the girl who helped him recover as “my [his] little angel” (Huong 65). The pronoun ‘we’ is constantly used in the novel to refer to all Vietnamese and envisions “our ancestors”. In *The Disappeared* (2009), the Canadian Anne tells Serey, who is from Cambodia, that “your people are my people” (Echlin 72). In other words, people are approached as equally important and as relations of us, the readers, and not as “Others”. The narrators speak of ‘us’, the humans, with the hope that

‘our’ humanity might grow, that ‘we’ would “believe ‘we’ are not that different from each other” (Echlin 68).

What is more, Nurit Bird-Davi (2004) believes that the knowledge that the ‘invoked dead’ provide, usually revolves around the importance of humanity and social bonds (417). Anne says, while she is writing her memories, that she dreamed of an old woman, who asked Anne to help her see through the darkness by looking at a child prisoner during the Khmer. The old woman told her that the “she [the girl] was not [even] worth a number. This is war. This is darkness” (Echlin 110). The wraith of Quan’s ancestors tells him that although “no one can choose his history” (Huong 257), “there is no absolute fatality” (Huong 256) and human has a word in his fate. Through this kind of representation in the novels, past events are brought into present, and become experienceable, and, therefore, a subject of learning. As Anne puts it: “I saw the world sharply with you” (Echlin 43). Nurit Bird-Davi (2004) says: “Death, in this case, is not seen as a switch from being to not being [...] Death is sensed as a transition between states of being, in terms of life-cycle stages” (417). By remembering the people of past, people of present become really involved in what they experienced and went through. Hence, what they did, becomes as important as who they were. Moreover, since there are an interaction and a communication with the dead, the people of the present are lead to insights beyond the events. Anne’s initial intention of travelling to Cambodia was not to learn about what happened or what was happening there, but to find Serey. However, soon she become deeply involved in the events as well. Anne tells Serey: “You are my country” (Echlin 203). Serey, himself, traveled back to Cambodia to find his family, but later realized that the country needs him more. He said: “my country is my skin” (Echlin 29). In support, when Anne tells Will that she wants to know Serey, he softly responses: “To know him you need to understand this place” (Echlin 107).

Above all, in both novels the reader finds a close affiliation between the narrators, as well as the authors, and their settings; Quan in Vietnam and Anne in Cambodia. According to Susan H. Rmitage (2001), a region remains unknown until someone, who lives in it, sets out to define them to the rest (32). As she claims, writing about the history of a region by its inhabitants is like turning it inside out. She also condemns describing places in the habits of the westerners, from the point of the strangers, an outsider (32). When reading *The Disappeared* (2009), the reader feels what everyday life in Cambodia is like, only because Anne relays it from the point of view of someone who has lived there long enough to discover depths and details. Through Anne, the reader is informed of “the light in Mau’s eyes” (Echlin 3) or the “flat eyes of the man in Choeung Ek (Echlin 87). The reader realizes that every day a man without legs rides a bicycle with hand-pedals in the streets of Phnom Penh (Echlin 61). The reader finds out that Will has been counting the dead long enough to build up his philosophy of life and humanity (Echlin 65). Finally, it is through Anne that the reader can say something for sure: in Cambodia, depression has “overgrown with grass” (Echlin 87) and that “time is no healer” (Echlin 12). Quan, also, is as impressive as he is impressed in the jungles of mid-Vietnam. The reader walks with him up and down the hills, in between the trees and in the mud. He shows how the three little boys, who used to play and splash the girls in the water, fall far apart in persuasion of a promised glory and paradise. The reader realizes that soldiers are “fighting [either] with the energy of despair” (Huong 78) or the “extraordinary energy” of blindness (Huong 84). The reader, sees that Bien has lost the look and the emotions of a normal human being, because he has been kept away from normal life, for years. Finally the reader wishes with him, if only one day human could learn the “art of life” (Huong 150) instead of the “game of war”, but feels equally disappointed when Quan, says: “that day hadn’t still come” (Huong 150).

Never the less, what might come to the mind is that, why the authors have chosen fiction to render the realities so deep and real. As for the Vietnam War, Nathalie Huynh Chau Nguyen (2004) believes that there is an underlying truth when realities are disguised in fictional War setting (1205); this gives “universal dimensions” to regional facts (1206). In other words, that is the way to grab the local realities and spreads them far beyond the geographical and political borders, as well as the limitations of time. A documentary, in contrast, confines the facts to the borders of Vietnam. Hence, the *Novel Without a Name*, opens in the “Gorge of the Lost Souls” (Huong 1), where Quan spends the whole night “listening”, not hearing, to the “howls”, “mourns” and “sobs” coming through the gorge. In *The Disappeared* (2009), all the same, the author crosses the borders through her protagonist and overcomes the limitations of time and distance with the power of love. In summary, fiction provides an opportunity for depicting vast images in the collective memory of people. Fiction violates the “untold life” (Echlin 224) and the “unwitnessed life” (Echlin 218), through the “flushed red” and the “surreal color” of blood (Huong 70).

Ashley Thompson (2006) discusses what she calls “Terrible but Unfinished” (197), to explain what happens when a tragedy is set in a tragic historical time and setting. This claim, not only goes parallel with Anne Christine Taylor’s (1993) idea about the potentials of fiction, but also indicates the probability of its repetition as a story from the many “Stories of History”, by means of the contradiction in contains. Tragedy, she explains, refers to both a genre as well as a real world phenomenon and the term *histoire*, in French, refers to both story and history (Thompson 197). *The Disappeared* (2009), and the *Novel Without a Name* (1996) are both tragic stories set in the historical tragedies of Cambodia and Vietnam, respectively. Hence, what this combination implies is that, the same story might occur again in the real historical setting, anywhere or anytime in the future. Furthermore, being tragedies they indicate that there is no escape, if it falls upon a portion of the history again (Thompson 197). In the *Novel Without a Name* (1996), Quan implies it by saying that: “I thought: bullets may miss people, but no one dodges a bullet” (Huong 36). This statement reminds the reader of what is exactly terrible about this tragedy; there might be no escape. *The Disappeared* (2009), the emphasizes that people continue to be killed after the Pol Pot period, if they opposed the government. Moreover, survivals still find it too hard to return to the normal rhythm of life.

In addition, when the ending of a tragic story set in the historical tragedy, it opens the door to the tragic aftermaths. The narration in the *Novel Without a Name* is closed about the end of the Vietnam War, exactly when the love story of *The Disappeared* is opened. To emphasize this, Anne travels to Cambodia ten years after the collapse of the Khmer Rouge regime, and finds out that the tragedy of Cambodia is still ‘unfinished’ there. The idea of a finished, and yet an unfinished tragedy, is, as discussed before, also supported by Stephan Landsmant’s (2002) idea in the real context of history. That is, in spite of remembering the past, the tragedy might be repeated in history when “justice is powerless and delayed” (5). all the same, Tony Kevin declares that tragedy in Cambodia is not finished yet, that Cambodia still cannot be considered as a normal Asian country. He believes that the reality should be known to two groups of people specifically: those who are professionally concerned about Cambodia, as well as the generation of the Cambodians who did not witness the genocide themselves (33). As both selected novels indicate, contemporary generation won’t recover and the future would continue to suffer, unless the past is understood.

3.4 WHAT NOT TO REMEMBER

Despite all, Anne Christine Taylor (1993) asserts that one needs to remember the past in order to be able to forget it. She argues that in the collective level of remembering, at the socio-cultural context, there is a continuous correspondence between the living and the dead. That is, after the biological death occurs, the mental image continues to haunt the survivals (655). The memory of the brutal death of about one third of the Cambodian during the three-year reign of the Angka regime has continued to traumatize the survival until the present time. In the years that followed, the politicians made every effort to erase the details from the memory of the Cambodians. As the chief officer tells Anne: “we must turn from this history now and build a future” (Echlin 205). In spite of that, people continue to show the symptoms of trauma in their public and private lives (Chandler 355). Kim Echlin (2009), the novelist, seems particularly highlights this fact in her story, by saying that “all over Cambodia people startle at cigarette smoke and rotting garbage and gasoline, surrogate odors of torture and dead bodies. A bad smell makes them jump [...] They call this sumseew, making the brain spin” (116). “Grief”, as Anne puts it, has only “changed shape; it has not ended in Cambodia (Echlin 107).

In their study, Anne Christine Taylor (1993) and her fellow essay-lists, show how the Jivaroan Achuar of the eastern Ecuador transform their mentality about their dead ones. This community uses the term ‘waken’ to refer to people after they die. The term can be translated to ‘soul’, but covers a wide range of things, from the reflection of a person in someone else’s pupil, to certain ritual acts and to the major organs of the body. However, the waken is dismissed from the mental and physical environment of the living in certain rituals (659). Instead, in both novels, Echlin (2009) and Huong (1996) keep repeating the name of the parts of the corpses, and address them directly when talking. The re-appearance of the dead ones after their death implies that their soul are still wandering, because, as the authors indicate, they had not been put to rest properly. For this reason, both narrators claim that the wandering souls are still haunting the living ones. As Quan says: “Dear sisters, you who have lived and died here as human beings: Do not haunt us any longer” (Huong 1). Anne also says: “They say that the soul of the dead wander if the monks don’t pray over the bodies. But I think the soul of the living wander when their dead are lost” (Echlin 144), and in Cambodia people are living missing everywhere. It is obvious that both narrators feel harnessed and caught in the trauma as well, which reflects what the community experienced collectively. After Serey’s dead, Anne finds it “impossible to leave. Impossible to stay” (Echlin 203). Still unable to believe Serey’s dead after thirty years, Anne says: “You keep coming back to me in little bits of moving images” (Echlin 228). Quan puts it in the form of a question, and asks, after all these years of killings and blood, “would it still be possible, one day, for us to go back, to rediscover our roots, the beauty of creation, the rapture of peaceful life” (Huong 193)? People were unable to comfort, unable to speak, unable to get separated from their memories. After she lost Setery, Anne says that a thought kept haunting her: “No one can help me” (Echlin 218) and she felt she was caught “in an intimacy with the violence of the untold life” (Echlin 224). Quan also hints at this fact when after pleading the souls of the girls not to hunt him anymore. He tries to bury his face and block the sound of the howling wind, but it seems to him that it is becoming deeper and stronger (Huong 2). Later he asserts that some poignant memories “stay with you for months. For years” (Huong 193).

The dead must disappear as mental objects while at the same time it remains rethinkable and recognizable as a dead person. During the writing process, as well as the narration of the details, “the image of the deceased is made to die” (Anne Christine Taylor et. al. 655), and rest on paper. These, now, recognizable dead characters let the mentality of the living ones socialize

and communicate with them and study the details of their deeds and manners. It is only then, that the living ones are capable of studying and remembering the past, in its literal meaning. According to Taylor (1993) and her co-researchers, while trauma is frequent after the war, writing can be highly beneficial in the recovery process. She believes that “forgetting them - is in every sense a vital necessity: if someone does not die, someone else cannot be born” (659). Anne and Quan, the protagonist-narrators of the novels, show their awareness of this fact by resorting to the narration of their memories. After saying that she needs both her memories and the hope to live on, Anne declares that she could find them both only in the “declension of the verbs”, the combination of “words” (Echlin 47). Anne says, “for thirty years I have clung to words that might lend me a measure of comfort” (Echlin 95). Quan also keeps an orderly account of his memories in details and states the date at the end of his narration: “Hanoi, December 11, 1990” (Huong 289). This method of writing allows him to share his pain in precision. It is a healing not only for the writer, but also for everyone who underwent the same agony and pain in Cambodia.

Once a woman came to the Buddha carrying her dead son in her arms. She asked him to have mercy on her, to give her back her son. The Buddha said he could help her. First, he said, bring me a mustard seed from a family that has never experienced death. The woman searched from home to home. People wanted to help but everyone she met had experienced death- a brother, sister, parent, husband, child. After searching for a long time the woman returned to the Buddha. He said where is your son? The woman replied, I buried him. (Echlin 181)

4.0 CONCLUSION

What is for sure is that the past did not pass so that it would be totally forgotten, nor was it meant to be overwhelmingly and traumatizingly remembered. Instead, the past has passed so that its facts could rest in the history while its knowledge would be carried into the present and the future. While, recollecting the facts of the past constructs its body, incorporating its knowledge into the experience of the present, sheds light on the path to the future.

Furthermore, setting fiction in the facts of history gives depth and dimension to the truth of the past. While in return, the real setting authorizes the underlying truth that the fiction discloses. The truth of the *Novel without A name* (1996) and *The Disappeared* (2009) is further guaranteed by their sympathetic authors and intimate narrators. While historiographers have remained neutral, the authors set their narrations in the past of their regions, so that they can dig out every single piece of it with their own familiar hands and fingers. Their narrations transmit the individual stories in the past of Vietnam and Cambodia to the people in the present and the future of the entire world. Moreover, by constructing their tragic stories in the heart of history, they have put up a world-wide warning against its indifference. In addition, the authors have made the untold traumatizing truth flow smoothly into the narrations and rest on the paper.

The author-narrators have written, to help “see into the darkness” (Echlin 109), to “lend a measure of comfort” and to “please the dead” (Echlin 5). But above all, they have written to fill the sack of the coming generations with the insight and the knowledge of the past and the present. As the wraith said:

It's better not to enter life with an empty sack. But neither should you dip into the sack you have inherited without hoping to fill another. But even more wretched is he who leaves nothing to his descendants. (Huong 257)

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