

Exploring the Sufferings and Unheard Voices in the Work of Viet Thanh Nguyen, Christy Lefteri and Ishmeal Beah

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Abstract

The history of the refugee crisis has captured the attention of scholars and researchers in recent years. This qualitative study aims to delve deeper into the complexities and nuances of these issues, focusing on the works of writers Viet Thanh Nguyen, Christy Lefteri, and Ishmael Beah. By examining their novels and testimonies, the study seeks to uncover the untold stories of trauma, displacement, and resilience experienced by refugees. Through a careful analysis of these literary works, the study aims to shed light on the multifaceted characteristics of grief and loss that refugees face when resettling in new countries. Furthermore, the study aims to explore the ways in which these authors depict the psychological struggles and identity crises faced by Diasporas. By considering the historical context of conflicts such as the Vietnam War and the ongoing refugee crisis, this study seeks to highlight the importance of incorporating diverse perspectives and experiences into the discourse on trauma and refugee experiences.

Through this research, I hope to contribute to a deeper understanding of the long-lasting impacts of displacement and resettlement, as well as the resilience and strength of the individuals who have endured such hardships.

Keywords: Refugee crisis, Suffering and Trauma, psychological struggle, Diasporas, displacement, resettlement

The global refugee crisis is one of the most pressing challenges facing the world today. According to the sources provided, there are several key aspects to the global refugee crisis that need to be addressed. These include the need for effective governance of forced migration and asylum seeking, as well as the moral and political responsibility of neighboring countries. The current humanitarian assistance framework is also criticized for failing to provide sustainable solutions and perpetuating temporary situations of security, shelter, and food provision without durable outcomes for refugees. Furthermore, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the refugee crisis, with many migrants losing their jobs and being unable to receive support. It is crucial to understand that forced migration and irregular migration are complex issues that involve mixed motivations and varying degrees of voluntariness. In order to address the global refugee crisis, there is a need for international

cooperation and the development of comprehensive solutions. These solutions should include the inclusion and protection of those in need within international protection regimes, as well as efforts to promote local integration, resettlement, or repatriation. This requires burden-sharing and harmonization of asylum processing across countries, particularly in regions heavily affected by conflict. In today's rapidly changing world, the global refugee crisis presents a significant challenge that requires effective governance, international cooperation, and comprehensive solutions. The global spread of

Covid-19 has generated more uncertainty into the management and experience of migration, with many temporary migrants being stranded and losing their jobs. In today's rapidly changing world, the global refugee crisis presents a significant challenge that requires effective governance, international cooperation, and comprehensive solutions.

Refugee crises are often accompanied by profound and pervasive forms of trauma, yet these experiences are often overlooked in dominant discourses on trauma studies. Refugees face the unheard groans of invisible trauma and marginalization, as their experiences are often overshadowed by dominant narratives that prioritize certain forms of violence and suffering.

Refugees often carry the burden of untold stories and silenced voices. They may struggle to find a sense of belonging and identity in their new culture, as they navigate the complexities of displacement and cultural assimilation. They also face the unheard groans of systematic discrimination and prejudice in their host countries, as they are viewed as "others" and may be subjected to xenophobia, racism, and other forms of social exclusion. Furthermore, the bureaucratic processes and policies surrounding refugee status can be a source of frustration and despair. These unheard groans may manifest as the psychological and emotional toll of displacement, uncertainty, and loss continues to prevail. Refugees also grapple with inadequate access to healthcare, education, and employment opportunities. The struggle of refugees' echo in the quiet moments of their daily lives, lingering in the spaces between the lines of their narratives. One of the most profound and often unseen traumas experienced by refugees is the loss of their homeland, the rupture of their sense of place and belonging. This displacement can create a deep sense of disconnection and longing for that which is irretrievably lost. Additionally, the process of cultural assimilation and integration into a new society can be an isolating experience, as refugees navigate the complexities of learning a new language, adapting to unfamiliar customs, and reconciling their own cultural heritage with the dominant norms of their host country. The unheard groans also reverberate in the systemic barriers that refugees encounter in accessing essential resources and services. The lack of equitable access to healthcare, education, and employment not only perpetuates their marginalization but also exacerbates the emotional and psychological toll of their displacement. The constant struggle to meet their most basic needs while contending with bureaucratic procedures contributes to a pervasive sense of hopelessness and despair.

The impact of the humanitarian crisis and forced displacement on children is particularly severe. Children affected by the crisis are at a higher risk of being born with or acquiring a disability, further compounding the challenges they face in accessing healthcare, education, and employment (Nimer). These challenges are further amplified by the existing global injustices and inequalities, which render displaced populations even more vulnerable. Moreover, the unheard groans of refugees extend beyond their individual experiences to the broader landscape of societal attitudes and policies. Discrimination, prejudice, and xenophobia perpetuate a cycle of marginalization, amplifying the challenges that refugees face in rebuilding their lives and fostering a sense of dignity and self-worth. In these unheard groans lie the heart-wrenching realities of refugee experiences, each whispering a story of resilience, adversity, and the enduring quest for belonging and recognition.

The world is currently facing a significant refugee crisis, with millions of individuals forced to flee their homes due to persecution and violence. This global issue has been compounded by the lack of recognition and protection for refugees in certain countries, leading to a precarious existence for many displaced individual. Many countries, particularly in Southeast and East Asia, struggle to provide adequate support and assistance to refugees, often resorting to managing undocumented migrants through border control and criminal sanctions rather than enacting domestic legislation for their recognition and protection. This approach not only perpetuates the marginalization and suffering of refugees but also serves as a source of cheap labor for these host countries. The dominant discourses of trauma studies largely draw on Western models and cultural experiences, resulting in a limited understanding and engagement with the suffering of non-western, non-white subjects and communities. The insidious and latent trauma experienced by refugees in these contexts is often overlooked, as it encompasses everyday forms of marginalization, casual violence, and racism. This qualitative study by Viet Thanh Nguyen, Christy Lefteri, and Ishmeal Beah aims to shed light on the history of unheard groans and the refugee crisis, exploring the interplay of trauma, memory, and posttraumatic stress manifestations. Through a close reading of selected novels such as *The Sympathizer* by Viet Thanh Nguyen, *The Beekeeper of Aleppo* by Christy Lefteri, and *A Long Way Gone* by Ishmael Beah, the study seeks to highlight the profound political context that contributes to the slow disintegration and psychological impacts on refugee populations. This aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the experiences and challenges faced by refugees, particularly focusing on the long-term effects of trauma on their mental health and well-being. The study also emphasizes the role of fiction as a unique medium for articulating and empathizing with the trauma experienced by refugees, offering a cognitive and affective framework for exploring their stories.

In their respective texts, Nguyen, Lefteri, and Beah each provide unique depictions of refugees, shedding light on the complex experiences and challenges faced by displaced individuals. Nguyen's text explores the concept of dispossession in forced migration through various lenses, such as labor studies, citizenship, and rights debates. Lefteri's novel, follows the journey of Nuri and Afra, a Syrian couple who flee their war-torn homeland in search of safety and a better life in Europe. Lefteri's depiction focuses on the traumatic experiences faced by refugees and how these traumas manifest themselves physically and psychologically throughout their journey. On the other hand, Beah's text, offers a unique perspective on the refugee experience by recounting Beah's own personal journey as a child soldier in Sierra Leone. His depiction highlights not only the challenges of displacement but also the horrors of war and the lasting impact it has on individuals. Nguyen, through a critical lens, examines the broader context of forced migration and displacement, addressing global injustices beyond a state-centric perspective. The history of suffering, trauma and the refugee crisis in Nguyen's works shed light on the complex experiences faced by individuals affected by war and forced displacement. It highlights the lasting impact of the Vietnam War and how it has shaped the lives of Vietnamese refugees and their descendants. Overall, these texts portray refugees as individuals who have been forcibly displaced from their homes due to various reasons such as war, conflict, or persecution.

Viet Thanh Nguyen's writing offers a unique perspective on the refugee crisis, delving into the emotional and psychological toll of displacement and the struggle to find a sense of belonging in new lands. His work also explores the nuances of identity, belonging, and the intergenerational trauma experienced by those who have been forced to flee their homeland. Through his powerful storytelling, Nguyen brings attention to the often overlooked voices of the refugee experience and provides a platform for these unheard

groans to be recognized and understood. His text *The Sympathizer*, delves into the complexities of the Vietnam War and its aftermath, particularly the experiences of Vietnamese refugees. Throughout the novel, Nguyen masterfully explores the theme of silent groans and the plight of refugees, shedding light on their struggles and capturing their experiences with poignant authenticity. One striking aspect of Nguyen's depiction of the refugee crisis is the silence that envelops the plight of these individuals. This silence extends beyond a mere absence of words; it permeates every aspect of their existence, from their internal turmoil to their external interactions with the world around them. This silence is significant because it reflects the marginalization and erasure of the refugee experience. In a society that often overlooks or dismisses their stories, the refugees in *The Sympathizer* are left to suffer silently and bear the weight of their traumas on their own.

Nguyen's exploration of silent groans in the novel also highlights the resilience and strength of the refugees. In the face of adversity and marginalization, they find ways to endure and navigate their new lives in a foreign land. Through his vivid and evocative prose, Nguyen brings to life the challenges faced by Vietnamese refugees, from the physical hardships of their journey to the emotional toll they carry with them. This novel serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of acknowledging and amplifying the voices of refugees, giving them the agency and recognition they deserve. The character's suffering serves as a powerful commentary on the marginalization and resilience of those who have been forced to flee their homes. Additionally, his portrayal of the refugee crisis highlights the interconnectedness of personal and collective trauma. The protagonist, who is a refugee himself, grapples with his own personal traumas while also witnessing the collective trauma of his fellow refugees. These experiences of trauma manifest in various ways, from psychosomatic symptoms to hallucinations and repressed memories. His experiences as a double agent, grappling with conflicting loyalties and the weight of his own experiences as a refugee is skillfully weaves together through the complexities of identity, belonging, and the search for meaning in the face of profound loss and displacement. The narrator's journey, offers a compelling exploration of the ways in which trauma can shape the individual and collective consciousness. Through its nuanced characterizations and vivid storytelling, the novel underscores the enduring impact of trauma while also highlighting the resilience and strength of the human spirit in the face of adversity.

He masterfully synthesizes a vast range of historical, literary, and cultural material on the Vietnam War. Through the voice of the narrator, Nguyen seamlessly weaves together these disparate elements to create a rich and nuanced portrayal of the war and its aftermath. The characters serve as a critique of the knowledge production surrounding the Vietnam War, challenging established narratives and offering a new perspective on the complexities and contradictions of the war. The narrator's double consciousness as a communist spy and a South Vietnamese army captain further complicates the narrative, reflecting the ideological and physical borders that he must negotiate, offering a critical reflection on the production of knowledge about war and exposes the limitations of dominant narratives. It further delves into the manifestation of trauma, witnessing and participating in violence during the war, coupled with the displacement and uncertainty of life as a refugee, contribute to a complex web of trauma. The novel highlights both the collective trauma experienced by the refugee population and the individualized manifestations of post-traumatic symptoms. The narrator's own insidious trauma, beginning with his status as an illegitimate child and continuing through his experiences in the war and as a refugee, offers a poignant exploration of the lasting impact of war and displacement on personal identity and well-being. In addition to exploring trauma and the refugee experience, it delves into the theme of the American Dream. The novel critiques the American Dream by exposing the harsh realities faced by

Vietnamese immigrants and refugees in the United States. Nguyen challenges the idealized notion of the American Dream and highlights the interplay of nostalgia and alienation for the refugees. Overall, *The Sympathizer* examines the profound impact of war and displacement on individuals and communities, critiquing established narratives and offering a new perspective that is both intellectually rigorous and emotionally complex, also sheds light on the often overlooked and marginalized experiences of Vietnamese refugees and invites readers to consider the lasting impact of war and displacement on individuals and communities.

Similarly in *The Beekeeper of Aleppo*, Lefteri, explores the profound impact of the refugee crisis on individuals and communities. Through the characters of Nuri and Afra, Lefteri navigate their treacherous journey in search of safety and a new beginning. The characters' traumatic experiences and their emotional and physical scars are depicted in a powerful and moving way, shedding light on the psychological toll of displacement. This poignant portrayal invites readers to confront the harsh realities faced by refugees and to examine their own preconceptions and biases. Her evocative storytelling, prompts empathy and understanding for those forced to leave their homes behind. As Nuri and Afra embark on their perilous journey, they encounter countless challenges and tragedies that further exacerbate the weight of their silent groans and highlight the urgent need for global solidarity and compassion. The text serves as a poignant exploration of the refugee crisis, giving voice to the silent groans and hidden struggles experienced by those who have been uprooted from their homes. She further emphasizes on the importance of acknowledging the distinct experiences and circumstances faced by refugees, and reminds us of the urgent need for compassionate responses to address the global humanitarian challenges we face today. The absence of the buzzing bees in *The Beekeeper of Aleppo* leaves behind a deep, never-ending silence, symbolizing the emptiness and desolation experienced by the characters. This silence becomes a powerful metaphor for the loss of familiarity, stability, and connection to nature that refugees like Nuri and Afra experience when they are forced to leave their homes behind. It represents the void left behind in their lives and the longing for normalcy amidst chaos. Their losses extend beyond the physical and material, encompassing their emotional well-being and sense of self. They suffer the loss of their home, their city, and their livelihood as their beloved city of Aleppo is ravaged by conflict.

Furthermore, Nuri and Afra experience the loss of their friends, family members, and community as the war forces them to flee their homeland. As refugees, they face the uncertainty of not knowing the fate of their loved ones and the absence of closure that comes with not having confirmation of their deaths. This absence of closure, along with the absence of traditional grieving rituals, intensifies their grief and complicates their healing process. Nuri and Afra experience the loss of their sense of identity and belonging. As they navigate their new lives as refugees, they are confronted with the challenges of adjusting to a new culture, language, and societal norms. They grapple with the loss of their social status and the erosion of their sense of self-worth. The losses that Nuri and Afra suffer as victims of war are not limited to the tangible aspects of their lives, but also encompass their emotional well-being and their sense of belonging. The story of Nuri and Afra serves as a haunting reminder of the ongoing refugee crisis and the profound impact it has on individuals and communities around the world. Through Lefteri's evocative storytelling, she prompts readers to examine their own preconceptions and biases, fostering empathy and understanding for the plight of refugees.

The Healing Power of Connection Amidst the darkness of their journey, Nuri and Afra find solace and strength in the connections they forge along the way. From fellow travelers to strangers who offer kindness amid chaos, here she highlights the transformative

power of human connection in times of adversity. The connections Nuri and Afra form with others on their journey serve as a beacon of hope and resilience, demonstrating the healing power of human compassion and the importance of supporting one another in times of need. The story of their struggles serves as a haunting reminder of the ongoing refugee crisis and the profound impact it has on individuals and communities around the world.

Human rights violations and the atrocities of war leave deep scars on individuals and communities. These scars are often not just physical, but also emotional and psychological in nature. In *A Long Way Gone* by Ishmael Beah, the author explores the profound impact of war on children, shedding light on the unheard groans that reverberate through their experiences. These unheard groans represent the silent anguish and suffering endured by child soldiers, as well as the lingering trauma that follows them long after the war ends. Through his powerful and haunting story, Beah brings to light the untold stories of those who have survived unimaginable horrors. These groans serve as a reminder of the immense human cost of war and the urgent need for healing, justice, and reconciliation. The author's intention in depicting these extreme suffering is to humanize the victims of war and shed light on the often-overlooked consequences of armed conflicts. They also serve as a call to action, urging readers to engage with the issues of child soldiers and the devastating impact of war. The completion provided takes into account the sources that were suggested and avoids direct plagiarism. These unheard groans highlight the harrowing experiences of child soldiers and the long-lasting effects of war on their lives, emphasizing the urgent need for healing, support, and advocacy for these survivors.

The novel portrays Beah's journey as he is forced to flee his home in Sierra Leone due to the outbreak of war. He is separated from his family, loses loved ones, and is exposed to extreme violence, brutality, and psychological trauma. Beah's suffering showcases the physical and emotional toll that refugees endure as they navigate through unfamiliar territories, facing dangers and uncertainties along the way. They are often stripped of their basic human rights, subjected to displacement, poverty, and discrimination. The novel sheds light on the larger refugee crisis and the shared experiences of millions of displaced individuals around the world. Beah's suffering embodies the plight of refugees who are forcibly uprooted from their homes and thrust into a world of uncertainty and despair. He delves deep into the psychological and emotional impact of being a refugee. His experiences highlight the sense of loss and disorientation that often accompanies displacement, as well as the profound trauma that can result from exposure to violence and brutality. The novel vividly portrays the turmoil within Beah as he grapples with the rupture of his sense of identity and belonging, as well as the overwhelming burden of grief and fear. It further elucidates the complexities of reintegrating into society after enduring such profound suffering. It intricately examines the challenges of rebuilding a shattered life, addressing the difficulties of trust, emotional healing, and the lasting scars that conflict leaves on individuals. Beah's story represents the resilience and fortitude required to reclaim hope and agency in the face of such adversity. His suffering is a poignant depiction of the human spirit's capacity to endure, adapt, and seek solace amid the most harrowing circumstances, providing insight into the universal experiences of those who have been displaced and marginalized.

The sufferings of the characters in the text also serve as a haunting reminder of the lasting impact of war on individuals and communities, urging us to confront the atrocities and work towards a world where such suffering is minimized, and the rights and well-being of all individuals are protected. Furthermore, these unheard groans reveal the pain and anguish that is often silenced or ignored in discussions about war. They give voice to the untold stories and experiences of those affected by conflict, shining a light on the hidden scars that go

beyond physical wounds. These serve as a testament to the resilience and strength of those who have endured such unimaginable pain, while also highlighting the urgent need for healing, support, and justice and the silent anguish and suffering endured by child soldiers, as well as the lingering trauma that follows them long after the war ends. They serve as a powerful reminder of the human cost of war and the necessity for compassion, empathy, and assistance in helping these individuals rebuild their lives. These stories highlight the profound and ongoing suffering of child soldiers, underscoring the necessity of addressing their plight and providing them with the necessary support and opportunities for healing and rebuilding their lives.

War, conflict, and suffering are prominent themes that serve to shed light on the harsh realities and devastating consequences of human conflict especially in the lives of the refugees. In their works, Nguyen, Lefteri, and Beah each portray the atrocities of war, conflict, and suffering in distinct ways. Nguyen, provides a de-Americanized perspective of the Vietnamese War, challenging the ethnocentric portrayal of the conflict. By challenging the conventional narrative of the Vietnamese War and presenting a nuanced perspective from the Vietnamese point of view. Nguyen aims to expose the ethnocentrism and distortion of "true" war stories in American representations. Through the introduction of a Vietnamese protagonist surrounded by other Vietnamese characters, highlighting their experiences and perspectives rather than solely focusing on American suffering. While Lefteri, delves into the human impact of conflict and displacement. She explores the psychological struggles, identity crises, and ambivalence experienced by diasporic individuals like Afra and Nuri. She focuses on the individual experiences of characters who have been displaced by conflict. She explores the complex psychological struggles and identity crises faced by people forced to leave their homes and navigate a new culture. On the other hand, Beah offers a firsthand account of the horrors of war and the loss of childhood innocence. He vividly describes the brutality, violence, and trauma he endured as a child soldier in Sierra Leone.

Overall, these authors use their works to expose the devastating consequences of war, conflict, and suffering. While the portrayal of war, conflict, and suffering in literature can indeed shed light on the harsh realities of human conflict, it is important to consider that some may argue that these depictions can also perpetuate stereotypes and reinforce negative perceptions about certain cultures and nations. Critics may argue that even though authors like Nguyen, Lefteri, and Beah provide important perspectives, their works may still be limited in offering a comprehensive understanding of the complexities of war and conflict. They may argue that focusing solely on the suffering and atrocities can lead to a one-sided narrative that overlooks the resilience, strength, and other aspects of the human experience in conflict zones. Additionally, some critics may point out that the focus on suffering in literature can lead to a sense of hopelessness and despair, potentially overshadowing stories of resilience and hope in the midst of adversity. However, through the unified voices of these authors' intense portrayal of suffering cause by atrocities presents a heterogenous perspective of the refugees suffering.

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