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| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Travelling Memories: Revisiting the Past in Larry Heinemann's *Black Virgin Mountain*

Sara Alzahrani
Assistant Professor, Department of Languages and Translation, University of Jeddah, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia
Corresponding Author: Sara Alzahrani, **E-mail**: salzahrani@uj.edu.sa

| ABSTRACT

The Vietnam War was a period of immense upheaval and trauma for American troops. In recognition of the urgent need for psychological support and care for veterans, a therapy culture and narratives of healing began to take shape, acknowledging the psychological potential of revisiting sites of trauma. While there are numerous cases of war veterans returning to Vietnam in search of closure, very few studies have delved into the specific ways in which mobility and movement influence the reconstruction of war memories and their impact on veterans' healing. This paper aims to examine how the physical act of returning to a place of trauma can be a powerful form of remembrance and healing, potentially leading to a greater understanding of the complex and interconnected nature of trauma and memory. Through a close reading of Larry Heinemann's memoir *Black Virgin Mountain: A Return to Vietnam* (2005), this paper seeks to uncover the power and potential of physical movement to manifest and process traumatic memories, and the potential risks involved. Understanding how war memories continue to manifest long after the war has ended is crucial for understanding the healing process and the urgent needs of veterans. It highlights the significance of mobility and movement as active vehicles of remembrance, allowing veterans to navigate the traumas of the past and find closure.

| KEYWORDS

Return to Vietnam, the Vietnam War, Larry Heinemann, memory, trauma, *Black Virgin Mountain*, movement, mobility

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

> But there remained, still, the itchy, undeniable sense of unfinished business between us Americans and the Vietnamese.
>
> —Larry Heinemann

In 1990, Vietnam War veteran Larry Heinemann made his first trip back to Vietnam since the end of hostilities two decades earlier. The visit marked a significant milestone for Heinemann, who was determined to resolve the lingering wounds of the past that stood as barriers to reconciliation and healing (Heinemann, 2005, p. 74). Heinemann's inescapable feeling of irresolution decades after the war ended is indicative of the pain and intensity of traumatic memories never subsiding with the passage of time. The entanglements of his memories of the war that are in one sense remote and isolated but, in another, perpetually present show that suffering, loss and trauma are anything but secondary. Vietnam, for him, has become a symbol of a frozen memory in time that needs to be confronted head-on and reconciled.

That Heinemann felt an urge to return to Vietnam is not entirely new; rather, it is an example of a classical pilgrimage story involving healing or redemption through an embodied return to sites of suffering. While Vietnam veterans have always engaged in memorialization practices of their war experiences, the patterns of remembrance practices serve to create a sense of fixity. By constructing physical memorials, organizing ceremonies, and preserving artifacts, veterans reconnect with their war experiences

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and reaffirm their commitment to remembering in a structured and controlled manner. There has been a lack of comprehensive studies on the ways in which mobility and movement influence the formation and recall of war memories. In recent years, the influx of veterans returning to war zones has led to distinct mobility flows that merit attention. These mobility flows provide valuable insights into how veterans' memories of war are shaped, recalled, and shared with the broader community.

The aim of this paper is to examine the efficacy of veterans' returning to trauma sites as an active vehicle of remembrance and healing through the prism of the Vietnam War. It specifically looks closely at Larry Heinemann's tale of Return to Vietnam in *Black Virgin Mountain* (2005) to harness insight into how Heinemann's traumatic memory emerges on the move and becomes intertwined with his physical movement. Drawing on theories of trauma, movement, and memory, I argue that Heinemann's return to Vietnam allows him a chance to relive memories through his movement, effectively providing him with different contexts and perspectives to reconcile the memories he recalls.

This paper is significant because it expands memory practices through mobility, allowing affective post-memory to replace past war recollections. Failing to focus on mobility and memory dynamics denies the complexity and diversification of memory patterns in a globalized transaction of memory practices. The experience of returning veterans as living reminders of past war trauma reveals how war memories continue to manifest long after the war has ended, even in peacetime. Veterans' stories, memoirs, and testimonies contribute to the collective memory of war, challenging passive commemoration and fostering a deeper understanding of the complexities of memory and the long-lasting consequences of war.

2. Literature Review

Wars are remembered as defining moments in a nation's history, shaping its cultural identity and the narratives that form its collective memory. The ways in which wars are remembered vary greatly, taking various forms, ranging from grand memorials in public places to smaller-scale tributes in cemeteries or hometowns, reflecting cultural, political, and social values and serving as symbols of a nation's collective memories. The following review explores the growing recognition of the limitations of traditional historical methods of war remembrance and the potential of alternative perspectives and contexts in reconstructing war memories.

In recent years, scholarly research has paid significant attention to the ways in which the spatial fixities of war memory are embedded in memorials, monuments, battlegrounds, and their commemorative practices. Greg Dickinson et al. argue that constructing memorials, museums, and war cemeteries involves the intersection of memory, place, and rhetoric, creating a coherent narrative that resonates with visitors (2010, p. 24). Similarly, Danielle Drozdzewski et al. contend that place-based narratives play a significant role in shaping cultural memory of war. Certain locations, such as battlefields, war memorials, and museums, become associated with specific events and repositories of memory, serving as physical reminders of the past and shaping how events are remembered and interpreted (2019, p. 253). Both articles contribute to understanding the intricate relationship between physical spaces, architectural forms, and the official narratives associated with war remembrance.

There is a consensus among historians and memory scholars that official memorials create architectures of memory that serve a collective imagination, infusing history with moral significance by controlling the narrative of historical events. Jay Winter demonstrates the problematic use of the term "collective memory" as it can obscure the individual and group agency involved in the process of remembrance (1999, p. 9). Likewise, Joanna Bourke (2004) argues that the concept of a collective memory does not only transcend individual memories but also fails to capture the true nature of memories that are selectively remembered, constructed, and reinforced by those in power (p. 474). Selective remembering or forgetting, thus, is not only a natural process but also a social and cultural phenomenon that contributes to the formation of a collective identity (Jan Assmann, 2008, p. 113). In this light, the social purposes of war memorials—service, honour, and humanitarianism—only partially fulfil shared human values in the designed memory spaces. James Mayo asserts that sacred memorials visibly express these human values, but no one expects memorials to represent the full range of desirable human values (1988, p. 71). In her article on museum sites, Sue Malven maintains that museum displays are provisional in the sense that they are incomplete and partial, leaving out details and nuances essential for a comprehensive understanding of the subject. They present one version of the history of war, shaped by the curators' interpretations and constrained by the limitations of physical objects (2000, p. 180). For that reason, the material and spatial composition of the memorials guide visitors' affective responses and interpretations (Zachary Beckstead, 2011, p. 193).

Historians and memory scholars who pay particular attention to the constructions of history emerging from memorial sites now dismiss them as inadequate modes that assume stable or permanent significance for memorial sites, choosing rather to widen their lenses to the conceptualization of war memories through the performance of personalized embodied, practiced, and inscribed presence rather than a semiotic representation of the past (Winter, 2010, p. 21). The shift tends towards "denaturalizing" official narratives that appear rigid, static, and unchanging. It acknowledges that memories are not just found in static objects that can be analysed in isolation but rather in dynamics that unfold in time and space and are shaped by patterns of interactions. This entails looking at the previous sites of wars implicated in movement as "points of the itinerary of movement rather than as final

destinations" (White & Buchheim, 2015, p. 10). The past, in this light, is seen as something that is constantly evolving rather than static; it is a living entity constantly being reshaped through the interactions of individuals and their environment. Movement, instead of location, is originally the condition of memory (Creet & Kitzmann, 2011, p. 9). It is particularly the various activities that take place within spaces dedicated to remembering that play a crucial role in shaping the emotional meanings associated with memory (White & Buchheim, 2015, p. 7).

The intersection of movement and memory has recently become a key focus in cultural studies. This surge of interest is part of a broader trend in cultural studies to explore the transnational and transcultural dimensions of identities, uncovering their complexities in a globalized world. A strand of literature on the role of mobility in shaping memory is found in the context of diaspora, exile, and immigration. Palmberger and Tosic (2016) delve into the ways in which migration challenges existing narratives of belonging and creates new opportunities for memory and storytelling through movement. By examining various forms of (im)mobility, including forced displacement, voluntary migration, and temporary displacement, the authors show how the collective memories of communities, nations, and ethnic groups can be reshaped by mobility, leading to both erasure and revitalization (p. 5). In like manner, Creet and Kitzmann (2011) argue that displacement intensifies immigrants' investment in memories, addressing the transcendental nature of migratory experience as a condition for contemporary identities (p. 10). Through remembering and constructing narratives, immigrants can preserve their sense of self and navigate the challenges of their new surroundings.

Another strand of literature that associates movement with memory is contextualized in the academic literature of tourism. Examining various kinds of travels, from tourism to pilgrimages of personal discovery, many tourism scholars make great progress in illuminating the mobile construction of remembrance through sacred/ secular movement. Although pilgrimage and tourism seem to embody the divide between sacred/secular, tourism studies, have long noted the similarity between tourism and a "sacred journey" in the same way pilgrimage practices of late trend more towards contravening the very idea of the sacred (White and Buchheim, 2012, p. 7). Both are spiritual ways of seeking reality in other periods and the lives of others.

The field of tourism and its influence on memories encompasses a wide range of perspectives and approaches. Although Debbie Lisle (2000) argues that organized historical battle tourist' sites encourage people to remember the war in specific ways, she appreciates the potential of this form of movement to fix problematic memories, proposing that mobile experiences contribute to the construction and personalization of individuals' memories (p. 98). Lisle proposes that tourism can go beyond mere cultural exchange and take on a global "peacemaking" role. The concept of the "global village" represents an ideal world where cultural differences are celebrated and where individuals from different backgrounds come together in harmony. By promoting the "global village," tourism encourages individuals to embrace memories that are fluid and subject to change (94).

While tourism studies show the significance of reconstructing memories through movement and mobility, it is imperative to consider that motivations and practices in tourism are never similar or analogous. The traditional tourist gaze, which assumes that tourists view the world from a detached and objective position, fails to capture the complexities of tourism. Tourists bring their own biases, emotions, and preconceived notions to their encounters with sites, and their gaze is shaped by their perspectives, resulting in diverse and often conflicting interpretations (Lisle, 2000, p. 104). Moreover, civilians remain the focus of many tourism studies, leaving underexplored the increasing trend of veterans returning to war zones. Although the image and portrayal of returning veterans have become a significant aspect of popular culture since the memory boom of the Second World War, a very handful number of scholars have examined Vietnam veterans' returns to places of traumatic memories (Hobbs, 2023, p. 250). Not only do individual veterans' returns through sites of war constitute a small demographic, but they are also insignificant to the national discourse of war. As veterans move, they always engage in a ritual process—not necessarily sacred—then still a movement that uses trauma spaces to enable ethical encounters and, potentially, personal transformation. In the case of the Vietnam War, investigating the different cultural meanings of memory is more urgent as the cultural battle over the meaning of the war has now lasted more than forty years and continues to this day.

3. Methodology

Recent shifts in theories of memories have opened new avenues of research and exploration. The recognition of the role of emotions in memory, the development of social memory practices, and the earnest study of cultural memory have all contributed to a deeper understanding of the complex nature of memory. More recent contemporary geographic dislocations, such as globalization, digital technologies, and tourism, have also reshaped the common understanding of memory. One of the key aspects of traumatic memory, among trauma scholars, is its persistence over time and resistance to change or interference. Traumatic memories are often recalled in their original form, with strong emotions attached, making it difficult to alter or tamper with their content. While a great deal of research has approached the issue of trauma from the perspective of memory and oral testimony, the role of places as sites of memory has, thus far, remained underdeveloped. The impact of trauma extends beyond the event itself, influencing the memories associated with places, objects, and sensory experiences.

Casting sites of memory as the primary agents of learned history, filled with cues that recall past events, has a long history in the study of mnemonics among historian scholars (Creet & Kitzmann, 2011, p. 5). For example, Pierre Nora's approach to memory retention and retrieval, Creet and Kitzmann state, employs associating specific locations with historical events, dates, or facts. By linking specific places to significant memories, historians like Nora aim to leverage the power of place to enhance memory recall. However, it is not only the stability of a place that makes memories significant but rather the mobility and displacement that often trigger the creation of immobile memories (Creet & Kitzmann, 2011, 10). One invests more in memories when migrated and when displaced. Memory is where we have arrived rather than left and goes through an ever-changing landscape that is constantly being modified and reimagined. In this light, memory is not sacred anymore where it stays, and traveling is an intrinsic quality of memory itself, not a flaw or a defect.

Given that all forms of memory are embedded in place or—"memory is naturally place-oriented, or at least place-supported," traumatic memory is expectedly reinforced in the places where trauma appeared, recounted, and memorialized (Casey, 2000, p.187). However, places that bear the wounds of trauma offer great possibilities for working through that trauma. They become safe spaces for reflection and provide a framework for understanding trauma, empowering individuals to process their experiences and contribute to public discourse. Such places, according to Stephanie Arel, qualify as "thin places" that can be seen as representations of the intersection of the earthly and the divine, allowing the traumatized to encounter the transcendent aspects of existence (2018, p. 17). The encounter makes the physical and the ethereal boundaries become blurred, leaving individuals with a sense of profound interconnectedness with something greater than oneself to tap into a higher wisdom and source of inspiration.

The returnees access war and trauma at a historical distance. The danger that once loomed large, threatening to engulf lives, is now relegated to the past. Traumatized individuals venture into the once-volatile territory with the reassurance that their well-being is protected for the time being (Lisle, 2000, p. 97). Safety plays a crucial role in the early stages of trauma recovery. The temporal distance between the returnees and the war allows them to view the war and its effects from a more objective perspective without the risk of experiencing the trauma of war firsthand. This is where the process of transformation becomes tangible (Arel, 2018, p. 21).

Traumatic places are unique in their embodiment of traumatic memory and their structured nature around movement. If the body is the thing that places the individual in a traumatic place, to begin with, it is the very same body that becomes vital in making the memory-bearing body recollect itself again in the very same place. Memory of places does change depending on the time a place of memory is re-visited, and the memory is revived, changes of habits, changes of environment, changes of interpretations and contexts (Casey, 2000, p. 182). The bodily enactment of the past disrupts the notion of time as linear and immutable. In moments of encounter with the past, the traumatic events of the past lose their identity as a separate past as they merge with the present, influencing and shaping the present and the future alike (Casey, 2000, p. 195).

The memory of the body is instrumental in shaping the perception of the world. The bodily memory of a place involves the interplay between bodily emplacement, motor intentions, and environmental contributions. This matching of action and response creates a loop that helps to create a sense of home in the world, a "lived-in" quality in which the body feels at ease in its environment (Casey, 2000, p. 192). Such a continuous conversation between the body and its environment allows one to move through the world with an understanding of its boundaries, affinities, and possibilities. In this realm of shifting time, the past, present, and future converge, creating a tapestry of memories and experiences that defy traditional categorization. It is a place where memories collide, where seemingly separate events intertwine, creating a complex layer of emotions, sensations, and reactions (Arel, 2018, p. 19).

The mobile body, constantly in motion, becomes a vehicle for self-discovery and transformation. Through crossings between past and present, the subject's identity is put into flux. No longer confined to a single identity, the subject has the potential to become multiple versions of themselves. This fluidity of identity is unsettling but also liberating. On the one hand, this wavering, where individuals step outside of their comfort zones and venture into unfamiliar territories, is a catalyst for the loss of oneself. On the other hand, the loss of oneself and one's past is necessary for the emergence of new selves. This ongoing dialectical interplay between the known self and the evolving self constitutes personal transformation (White & Buchheim, 2015, p. 11).

The relationship between the traumatized body and the self-moving soul is symbiotic. While the traumatized body navigates the physical world, the self-moving soul provides the wisdom and guidance necessary for healing and reintegration. This internal dialogue between the two aspects of the body is essential for the healing process, allowing for the integration of past experiences and the emergence of a new sense of identity. Moving back to a trauma site is an attempt of the subject to create for the self an origin story from the beginning, a story that he/she writes back to the previous self. It is a way for the subject to create a sense of control over his/her life as they actively engage with the events that have shaped them in the past. By exploring the physical body, relationships with their surroundings, and the significance of the site where the trauma occurred, survivors navigate the complex

terrain of their past in a constructive way where the body that was used only to receive seems to finally be speaking for itself and tell its story of trauma leaving the body.

4. Results and Discussion

Larry Heinemann's memoir *Black Virgin Mountain* of his return to Vietnam emphasizes that there is no single or fixed form of remembrance and that memories can be revisited, reframed, and reshaped over time. Heinemann's memories of war manifest themselves as a blur, making it difficult for him to form a meaningful relationship with the past. His tale of return to Vietnam underscores that movement is not just a passive process but an active agent in reshaping his encounter with sites of memory. He actively engages with the spaces, objects, and events that shape his memories, allowing for embodied experiences that go beyond passive reflection to reclaim memories and take ownership of their interpretation. Heinemann's body becomes a conduit for his own memories, facilitating a deeply personal and introspective exploration of his own identity.

Like other veterans, Heinemann longed for a way out of the war when he finally reached the end of his tour. With a keen sense of relief and a desire to finally leave behind the war, he boarded the plane back to the US, hoping to return to his normal life as if the war had never happened. However, he soon realized that it was not possible for a rifle-soldier to shake off the effects of war in any straightforward way. The intensity of his war experience has lingered with him, haunting his thoughts and actions: "My war-year was like a nail in my head, like a corpse in my house, and I wanted it out, but for the longest time now, I have had the unshakeable, melancholy understanding that the war will always be vividly present in me, a literal physical, palpable sensation" (64). Heinemann wants nothing more than to rid himself of these demons, but he has realized that they are a part of who he is, forever etched into his memory. The place that used to be 'home' had vanished and was replaced by a foreign environment that felt disorienting and unwelcoming.

Heinemann's determination to grasp every aspect of the war led him to write two acclaimed memoirs: "I had written enough about that large and ghastly event, a benchmark of American history if there ever was one" (74). While writing serves as an important outlet for externalizing his thoughts and experiences, it cannot fully encapsulate the complexities of his experience in Vietnam. It serves to acknowledge and document the events, but it cannot fully capture the chaotic nature of the war and the complexities of healing from emotional trauma (58). Despite the limitations of writing, Heinemann's literary achievements eventually paved the way for him to join a group of American writers traveling to Vietnam for a literary conference. The conference, which was organized by the William Joiner Center at the University of Massachusetts in Boston, marked the first of its kind, bringing together a diverse group of talented writers and poets in the likes of Philip Caputo, W. D. Erhart, Yusef Komunyakaa, and Bruce Weigl (74).

The first flight from Bangkok to Hanoi in 1990 was not just an ordinary journey for Heinemann but an opportunity for self-discovery and exploration. Unaware of what he would find in Vietnam after all the years that passed, he was intensely resolved to take it as it came (125). The hazy landscape of Hanoi, while onboard below, came into his view, and Hanoi appeared a bustling city, its streets teeming with people and vehicles. It was a bustling contrast to the quiet, isolated life he had left behind and the years he had spent in the military service. As soon as he stepped out of the plane, there was an instant sense of nostalgia and renewed energy. The vibrant colours and busy markets were a feast for his searching eyes. Hanoi had a lasting impression on him and a turning point that taught him the power of embracing the unknown, the value of cultural immersion, and the potential to embrace challenges. Since then, each subsequent visit to Hanoi has been highly anticipated and thoroughly enjoyed and was a mix of highs and lows. The stark contrast between his memory of the country back then and his memory now was uncomfortably difficult to reconcile. But Heinemann was determined not to let the past define him and to focus on the present moment and its potential in reframing his lingering memories.

Throughout his memoir, Heinemann repeatedly emphasized that his return to Vietnam was not motivated by a desire to revisit the past or seek closure. He writes: "Coming back is not the wistful nostalgia of some geezer of an "old soldier" hankering for the "old days" (249). The quote serves to highlight that revisiting the past is not always about longing for what it once was. In fact, reliving the war all over again is not what he set out to accomplish. Somewhere else, Heinemann clarifies that:

> These sojourns are not "guilt trips." And I don't go to Vietnam to "heal" myself with one of those good, cleansing New Age crying jags. No. "healing" is too dicey a business to be settled with a couple of weeks' vacation. And there's nothing about "reconciliation" in these visits; I was a solider once, as was just about every Vietnamese of a certain age I have ever met… I've come to see that the Vietnamese have a deep (not to say historical) sense of melancholy, and are more empathetic with Americans returned to settle a grief that will not sit. (136)

Heinemann excludes all the reasons that might be expected of these return visits to trauma sites. Healing through moving is a highly personal journey that cannot be rushed or achieved solely by spending a couple of weeks in a foreign land. He was driven by a desire to examine the war from a fresh perspective and deepen his understanding of its impact on Vietnamese culture and

society: "And there it was, the country at peace, the thing I had come to see" (195). By doing so, he challenges preconceived notions and offers a more holistic understanding of the war and its legacy that are often left unexplored in popular or official narratives. It should be seen as a purposeful decision driven by a desire to contribute positively to the present.

Being a young soldier was, in many ways, like being in prison. Heinemann was literally confined, confined to his duties and role. Not only did the military routine become monotonous and oppressive, but every moment was carefully planned and executed. There was little room for individuality or self-expression. The reconciliation project that Heinemann embarked on requires replacing old memories of Vietnam at war with new memories of Vietnam at peace (195). This signifies a shift in perspective and a shift in focus. He embarked on a mission to witness and experience peace firsthand, leaving behind the images of conflict that were previously occupying his mind. This transition reveals Heinemann's intention to focus not just passively on observing peace but actively seeking it out. The absence of violence and strife allows for a relaxation of tensions and a restoration of community bonds. It is a remarkable experience for Heinemann to see the Vietnamese going about their daily activities, attending schools, going to work, and enjoying their leisure time without fear or apprehension.

In one incident, Heinemann recalled Trang Bang's Square as a serene haven amidst the chaos and turmoil that enveloped the city in times of war (234). It was depicted as a place where soldiers and civilians alike could escape the relentless violence that plagued their daily lives and find solace in the tranquillity that the square had to offer. However, on his return visits, the square is nowhere to be found, leaving a void in the hearts of the Vietnamese and the Americans who once cherished its tranquil charm. The once bustling hub of activity with its lush greenery and soothing water fountains is now an empty shell, a testament to the destruction and devastation that war can bring. The trees that once stood tall and proud were now reduced to charred remains, and the water that once cascaded gracefully from the fountain was now stagnant. The disappearance of Trang Bang's Square is a painful reminder of the fragility of peace and the devastating effects war can have on urban spaces.

Heinemann's movement through spaces of memories presents a unique opportunity to observe the daily routines of ordinary people without the disruptions and hardships associated with military discipline. The fear of fraternization with the Vietnamese was deeply ingrained in the American soldiers. Any form of friendship or bonding was discouraged, as it was seen as a threat to the chain of command and a potential threat to the war effort (43). This fear was fuelled by the belief that any human connection with the enemy would soften their resolve and hinder their ability to carry out their duties effectively. The lack of ordinary human contact with the Vietnamese played a significant role in shaping the perception of the Vietnamese as an enemy. By the end of his service, Heinemann had lost any knowledge or understanding of Vietnamese culture, language, military or social history, literature, music, religion, or costumes. Coming back to the country in peacetime symbolizes a return to normality and allows for a more authentic glimpse into the lives of the Vietnamese and the resilience of the nation. It also offers ample space for reconciliation and forgiveness.

Heinemann approached Vietnam as the locals, immersing himself in the customs, traditions, and lifestyle of the Vietnamese people. In his effort to genuinely commit to cultural sensitivity, he refused to create an insurmountable barrier between himself and the local community by using cars, preferring instead to use bikes as his main mode of transportation. He writes: "Riding the bikes was a great kick, part transportation and conversation piece" (175). The sense of threat and dread of walking down the street of Hanoi during the war is replaced by a sense of safety. This gesture conveyed the value of physical contact, emphasizing the significance of being in close proximity to "regular folks" of Vietnam, blending in seamlessly with the everyday commuters and pedestrians on the streets (174).

Just as Heinemann rewrites his war memories through movement, the interplay of taste and memory is one aspect that facilitates his connection with the country. His war memory of the culinary delights of Vietnamese cuisine is almost non-existent (153). His military diet was predominantly composed of American-style food, often heavy, rich, and starchy. Although Heinemann's war memory of Vietnamese cuisine is scarce, he recognizes the power that taste holds in creating emotions and attachments to the culture. Whether trying new Vietnamese dishes, cooking traditional Vietnamese recipes, or simply reminiscing about the different tastes, his goal is to subvert memories of the past as a gateway to a deeper connection and understanding of the country's culture.

Heinemann's ability to reframe his war memory through movement extends to reinventing his past to derive new memories and impressions. This move is a remarkable demonstration of resilience and growth. During his war-time experience, he had often witnessed incredible battles and witnessed heroic acts of bravery. The adrenaline rush that accompanied those encounters had left him craving more. However, the idea of venturing into tunnels had never occurred to him (227). It is on his return visits that he decides to explore the tunnels for himself. The idea of walking alone through the darkness, surrounded by the unknown, was initially daunting. Yet, there was an undeniable thrill that came with the task. The tunnel served as a rebirth for Heinemann, offering him a glimpse into a world he had never known. Time seemed to stand still as he explored the tunnels, carefully navigating his way through narrow passages and avoiding unexpected twists and turns (228). The sound of his footsteps echoed through the darkness,

creating a surreal ambiance. It was at that moment that he realized the true allure of tunnels. They offered a stark contrast to the chaos and danger of the above-ground world. The tunnels unexpectedly become a place of solitude and introspection, where Heinemann can escape the memory of the past.

One of the most sought-after experiences for Heineman on his return visits is to depoliticize his traumatic war memories. Despite the sombre memories associated with the war, the Nui Ba Den Mountain peak during the war held an appeal that transcended the conflict. He was not the only American who served in the region who felt this way. In fact, it was a common sentiment among veterans who had encountered this breathtaking natural wonder. The mountain peak loomed large, casting an imposing figure on the horizon: "The thing looms large in the distance, like a dusky apparition. It is the largest, most vague object you have ever seen. …. As you move, that thing, that aura, that elongated bull's-eye, becomes the faintest, roughest spread of light. It is light. It is the light of men's lives. It is the ambient light from another spider hole. The light of your life" (232). There was something about its enigmatic aura that seemed to transcend the war's shadow, serving as a sanctuary of peace and tranquillity. The combination of the natural setting, coupled with its historical significance, makes Nui Ba Den such a remarkable destination that Heinemann admits: "It is Nui Ba Den, and not the war, that draws me here" (256).

Climbing the mountain symbolizes the culmination of everything Heinemann has ever experienced. As he stood on top, gazing out across the wide, hazy panorama of the hot Tay Ninh countryside, an overwhelming sensation washed over him, a sense of clarity and self-awareness that defies explanation. He found himself uttering a word that strikes a deep chord within him – "home" (261). It is a realization that hits him like a lightning bolt, flooding his consciousness with a profound sense of comfort and belonging. This word, so simple yet so profound, carries the weight of untold memories and experiences. It is as if he has known this all along, deep down in his subconscious, that this place holds the truth he is seeking. It is a feeling that goes beyond physical boundaries and transcends time and space.

If the war year still stirs in Heinemann's deep and unmistakable traumatic memories, the writers' trip of 1990 was a welcome discovery and revelation. Hanoi, once a forbidden city, a place off limits to Heinemann's imagination, has gradually opened to him, and he has developed strong connections with people and country once more (125). Hanoi had a charm that was impossible to resist. It was a city that embraced contradictions, mixing the historical with the modern, the chaotic with the serene; in the same way, his memories of war blur the lines between the past and the present. Every visit left him longing for more, eager to experience its quirky charm all over again. The new memories he accumulated have provided him with a sense of belonging and camaraderie that he often finds difficult to replicate in his own life in the United States. The special bond he forms with his Vietnamese friends in Hanoi stems from their shared experiences and shared understanding of a particular memory of their lives.

For Heinemann, Vietnam is more than just a destination; it is a place of memory. It is a place where the past is remembered, but not in a way that defines the present self. Unlike tourists with a predetermined itinerary or a specific goal, Heinemann's approach was more organic and spontaneous. Walking through Vietnam in peace was his very body's way of feeling, knowing, and remembering Vietnam in a way that is both visceral and profound. The route he took was not merely a path on a map; it was a direct reflection of his physical journey through the landscape of the past. With each stride, he felt the ground beneath his feet, absorbing the textures, smells, and sounds of the country, and it became ingrained in his memory. His physical engagement allows Heinemann's body to become attuned to the nuances and rhythms of Vietnam, forming an intimate connection with the land, a communion with its spirit, and a repository of memories. His journey is not a recovery but rather a discovery. He is not simply returning to a previous state; instead, he is uncovering new layers of himself along the way, where he discovers new passions, new relationships, and new possibilities.

5. Conclusion

This paper aims to shed light on the transformative power of movement in Heinemann's narrative, shedding light on how it serves to break free from the baggage of the past. Heinemann does more than a tourist gaze; he walks, acts, encounters, performs, and leaves changed. Heinemann's physical movement in *Black Virgin Mountain* is driven by a desire to engage with the emotional residue of the war that has been repressed and buried deep within him. Heinemann's return to Vietnam is not just a journey to revisit the past; it is also a means of creating a new past for himself. By actively engaging with the trauma sites, Heinemann replaces old memories with new ones, giving him a chance to invent a new relationship with the past and craft a coherent narrative that resonates with his evolving understanding of the conflict decades after its end.

The construction of a new narrative of the war that seeks to make meaningful the confusing and traumatic experiences that often defy such meaning is what physical movement accomplishes for Heinemann. Although travelling back to sites of trauma resists victimization and challenges passivity because it allows veterans to take tangible steps towards recovery and healing, it is important to note that movement is not a one-size-fits-all approach to trauma healing. Movement can also be a source of re-traumatization and, therefore, should be approached with caution and sensitivity. To address the specific needs of traumatized veterans, it is

crucial to tailor movement interventions to their specific needs and sensitivities. As long as the concept of returning to trauma sites in psychotherapy continues to gain recognition for its potential benefits in addressing and healing from traumatic experiences and as long as there is still a cultural fixation with the Vietnam War, more studies should seek to explore both American and Vietnamese experiences of returns, and the ongoing reconciliation projects.

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