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The Traumatic Effects of War on Women in Alexievich's *The Unwomanly Face of War*

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Abstract

This interdisciplinary study discusses Svetlana Alexievich's *The Unwomanly Face of War*, a literary work that focuses on the history of World War Two from the perspective of female soldiers of the Soviet Union. The women are veteran soldiers, a part of war history who continue their lives after the war and who suffer various mental disorders as a result of the war. These mental disorders are not only the aftereffects of the war, but also the consequences of political and social taboos of the Soviet Union. We analyze the women's testimonies as they pertain to Cathy Caruth's trauma theory. By analyzing trauma theory as it applies to the female soldiers, we see that if the society were to treat the female soldiers as heroines, to treat them with the same respect with which male soldiers are treated, the women would suffer fewer psychological disorders, but unfortunately, many of them suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorders (PTSD). Trauma theory draws on psychoanalysis to establish a connection between the characters in the novels and real-life people, allowing a consideration of each character as a more well-rounded and in-depth individual, improving the studies of both literature and psychology.

Keywords War, Trauma Studies in Literary Theories, Women, Female Veterans, Cathy Caruth

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1. Introduction

The Unwomanly Face of War is a collection of reports and monologues of female Soviet soldiers in the Second World War. The book is an impressive testimony of the female soldiers. The writer makes a connection to the soldiers forty years after the war and tries to talk about their memories of the war. Because of the devastating losses suffered by the Soviet Union in the Second World War, the Soviets were forced to allow women into their armed forces. Despite these women's contributions to the war effort, the postwar Soviet Union afforded them little credit for their participation. Rather, the Soviets attempted to expunge them from the histories, ashamed, perhaps, of having allowed women to fight for them. As a result of this historical editing, no documentation of female soldiers was to be found until the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and in some cases, many years after that. Because of the terrible circumstances of the female soldiers in the war and after that they suffer from psychological disorders.

The main focus of the research is the mental disorders of the female soldiers based on Svetlana Alexievich's reports in *The Unwomanly Face of War*. The role of the society in fostering these disorders is undeniable. The research examines the novel with relation to Caruth's trauma theory. The new perspective on war and female veterans and their mental disorders, is a new way of considering individuals who are mostly omitted from war history. We discuss some of the characters of the novel and how some aspects of the trauma theory apply to their cases. This perspective is also a novel way of looking at war. Reports often cite the hidden truth of war. "This is conceptualization of war as a daily/nightly experience" (Huang 2005: 24). This research is an attempt to uncover the hidden truths of war trauma.

Alexievich collects many of these reports in her book, and each report is a new page of the hidden history of the Soviet Union. "Diaries from the Second World War carry special weight for historians" (Timms 2015: 2). Some of them won't share any information with her. Others feel sick when they talk to her. Some of them hug her and treat her as their own daughter. She experiences different reactions from the soldiers and each of them is a vital document of the war for the writer and the reader. Female soldiers' reports about the war are not the same as those found in most war books. The soldiers speak of their womanly wishes and attitudes toward the war. They do not speak about a great victory and governments and war instruments. They speak about their appearances as young girls, when they were worried about their beauty and their bodies, about love and marriage. We do not see any traces of heroism in the women. They are all just victims of the war, women from ordinary families who went to the war filled with patriotism and returned home filled with regret. They do not even mention winning the war or the violence of their enemy. They speak about the violence of the Soviet army, about rape and blood. In some of the reports the reader cannot sense anything except the smell of blood. And in some reports the reader feels that the soldiers' depiction of war is a new testimony that she has never before heard.

Alexievich's *The Unwomanly Face of War* is a powerful manifesto criticizing

the official history of World War II in the Soviet Union. Violence against the female soldiers was manifest in law in the Soviet Union after the war and "it institutes itself as law and creates new legal norms and new prescriptive standards" (Felman 1995: 17). She does not write about the commanders and leaders of the war- rather she tries to write history through the eyes of female soldiers and write about the violence of the society against them. It is a different history in which the protagonists of the novel are female veterans who have no place in their own society. Those women who participated in the war were no longer accepted even by their own families. A history which focuses on the travails of female soldiers is notable, not least because most students of the history of war read about battles and territories, giving little consideration to the women who fought in the war. The study of this overlooked facet of history makes the book a significant work in both war literature and history.

Forty years after the war, Alexievich finally gives a voice to the silent female soldiers. She lets them speak about their emotions and all their feelings and lets the emotions write the history. But an open question regarding this history remains: are the witnesses reliable or not? How can we trust some traumatized veterans' testimony of war? There are "strict and unmovable boundaries between literary genres and historical truths" (Michelis 2014: 64). The writer's mind is full of pictures of war. She wants to find the reality of war in women's descriptions. She needs the feminine tone of war. The writer writes the novel forty years after the war, but the women speak like people who are experiencing the memory at the very moment they speak of it. The novel presents many women who were firsthand witnesses to the war. They speak about their personal diaries in the war, as soldiers, nurses, etc. They return home traumatized and in pain, but no one accepts them because of their gender, because they are women.

Female soldiers were present in the war scene, but as most of the witnesses are traumatized, how is it possible to trust them? And if they are not reliable, where can the true history be found? What is the reality of war? The war that these women speak about is vastly different from the history of war and victory that we read in most of the history books. Their history rejects heroes of war. In *The Unwomanly Face of War* our heroines are little girls who were omitted from annals of war history. In the following parts we analyze some of the mental disorders of the female soldiers.

2. The Significance of Study

This research is an interdisciplinary work and in fact, "comparative literature is inter-linguistic, intercultural and interdisciplinary. The essence of comparative literature lies in this prefix "inter-", or "between", which means interaction with another" (Anushiravani 2023: XVII). While war stories are common in literature, *The Unwomanly Face of War* is distinct from other such works in several ways, and as such it deserves to be approached in a unique way. First, very few works exist which focus on the aftereffects of war on female veterans from a completely

feminine viewpoint, with *The Unwomanly Face of War* being a notable exception in this regard. Second, the stories recounted are presented as part of oral history rather than as a summary or analysis which would necessarily have been filtered through the lens of the author's sensibilities. This faithful recounting of an oral history creates a sense of personal connection between the reader and the women who suffered through the war, emphasizing the very human and personal effects of the trauma they suffered from. The distinctive blend between the immediacy of an oral history and the detached neutrality of an observer provides a platform or the application of trauma theory, allowing it to be applied in a direct way to the experiences of the women. This interdisciplinary melding between the fields of literature and psychology provides a fresh new perspective on Alexivich's work.

3. Objectives of the Study

This research has multiple objectives. First, it seeks to highlight the differences in how society treats female soldiers compared to male soldiers. Additionally, it aims to examine the manifestations of trauma depicted in Alexievich's *The Unwomanly Face of War* using Cathy Caruth's trauma theory. By applying an interdisciplinary approach that combines academic trauma theory with literary analysis, the research aims to offer a deeper, richer understanding of depictions of trauma in literature. Fulfilling these goals will bridge the gap between scientific definitions of trauma and creative representations of trauma's impact in Alexievich's work while at the same time illuminating the wider connections between literary studies and trauma studies as interconnected fields.

4. Research Questions

1- What traumatic effects does war inflict on the female characters in *The Unwomanly Face of War*?

2- What is the trauma narrative, and how is it expressed in *The Unwomanly Face of War*?

3- What facets of the former Soviet Union's patriarchal society exacerbate the traumatic effects of war on the female veterans?

5. Review of Literature

The field of comparative literature has a long history, but it is not static. It is a living, dynamic, and practical field of study. Methodologically, the American comparative literature school benefits from interdisciplinary theoretical approaches. Among the interdisciplinary methodologies, trauma theory in literature, first presented by Cathy Caruth and then used by many subsequent scholars to analyze different literary works through the lens of psychology. Trauma theory is particularly relevant to the study of war literature. For instance, Mark Heberle in his *A Trauma Artist: Tim O'Brien and the Fiction of Vietnam* (2001), claims that in order to properly recover from trauma,

a victim has to preserve his or her ability to speak about his feelings of fear, shame, anger, and grief. He focuses on the narrative of the trauma of war and analyzes Tim O'Brien's traumatic experiences in the Vietnam war. Berdien Vrijders (2015) in Trauma Representation in Styron's *Sophie's Choice* and its Adaptation by Pakula, tries to examine the same elements in *Sophie's Choice*. Behzad Pourgharib et.al. in "Trauma Narrative and Healing: A Post-traumatic Exploration of Toni Morrison's *Home"* "emphasize on the intricate interplay between personal and historical traumas, the disruption of identity, and the possibilities for healing and resilience". (2024:57)

Some scholars who have applied trauma theory to *The Unwomanly Face of War*, like Liubov Kartashova in "The Deconstruction of Patriarchal War Narratives in Svetlana Alexievich's *The Unwomanly Face of War*," have posited that the ways in which the Soviet Union glorified war blended with their unique concept of womanhood to first lead to women's active participation in World War II and then later demanded the silencing of their war experiences.

Danijela Lugaric Vukas, in "Witnessing the Unspeakable: On Testimony and Trauma in Svetlana Alexievich´s *The War's Unwomanly Face* and Zinky Boys" places emphasis on the ideas of witness and testimony in literary works and explores the victims of the war as female veterans from this vantage point. The focus of the article is on traumatic problems related to gender. Evgeniya Kuznetsova, in "Trauma in Games: Narrativizing Denied Agency, Ludonarrative Dissonance and Empathy Play", studies narrative trauma in the case of video games and tries to compare *The Unwomanly Face of War* with some video games and considers Alexivich's work as a narrative trauma.

6. Theoretical Framework and Methodology

In her *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, and History* (1996), Cathy Caruth analyzes literary works which focus on psychological trauma, especially post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and analyzes the impact of traumatic experiences, focusing on the unknown but omnipresent voice of suffering and on memory as the cause of the repetition of suffering. In the present study, the researcher will use this same methodology. Traumatic effects cause suffering, psychological pain, and disorder in survivors, and literature reflects real-life experiences in that some characters are able to overcome the traumatic effects of war to some extent and others fail to do so. An understanding of human (social, cultural, political systems) and realities and discourse (narratives, literary and cultural representations) (Islam 2024:66) is one of the main features of these types of researches. The traumatic effects of war on women are different from those on men, and the present research focuses on the unique characteristics of such traumas specific to women.

6.1. Trauma Theory

Trauma is a complicated concept. It has at its heart an occurrence that took place in reality. However, not all of the "reality of the reality" remains accessible to the victim

of trauma. The story of trauma is one of delayed impact shocking and unexpected realities rising to the surface long after the incident itself has passed. For instance, in the case of an accident, the symptoms of the shock may manifest in the survivor several weeks after the accident. Trauma tends to recur as the victim will often repeatedly relapse while recalling pain. This recurrence of trauma is one of the most important parts of Freud's trauma theory. According to Freud, most adult traumas are the result of childhood ones. Freud sometimes relegates such traumatic memories to the realm of fantasy, considering certain memories as either misunderstood or entirely imagined.

Caruth's interpretation fills in many of the gaps in Freud's theory, but it also criticizes it. Caruth declares, "trauma involves intense personal suffering, but it also involves the recognition of realities that most of us have not begun to face" (1996: VII). A traumatized person is like a new human being whose experiences have been built upon the trauma itself. According to Caruth's version of trauma and literature theory, the historical, social and cultural circumstances of the victim are important factors in the development of this new self. It could be said that she wants to change the definition of trauma as a very general phenomenon and break the taboos surrounding the acceptance of previous trauma theories by injecting the crucial role of history and the role of the witness into the theory.

Caruth's main concern in trauma theory is survival and she refers to her personal history as an "enigma of survival". She notes that the complex, nearly incomprehensible relationship between destructiveness and survival is a traumatic experience itself. In other words, traumatic experience is a name given to this relationship. Once the "enigmatic" nature of this relationship is realized only then might the observer appreciate the incomprehensibility of catastrophic experience as well. The heart of this human experience is unknown and indecipherable to the survivor. In her *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, and History* (1996), Caruth analyzes literary works from the perspective of psychological traumas. This methodology will be used by the researcher in the present article. "The study of psychological trauma must constantly contend with this tendency to discredit the victim or to render her invisible" (Herman 1997: 5)

In Caruth's works, history, international history, the historical situation of the victim and the question of history are each basic element of her theory. The survivor of trauma has at once encountered death and survived it. Not only the death of others but also the survival itself and escaping death that result in flashbacks and repetition. If we consider history to be the history of trauma, it then follows that it is the survivor's eternal striving to understand his/ her own survival.

7. Discussion

7.1. Trauma and Silence

Speaking about a traumatic situation is a very important part of the healing process of a survivor. Most women are silent because of the constant pressure of culture and society throughout their life. War is not an exception since "Everything we know about war we know is through 'a man's voice.' We are all captives of 'men's' notions and 'men's' sense of war. 'Men's' words. Women are silent" (Alexiech 2017:10). Because of women's silence, we do not know the reality of many aspects of their lives. War is just one of those realities. If women do not break their silence their silence will cause emptiness, hate, death, and alienation in them as survivors. In addition, it is critical to know the reality from women's
Perspective. After all, the world is not just a man's world. In this novel we see that moral obligations, at least those imposed by the society, do not allow women the ability to speak about their experiences. One of the survivor's said "I got married right after the war. I hid behind my husband. Behind the humdrum, behind baby diapers. I wanted to hide. My mother also begged: Be quiet! Be quiet! Don't tell.' I fulfilled my duty to the Motherland, but it makes me sad that I was there" (Alexiech 2017: 12). She went to war to protect her country and people, but after the war it was decided that the healing of those similar to her was to come through the application of ethical convictions rather than medical/psychological intervention.
Female soldiers are heroines but their families hide them and it causes the sufferings too.
Cultural, social and spiritual paradigms that do not let women talk and convey them too for it. If they could express the experiences and did not use silence as a strategy of self- preservation, they would be more successful in the process of curing the trauma. They even refrain from fully revealing themselves to anyone, anyone at all and self repression and denial are elements of silence in traumatic situations. In the other cases, some survivors do not want to talk about the traumatic circumstances of war because they believe if they speak about them, they will remember every detail and it will take them back to the trauma. Consequently, they use the strategy of self-preservation and denial, namely, they prefer to remain silent.

A woman (a pilot) says to Alexievich "I can't…I don't want to remember" (Alexiech 2017: 13), the other survivors says "No, it's like a terrible dream…I can't! I won't!" or "I don't want to remember! I don't want to! It took me so long to forget…" 132); some survivors want to escape from themselves by remaining silent. These women are good examples, they refuse to participate in Alexievich's interviews because they do not want to remember their terrible trauma. But they do not know that this dead silence makes them ill, either psychosomatically or psychologically. This silence belongs to the negative sphere within the psychoanalytic framework, and it would be beneficial for them to share their memories.

Alexievich says some of the female victims "cry a lot. They shout. Swallow heart pills
after I am gone. Call an ambulance. But even so they beg me: "Come. Be sure to

come. We've been silent so long. Forty years…" (18). These women want to break the silence. They are aware that the sophisticated and complicated structure of society does not help them anymore and they have to break its conventions. They want to find a way to share their trauma, they were silent for over forty years. They have developed psychosomatic symptoms and identified the root of their pain: silence. Therefore, they speak about every buried, hidden incident and occurrence of the war. Some of the survivors are silent because they do not know how to talk about their feelings. They are mentally frozen, like a survivor who says to Alexievich "It was hard…To kill is hard…To kill is more terrible than to die…I've taught history all my life…And I never knew how to tell about that…In what words" (34). She knows, she should speak about her history, the traumatic shock she experienced in the war, but she cannot. She is a survivor who killed many people in the war, but encountering the death of the other is more vexing than encountering her own death. She cannot talk about it and it causes her mental problems. She is a witness to war, but she is under the pressure of psychological and moral obligations. She is a vulnerable female character who is in the process of masochistic obviation.

A well-known journalist, Vera Tkachenko is the first one who wrote about female soldiers in the former Soviet Union and she caused the attention to be focused on the frontline women, who "have remained single, have not arranged their lives, and still have nowhere to live" (117). They live in dormitories. The journalist makes the world a better place for the women veterans after three decades and the government gives them each an individual apartment. However, there are still some survivors who lead a secluded life and do not want to say anything about their war experiences.

For example, one of these veterans even tore up all her certifications of war and does not talk to

anyone and tries to make herself unnoticed and disconnected from every related situation in order to have a better life. She confesses in tears in the answer to the question "'Why did you tear them up?' She wept: And who would have married me'" (117)? The society and culture is the reason for self repression and denial in the face of the suffering of the survivor. There are many similar survivors in the book such as the an unidentified one who said: after the war I do not know anything other than war. I wanted to take it away, so I changed my uniform and buttons, then put on shoes and address, but when I see myself in the mirror, my image was not recognizable to me. I cried:

There was no one I could tell that I had been wounded, that I had a concussion. Try

telling it, and who will give you a job, then who will marry you? We were silent as fish.

We never acknowledged to anybody that we had been at the front. We just kept in touch

among ourselves, wrote letters. It was later that they began to honor us, thirty

years

later…to invite us to meetings…But back then we hid, we didn't even wear our medals.

Men wore them, but not women. Men were victors, heroes, wooers, the war was theirs,

but we were looked at with quite different eyes…I'll tell you, they robbed us of the

victory. They quietly exchanged it for ordinary women's happiness. Men didn't share the

victory with us. It was painful…Incomprehensible. (128)

Traditionally, in the former Soviet Union society, it was inappropriate for women to fight in the war. However, they were in the war, they fought and were wounded, but the society did not recognize them as victors, rather, they were losers of the war because of their gender. Everything is controlled by men and they are victors. Culture is the single most important factor in determining the reaction of female soldiers to their trauma. They war traumatized because according to ICD-10's definition of trauma they were in "*an event outside the range of human experience*" . But after the war they were thrust in other traumatic set of circumstances by the society made for them; they are dual victims: both victims of the war and the society. Not only does the society fail to heal or accept their traumatized personalities, but it also seeks to erase them, leaving them in a doubly traumatic situation.

In the past, trauma studies were mostly the province of male researchers and analysts, but

a great deal of the trauma suffered in war is, in fact, suffered by women, and it can be difficult for male researchers to understand the extent of the trauma suffered by women- first, because they are not women themselves, and second, because these women, having often suffered at the hands of men, may find it difficult to share their stories with men. As a result, a female survivor finds herself in a fight against her past and will sometimes suffer traumatophobia. As one unnamed character from *The Unwomanly Face of War* says: "I can't say anything to you, I can only weep" (130). The shame of being a female soldier in a society that believed women should not serve in the military pressured her to bury her story, preventing her from expressing her feelings. The concept of selfhood is influenced by culture and here the culture itself increases the severity of the trauma for the survivors of the war. While the war itself was traumatic, the war's aftermath only makes the trauma worse.

The isolation of these survivors could be difficult to bear, and women coped with it in

different ways. In some cases, they used silence as a weapon. Olga Yakovlevna Omelchenko, one of these survivors, wore an army uniform and army beret on Victory Day. She was "Tall, strong. She did not talk and did not weep. She was silent all the time, but this was some sort of special silence, which implied more than

could be said, more than words. It was as if she talked to herself all the time. She no longer needed anybody (149). Omelchenko was a female soldier, but she knew that no words would cause society to accept her as such, so she stood in stoic resistance, her army uniform and her silence an armor against their condemnation. This silence evokes her rigid personality and her acceptance of herself as a
female soldier for the rest of her life.

7.2. Traumatic Dreams and Flashbacks

A small woman sitting on the armchair says, "No, no, I won't. Go back there again? I can't…To this day I can't watch war movies. I was very young then. I dreamed and grew, grew and dreamed. And then the war. I even feel sorry for you…I know what I'm talking about…Do you really want to know that" (37)? Although the war was ended forty years ago, she has not forgotten the trauma of it. Every element of her life reminds her of the war. She cannot watch war movies. Watching them sends her mind back in time to memories she can't bear. Her life has become a never ending nightmare. Every night she relives her experiences as she sleeps, waking to the raw horror of it, never able to fully comprehend the entirety of the shocking experience. Like other survivors of war, she remembers "acts of war and [spends] a lifetime thinking about the war, representing the common sense of postwar" (Mori 2017: 114) victims. She feels guilty. She cannot talk about war anymore.

All these elements are difficult for the conscious mind to process, so they return, triggered by outside forces to reenter the mind and irritate the victim. Caruth writes that the victim does not want to experience these dreams and flashbacks, that they are caused by the mind's inability to find a way to escape from the process of the inevitable and recurring memories.

> There are "reluctant killers who nonetheless are willing to kill for a just cause" (Mcguire
> 2008: 24); in *Unwomanly Face of War* a woman says "I decided to shoot. I decided, and suddenly a thought flashed through my mind: he's a human being; he may be an enemy, but he's a human being and my hands began to tremble, I started trembling all over, I got chills. Some sort of fear…That feeling sometimes comes back to me in dreams even now" (41). Years ago she was in a very difficult circumstance. She remembers it now: the trembling, the guilt of not being able to bring herself to kill the enemy. Now, forty years later, she still sees him in her nightmares. These flashbacks are the result of the "*experience of waking from it*" because in each nightmare the victim wakes up suffering anew. Though the events and memories are part of a dream, the suffering is very real, and the trauma returns again and again.
>
> Klavdia Grigoryevna Krokhina was a sergeant and then sniper in the war. She says after
> the war:
>
> As soon as the blasting began it was always during the night for some reason I instantly jumped out of the bed and grabbed my coat first thing and ran, I had

> to
> run somewhere quickly. Mama would catch me, press me to her, and talk to me:
> 'Wake up, wake up. The war is over. You're home.' I would come to my senses at
> her words: 'I'm your mama. Mama…' She spoke softly. Softly…Loud talk frightened me... (43).

Krokhina lives in war even after the war. During the war, they had had to keep moving, and there had been no time for thinking. There is never enough time for thinking in war. Every night she relives the war in her nightmares. She cannot always recognize the boundary between reality and the dream. She fears loud voices. Her mind does not have the ability to understand the situation. She wakes up from the same dream every night and she cannot truly comprehend the events she's seen. This is not a pleasurable dream, a reflection of desires as posited by Freud. These dreams demonstrate the gaps of Freud's theory and are the evidence to support Caruth's assumptions on trauma and dreams.

"Yes…I can't forget" (45). "I can't forget…O- oh…How can I forget it?" (47) These are the common refrains uttered by many of the female veterans interviewed in Alexievich's chronicles of war. They cannot forget. No matter how they wish it, they are not capable of such an act. Their minds are traumatized and cannot even recognize reality. But we should add that the repetition of dreams and flashbacks is not the same in all victims. Their responses differ based on the exact traumatic experiences they suffered, and they are different from normal neuroses as well.

Olga Vasilyevna is another female soldier who talks to Alexievich about war and her
problems after the war. She even discusses some of the problems suffered by her friends and
their reactions toward the war. Alexievich asks:

> Would you like to forget the war?
> Forget? Forget… Olga Vasilyevna repeats my question. We're unable to forget it. It's not in our power. And I'd like to forget. I want to… Olga Vasilyevna utters slowly, almost in a whisper. I want to live at least one day without the war. Without our
> memory of it…At least one day… (118).

Even after forty years, Vasilyevna cannot be free from thoughts of the war. It is everywhere- in her dreams and in her waking life. She sometimes strives to bury it, but she cannot. Similar to Krokhina, she is not able to forget the war. She lives with its flashbacks and she is not their only victim.

Zinaida Vasilyevna, another woman who was in the war, says: "I cannot forget the war and dead bodies… before the war I wanted to be a doctor, but after the war I could not imagine any more death and human suffering." Even after forty years", she

says: "As soon as I close my eyes I see, we go some field, just after a battle, looking for the wounded. The field is trampled all over. I come upon two dead men a young soldier of ours and a young German. Lying in young wheat and looking into the sky. No signs of death on them. I still remember those eyes…" (172). Due to these flashbacks, Zinaida Vasilyevna could not return to her plans for her life which she had set before the war. Her traumatized mind is unable to see the reality of her life and cannot process the end of the war. The events of the war loop constantly in her mind, robbing her of her pre-war dreams and plans.

7.3. History and Latency

In some cases, the witness has never seen the war herself, but she is involved through the vehicles of the testimony of others. In *The Unwomanly Face of War* Alexievich writes, "the war was remembered all the time: at school and at home, at weddings and christenings, at celebrations and wakes. Even in children's conversations")8). She adds, "we didn't know a world without war; the world of war was the only one familiar to us, and the people of war were the only people we knew. Even now I don't know any other

world and any other people. Did they ever exist?" (Alexievich 2017: 9). The characters of the novel, the writer says, are real characters and in their real lives they have never experienced a world without war. Although they have not seen war themselves, they have heard a great deal about it, and they speak of it often. They do not know what war is, but their lives have been inextricably linked with it from childhood. "It refers to memories of memories, second- generation survivors' memories of their parents' recollections of their traumatic experience" (Diedrich 2014: 3). Therefore, the trauma of the war will manifest itself even in the lives of those who have not experienced it directly.

Lasting effects from the war control the lives of the people in a multitude of ways. The lives of the characters in this novel are inextricably intertwined with the war. The characters prepare for the war as children; they go to the war as young adults, and for the rest of their lives most of them endure dissociative disorders. War surrounds children at all times: at school, in the village, in the home, everywhere. "In the school library half of the books were about the war. The same with the village library, and in the nearby town, where my father often drove to get books" (9). These children are primed for the war, but which war? They are only fourteen- or fifteen-year-old girls, but they are ready for the war. The lives of these victims, as well as their encounters with death, are directed from the start by historical events. They are survivors of history, the very history which brought them face to face with death and which also subsequently granted them survival itself. And it is not a personal history, it is a collective history, the history of their people.

Alexievich says, "I write not about war, but about human beings in war. I write not the history of a war, but the history of feelings" (15). The writer wants to uncover the human psyche in war. How does the trauma of war affect the human

psyche? When the life lived was one of blood and dead bodies? The writer goes a step further than others, describing the traumatic process of human history. "We still live in history, not in the cosmos" (18). This is in accordance with Caruth's idea that trauma is repeated in another time and another place. Both writers speak of trauma as a process- as a history, a repetition. Characters live in the time of war, but their trauma repeats itself in other times and places.

7.4. Concept of Witnessing the Trauma and The Survivor's Mission

Female veterans witnessed death of others while they survived. Their stories are different from the male veterans' testimony of war. Alexievich believes "'Women's' war has its own colors, its own smells, its own lighting, and its own range of feelings. Its own words. There are no heroes and incredible feats, there are simply people who are busy doing in humanly human things" (Alexievich 2017: 10). In contrast to men, women's testimonies do not include any great victory, they mostly speak about their feelings with womanly words. According to Caruth the survivor is not present in her traumatic event, so survivors' testimonies are not reliable. They suffer from "inhumanly, human things" that they encountered in war. They harbor a sense of guilt as survivors, as persons who killed the other for their own survival. It pains them until the end of their lives. They cannot fully recognize the depth of the trauma. Given this, even their testimony about it is more rightfully considered a reaction to the circumstances in which they found themselves, circumstances they did not fully understand. "Representation of trauma in any direct sense necessarily involves a misrepresentation" (Adams 2012: 33).

Female soldiers are not heroines in the eyes of the society and it compels the female veterans to adapt themselves to the "identity to a surrounding situation threatens the notion that spiritual *value* is the primary incentive for human conduct" (Langer 1991: 162). We never hear anything about martyrdom and heroism from the female soldiers, because they do not consider their actions as holy actions, nor their dead friends as martyrs. Their witnesses are under the influence of the society. They protect their country and people, but no one even accept their stories about the protection so they prefer to adapt themselves with society and forget the instinct of the war and their action. They forget that they went to war because of their country and people and consider themselves nothing more than an unusable dot on the war. They never speak about the values that sent them to the war. The society believes those values belong to male soldiers so these females do not have such values and after a while the female

soldiers accept that they did not follow the values unconsciously.

There is a nameless woman in the novel who wants to speak about war, her husband taught her the way that she should share her testimony "without tears and women's trifles" (18). Her husband "studied *The History of the Great Patriotic War* with her all last night. He was afraid for her. And now he's worried she won't remember right. Not the way she should" (18). The woman does not even have the

choice to share her testimony because of her gender because her husband does not accept her testimony; he believes she should follow the way of the war history books in her testimony and it is not important what she saw in the war. This is time for her testimony and speech, but she does not speak about the reality of what she saw; the reality that was hidden by her husband behind books on the history of war. For "soldiers it is the severing force of traumatic shocks to memory and recollection that incapacitates narrative form" (Booth 2015: 155).

Another unnamed female character believes, "our memory is far from an ideal instrument" (19). According to her, her memory is not reliable for the war testimony. She believes that what she went through was not just a war, it was her youth. Even forty years after the end of the war, she still conceives of herself as being in the war. She has never forgotten the war and its memories, but she believes she is an unreliable narrator.

There is the other testimony again from the other nameless veteran who speaks about the

field in which nothing grew after the war for a long time. She says: "there was a battle here, it went on for two days…The dead lay next to each other like sheaves. Like railroad ties. The Germans' and ours. After rain they all had tear-stained faces. Our whole village spent a month burying them. How can I forget that field" (21)? This testimony is about a village, all the people of which were victims of the war, most of them are dead, and she was there at the time of the war. She cannot forget the occurrence, but is she a reliable witness? Regarding that traumatic episode, she cannot recall all the details and all aspects of the event. She just speaks about many dead people. Maybe she will be able to recall the details when her traumatized memory becomes active, but in an ideal situation, she would not remember anything more. In addition, she has never forgotten the trauma because of her sense of guilt.

The writer was under pressure of censorship and they believe *The Unwomanly Face of War* is a collection of women's testimony of war and would prevent others from participating in war. They add, "You humiliate women with a primitive naturalism. Heroic women. You dethrone them. You make them into ordinary women, females. But our women are saints" (26). They did not allow her to speak about the reality of the lives of women veterans. The writer herself is a woman who wants to speak about the reality of war and due to this she speaks with the veteran women. But society does not accept her work forty years after the war. She is a woman and women should be silent in the society. They believe *The Unwomanly Face of War* is "a lie! This is slander against our soldiers, who liberated half of Europe. Against our partisans. Against our heroic people. We don't need your little history; we need the big history. The history of the Victory. You don't love our heroes! You don't love our great ideas. The ideas of Marx and Lenin" (29).

Alexievich was not in the war herself, but she tries to gather testimonies of those who participated in the war and then finds the reality of it. But the culture and

its values do not want to talk about those realities. They want to hide the women and write their own testimonies. But what happened to the women's testimonies? The mission that remains is to provide the testimony of a survivor, but women veteran cannot because they are women and the society does not have any place for their voices. The other woman says, I came back to my village from Berlin with two Medals of Honor. But my mother "my mother got me up early, while everybody was asleep: "Daughter dear, I've prepared a bundle for you. Go away…Go away…You have two younger sisters growing up. Who will marry them? Everybody knows you spent four years at the front, with men…" (31).

This is another sad testimony of war from another woman veteran. She can convince herself of the traumatic nature of the war, but she cannot accept being traumatized by her family after the war. She does not speak about war. She speaks about her mother, her society. As for the female soldiers, they are more traumatized than both the society in which they live and the dead bodies they see. She is not here for testify about the war. Her problem is her family. The situation makes her traumatized for the rest of her life.

The other veteran says "I was a machine gunner. I killed so many… For a long time after the war I was afraid to have children. I gave birth to a child when I calmed down. Seven years later… (32). She is a witness to many dead bodies. She was not only a witness, but she killed a lot of them also. The sense of guilt does not let her bring a child in to the world. Because a mother gives birth to a child, how is it possible for her to kill someone else at the same time? She is a killer. This sense of guilt is in tension with therapeutic values. And what does it mean to be alive after so many dead bodies? The survivor attempts to comprehend the situation by repetition and analyses.

The other nameless woman says I can only cry I cannot speak, "But there's no need to pity us. We're proud. Let them rewrite history ten times. With Stalin or without Stalin. But this remains—we were victorious! Not a word more (130). She is aware of censorship and she wants to testify as a witness of war, but she cannot. She is a victim of war a survivor with much pain. She is traumatized, but she cannot give testimony. She does not feel guilty and nor does the same thoughts and personality even after all problems and shocking situations she experienced. Alexievich feels, she is responsible to the veterans. She believes she is a witness, a witness to all of the veterans' suffering memories and emotions. She is witness to "war neuroses", war traumatized survivors, their wishes and unspeakable speeches. She tries to write every testimony about them and she did her mission very well. *The Unwomanly Face of War* itself is a great account of people who were vanished from the society for forty years. She starts to speak about the women without any position in the society. It shows her courage and its very strange to speak about such women after several years. But she is a reliable witness, because she was not in the war and due to this she is able to analyzes everything very well.

Alexievich believes concerning the women veterans that "most often it is already two persons this one and that one, the young one and the old one. The one in the war and the one after the war. Long after the war. The feeling that I am hearing two voices at the same time never leaves me… (149). These changes and different personalities after and before a war are very often present in the survivors of war. When they start to talk about their testimonies they can understand what happened to them. Sometimes the victim cannot understand it herself before talking to someone about her traumatized mind and all the disturbing events.

7.5. Psychosomatic Patients

Sometimes traumatic events cause psychosomatic symptoms in a survivor. Psychosomatic symptoms are physical responses engendered in the body by a traumatized mind, like sleep disturbances, various chronic pain syndromes, numbness, etc. An unnamed veteran woman related this story: She was in the war for three years and during those years she did not have any orgasms, any periods, or any womanly behavior and desires. She added: "When my future husband proposed to me…He said: 'The war's over. We're still alive.Let's get married.' I wanted to cry. To shout. To hit him! What? do you mean, married? Now? Look at me…." (13) She could not believe she was even a woman anymore. She was under the tremendous pressure of the war, and her body's reaction matched itself to her emotional state. Even the most important parts of her body did not work as they should.

A matron at a private hospital, Xenia Sergeevna Osadcheva is a victim of psychosomatic disorder. The war caused her to lose her beauty and womanly appearance. Her appearance changed so much that when she returned home her mother did not recognize her. She had to ask to be directed to her mother's home, and when she arrived, she said to her mother, "Let me stay here." But her mother replied, "We do not have any place for you. Go somewhere else." Osadcheva embraced her mother and said, "I am your daughter!" and cried until her mother eventually recognized her. Xenia Sergeevna lived with pain for her whole life. She no longer had a woman's face and she lived the rest of her life in suffering. Her traumatized mind caused not only pain in her body, but also a change in her appearance.

Maria Nesterovna Kuzmenko, a sergeant major in the war, says many women in the war were unable to find suitable dresses and were forced to wear men's uniforms. They felt disgusted by the act, as if robbed of their femininity, but after six months "We were so overworked we ceased to be women…We stopped having… The biological cycle got thrown off…See? Very frightening" (208)! and she came to believe that she would never be a woman again. The trauma she felt in her mind was reflected in her body, leaving her with physical changes which reinforced the trauma she felt.

In the words of another female veteran: "as soon as I begin telling this story, I get sick again. I'm talking, my insides turn to jelly, everything is shaking. I see it all again, I picture it: how the dead lie- their mouths are open, they were

shouting something and never finished shouting, their guts are ripped out" (324). She experiences psychosomatic disorders after the war. She is not able to speak about war, because she gets sick again and again each time she attempts to think about it. She has succumbed to the inescapable dangers of war.

8. Conclusion

According to *The Unwomanly Face of War,* the female soldiers of the Soviet Union endured many mental disorders after the Second World War, disorders from which they never fully recovered. This article analyzed some of the problems suffered by these soldiers, and we conclude that the war and the traumatic effects of war transformed the lives of female soldiers during and after the war. Society and family play a major role in the traumatization of these individuals. Society often expects female veterans to return to their normal lives in the home after a war, while male soldiers are encouraged to write heroic tales of war like the Odyssey. The respect granted to men for their efforts to defend their country should be extended to both sexes, but women's role in war typically remains buried in the drafts of history. They are treated as inferior and are less-respected because they are women.

Alexievich shows in this dark truth of Soviet society that it is because of their gender that the female veterans are not respected. She wants to inspire the mind of the reader to question who the true victors of the war are and who the heroines of the war might be. We are confronted by many mentally ill female soldiers. We recognize that they are victims of the war and we can conclude that if society's demands upon women were not so unrelentingly harsh, they could perhaps have a better life. In fact, these women are heroines, no less deserving of their admiration than the men they fought beside. They fought in the name of the fatherland and for their people. Why is it, we are encouraged to ask, that a female soldier should be so slighted that she is denied true healing? There are many heroines in our societies, but too often they bury their pasts because of their gender, as though males should be respected for their bravery, but brave females should be hidden as anomalies.

Thus, we can see that to understand the women in the story, we need to understand their stories. Likewise, we need to understand the society in which they live. The women have been treated like cogs in a war machine, used and then discarded when they become worn out. But they are not parts in a machine. To understand war, we have to understand the women's stories. And just as we have to understand society to understand the women, to fully understand their society, we have to understand the women. War and politics and society are all interconnected through literature, and literature acts as the spectacles which allow us to clearly see the relationships between them.

The days of isolated dogmatism in the study of literature are in the past. Literature is a reflection of human nature, and as such, it can grant its human readers a more thorough understanding of the background and feelings behind any human endeavor, including that of science. Literature has the ability to fill in the gaps in a

reader's understanding by allowing the reader to reflect on the reasons that the events in a story occur. By presenting new viewpoints and provoking new ideas, literature can open new doors in other fields of study. By its essence as a reflection of human nature, literature interacts with all other sciences, and it behooves scholars not to ignore its influence when studying other sciences, and likewise, for other sciences to consider their relationship to literature as well.

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