

“Tây Ninh Syndrome”: Re-examining Silences and Disguised Gendered Violence of Vietnam War in Kim Thúy’s Narratives

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Abstract

Like the “comfort women” of the Korean War, in the Vietnam-American War, there was the “con gái” (Em). A term lesser known, as in its essence, it means “daughter” in Vietnamese. The bearings of women were disguised and forgotten in the recounting of the partitioned Vietnam. A precedent for the emergent post-colonial warfare, Vietnam’s structural conflict ascertained its worst impact on women. Resulting in forced migration and the parlous journey expanded the plights and buried the relics of this violence on its way, while the rest was carried to the settlements. The term “strongbox” used for houses where men “shut their wives up...wound ropes” (Em, p. 12) situated itself in Mãn’s husband’s house in Montreal whose “fire door...was permanently closed, turning the kitchen into a strongbox” (Mãn, p. 29). Vietnamese-Canadian writer Kim Thúy’s novels *Mãn* and *Em* chronicle identities as “imperceptible, invisible” (Mãn, p. 17) re-centered and reperforming resistance against violence of both stasis and mobility through female narrators. While *Em*’s stasis strife with the reproductive violence of the herbicide war, *Mãn*, in continuous involuntary movement, sustains apathetic trauma response in all aspects of her social and emotional being. This violence is perpetrated on the intersections of gender and stateless identity within the borders of unrest. Through the critical and agential lenses of transnationalism and re-performance methodology, the study aims to uncover the forgotten violence and analyze silence in Kim Thúy’s narratives.

Keywords: Vietnam-American War, reproductive violence, forgotten violence, forced migration, post-colonial warfare