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**Pandora's Box**  
**Hope and the impacts of war**  
Patron, Marie Claire

*Published in:*  
Women and war

Published: 01/01/2017

*Document Version:*  
Peer reviewed version

*Licence:*  
Other

[Link to publication in Bond University research repository.](#)

*Recommended citation(APA):*  
Patron, M. C. (2017). Pandora's Box: Hope and the impacts of war. In M-C. Patron, R. Wildeboer, & A. Rokach (Eds.), *Women and war: Opening Pandora's Box - Intimate relationships in the shadow of traumatic experiences* (pp. 33-50). (The World of Psychology: Therapeutic, relational, teaching). Nova Science Publishers.

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*Chapter 3*

**PANDORA’S BOX:  
HOPE AND THE IMPACTS OF WAR**

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**ABSTRACT**

In an effort to unpack the convoluted themes that are inherent in the concepts of good and evil which were represented through Pandora’s Box, and to unravel the voluminous historical literature on WWII and the Vietnam War, this chapter will be presented in two parts. I shall provide a framework on which to situate the narratives of this book, predicated on a review of extant literature that has been put forward by philosophers and war historians. Firstly, Part 1, entitled *Pandora’s Box: Hope and Evil: Strange Bedfellows* features an abridged version of Hesiod’s account of the Myth of Pandora’s Box, considered to be the most prominent available. This section also contains a reflection on the philosophical perspectives articulated on the concepts of evil or despair, juxtaposed with hope and good that assist in underpinning the recurring themes emerging from our book.

In Part 2, *The Legacies of War*, in an attempt to demystify the socio-political and cultural decisions that led to WWII, and to situate them in the context of our book, I present an exposé in layman terms, of a brief history and the impacts of wars on generations of people who have suffered untold miseries and continue to do so today. The sequences of nefarious events and circumstances that have led to war will be included to provide

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perspective on the consequences that have ultimately provoked an indelible impact on the lives of countless individuals over many decades. As Co-Editor, Roni Wildeboer, the wife of a returned Vietnam Veteran, has devoted a considerable part of her chapter to the Vietnam War, I focus only briefly at the end of this chapter, on the problematic issues concerning the Vietnam War, in order to elucidate how the contentious debates surrounding this long, drawn out war fuelled outrage among the returned war Veterans and subsequently, their wives and families.

## **PREAMBLE**

The aftermath of war has far-reaching consequences that extend beyond tangible, visual, physical or geographical scars. It is hard to remain impassive before the poignant testimonies of the brave women authors of this book! We can no longer ignore the untold suffering some women have endured, during and subsequent to the many wars our world has witnessed. The indignities and torment many have experienced in their private hell, compounded by the psychosocial traumas that continue to define their existence, remain a mystery to most members of society for reasons these women are reticent to share. As the women involved attempt to piece together the shattered fragments of their life, the intergenerational transmission of the impacts of war becomes apparent as the focus shifts to their children and grandchildren, and dare we admit, to those who will never be born as a result of the injustices of war. It is irrefutable that the physical and psychological ravages of war leave their mark on those directly implicated. The tragic consequences of countless wars waged on foreign shores have had an enormous bearing on various groups of society and on the soldiers primarily, irrespective of whether they were conscripted, or, through some misguided sense of duty, felt obliged to enlist in wars that raged on the other side of the globe. Upon repatriation, the welfare of the Veterans is at times contingent on the welcome they receive, this factor considered a significant predictor of their mental health. The Vietnam War is a particular case in point. However, what of the silent majority of women and their families, whose perennial suffering leads to despair and sometimes suicide?

For decades now, women (wives, daughters and mothers) of Australian War Veterans in particular, have still not been recognized as a genuine casualty of war. They represent, bluntly speaking, unqualified collateral damage; they have not found peace and have not had the chance to heal psychologically; and some never will. These claims are abundantly supported by the women authors in this book who testify staunchly to the perennial, nefarious impacts of war on their

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lives. More emphatically, they have been denied a place in historical narratives compared to the significant documentation of the impacts of war on the males, the brave soldiers who fought for their country, many of whom have subsequently been diagnosed with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD thereafter) (Shoebridge, 2010). It must be pointed out, however, that in many cases, these women have been disinclined to participate in research, for very legitimate reasons.

## **PART 1. PANDORA'S BOX: HOPE AND EVIL: STRANGE BEDFELLOWS**

### **Pandora's Box – A Fitting Metaphor!**

As the courageous women involved in this book begin to divulge their deep, dark and shameful secrets, sharing their tragic and poignant testimonies with the world, one bears witness to a deluge of painful experiences, pent-up emotions withheld for far too long as they pour forth from Pandora's Box. These memories create a mosaic of unspeakable truths emerging from the depths of their souls, of deeds sometimes perpetrated from close quarters; old tapestries that are chaotically intertwined with pervasive accounts of trauma, suffering, humiliation and despair. Hope is their only ally; hope that they will earn the respect and understanding from those who would judge them. Hope that they will become more resilient, stoic and dare they believe, hope that they can rise above adversity to become victorious (See also Dolinska, 2008; Patron & Holden, 2015; Pennebaker, 1997; Poulos, 2012; Shoebridge, 2010). The benefits of this disclosure to the world can at the very least assist them to become stronger, knowing that they are no longer alone in their plight; the act of telling their story should help them cope a little better with their predicament as per the old adage *'a problem shared is a problem halved!'*

### **The Myth of Pandora's Box**

The myth of Pandora's Box is one of the most fascinating and descriptive tales of human behavior from ancient Greek Mythology and a fitting metaphor for the title of our book. Philosophers have been engaged in esoteric discussions about the enigmatic figure of hope (Geoghegan, 2008) and that of despair and evil since time immemorial, theorizing about their particular version of the Greek myth. Haramati (2010) purports that historically, the ancient Greeks viewed hope in a largely pessimistic light, as negative and harmful. Other philosophers were also cynical about Pandora and her 'Jar' of calamity, hardship and troubles or 'Pandora's Box' as Erasmus preferred to call it (Geoghegan, 2008). Geoghegan notes that some philosophers maintain that only 'hope' remained from Pandora's Jar of evils; hope juxtaposed in a bizarre co-habitation with evil. Geoghegan (p.26) points out that the story of Eve in Genesis corroborates the archaic New Eastern tradition that links the introduction of evil into the world with women! The similarities between the biblical story of Adam and Eve are plausible when one considers that both Eve and Pandora have sometimes been perceived in a rather misogynistic light, as perpetrators, harbingers of all evil on this world, and by Hesiod himself, it would appear (Allsop, 2013; Blundell, 1995; Pomeroy, 1994). Haramati (2010) suggests that hope is not simply an illusion because destiny is immutable, a fatalistic approach that is replicated in Shelley – *'worse than despair, worse than the bitterness of death, is hope,'* and in Nietzsche - *'Hope is the worst of all evils, for it prolongs the torment of man'* (2010 p.144).

On the other hand, Haramati (2010) presents findings by medical professionals whose research is predicated on incurable medical problems, suggesting that despair, as well as the search for hope, are part of the basic dynamics in situations of health and illness. Further, an important link was found to exist between hope and hopelessness and the phenomenon of posttraumatic growth, in which hope is born out of extreme horror. Her arguments are supported by Shiri et al.'s (2008) conclusions that individuals who have suffered severe trauma often experience a meaningful positive development after the trauma.

These assumptions are pertinent to the circumstances discussed in our book, even if not in all cases. As Shiri et al. write, the change, often spontaneous, can comprise an improved self-image, a deeper understanding of the self and enhanced personal relationships. Some of our women authors have testified through personal communication, to having become more resilient, especially through the therapeutic exercise of ethnographic writing. Haramati (2010) includes Searles's (1979) appraisal of the role of hope in the therapist–client relationship that applies closely to the positive effects of ethnographic writing:

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Feeling of hopefulness proceeds in pace with the working through of pro-intense feelings of disappointment, discouragement, despair, grief and infantile omnipotence-based frustration – rage. This is a maturational process, which *is never completed* (Searles, 1979, p. 502).

### **Hesiod's Account**

Distinct versions of the myth of Pandora's Box abound in literature. Let us briefly elaborate on the legend as it was initially conceived by Hesiod. Hesiod and Homer were the first great writers of Greek literature, famous for their Greek poems that are essentially instructive and moralizing stories. Philosophers refer to Hesiod's *Theogony and Works and Days* (West, 1988) as the most influential versions of the myth, from which our account is derived. Geoghegan's (2008) reflections on this myth have been employed in this chapter to decipher the lessons contained therein. These philosophical explorations will assist in our comprehension of the intricacies involved with the myth of Pandora's Box. He warns however, that attempting to give a précis of this myth is at best unsatisfactory, given its ambiguities and anomalies. For the purposes of this book, we shall nonetheless adopt a condensed version of Pandora's Box derived from his interpretations of Hesiod's account (2008, p. 25).

In this myth, only the gods and men exist, as human women were not yet created. Prometheus (whose name means Forethought or Foresight) and his brother Epimetheus (Afterthought or Hindsight) are grandsons of Gaea, (Mother Earth). Prometheus and his brother, the foolish Epimetheus, had been given the task of populating the earth with mankind and animals and distributing characteristics to them; but lacking foresight, Epimetheus had left few positive traits for mankind. It was left up to Prometheus to endow them with the civilizing arts, mathematics, science and medicine amongst others. The trickery of Prometheus, the Titan, (concerning a bogus gift of a slaughtered ox offering to the gods), results in the wrath of Zeus, the lord of the gods. Zeus unleashes his fury by withholding fire from humans until Prometheus steals it back from the gods and gives it to humans. Zeus's revenge is to send Pandora, the first human woman, to them as punishment.

The gods had endowed Pandora with beautifully evil gifts, according to Hesiod. They bestowed upon her feminine perfection, shape and beauty and she was taught the crafts. Hermes was ordered by Zeus to also give her the undesirable attributes of deceitfulness, stubbornness and curiosity. Pandora,

whose name in Greek means ‘the all-encompassing gift,’ was warned to never open the box. She was taken to Epimetheus, who, unable to resist her charms and beauty, allowed himself to be seduced by appearances and his own desires, and he subsequently married her. Self-absorbed, he did not foresee the implications of his actions as he had acted selfishly. His brother on the other hand, warned that hindsight was futile as hoping for the best was ignorant and impotent. Pandora, although not malicious, ultimately could not contain her curiosity and she opened the box, from whence spurted forth calamity, evil, turmoil and misery that the world has witnessed, leaving only hope behind. As the evil spirits gushed out of the box, Zeus allowed Pandora to shut the lid in time to prevent hope from escaping.

### Unraveling the Myth

Much ambiguity surrounds the myth of Pandora’s Box but the diverse interpretations are predicated on one fundamental distinction that divides the schools of Greek Philosophy – hope that is released from Pandora’s Box or that remains forever trapped. Based on his research of this myth, Geoghegan (2008 p. 28) suggests there are dark interpretations that can be derived from this act of closing the lid on hope, that are akin to despair – *‘Zeus’s punishment of humanity’ ... ‘the malign possibility that he intended hope to be inaccessible ... only irrevocably to be put beyond human use’ ... ‘the irremediable nature of the disaster’ where ‘no future redemption of man is forecast.’*

A diametrically contrasting view reveals that the predominant interpretation of hope in the jar was *‘an expression of the merciful aspect of Zeus. He wanted to punish but not annihilate humanity and therefore gave them the resources of hope to help them survive in the midst of adversity: even possibly flourish if suitably chastened and reformed’* (Geoghegan, 2008, p. 28).

There is a convincing argument embedded within Geoghegan’s (2008) reflections that strikes a chord for us in this book, acknowledging a Christianization of the story that focuses on the new status of hope in the New Testament. A leading commentator on Hesiod, West (1973) claimed *‘Hesiod ... means that hope remains among men as the one antidote to suffering’* (Geoghegan, 2008 p. 28). The act of closing the lid can thus be construed as an act of domestication and protection, not imprisonment or entrapment. Hope was being kept *‘safely close by as a perennial human resource’* (2008 p. 29). From a plethora of views available in the philosophical literature, whether the slant is

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pessimistic or optimistic, 'the enigmatic figure of hope' is open to interpretation – hope as the ultimate evil or the spirit of hope as a virtue.

### **A Confusing Legacy**

The fact remains, Hesiod has left us with a confusing legacy. Geoghegan (p. 27) argues Hesiod's purpose for the jar is the crucible for the juxtaposition of hope and evil, which makes it all the more puzzling. In our book, the allegory of Pandora's Box is plausible, as the dubious chemistry of women (hope) and war (despair or evil) co-exists in a visceral relationship, strange bed-fellows as it were, unraveled through the narratives of the women authors. More specifically for the women involved with the War Veterans, they are co-dependent; the unfortunate plight of these women would not exist without the psychologically damaged men who are the product of the wars in the first place. Given the ambiguity proposed by Geoghegan (2008) on the potential interpretations of the role of hope, we do not perceive this force as part of the punishment, '*a sadistic added twist of the knife on Zeus's part*' (2008, p. 27). That is to say that Zeus's intention in this scenario, knowing the human propensity for desire, was to allow humanity to '*keep this enervating presence close by in the jar*'; in so doing, humans continued to hope that things would improve only to be bitterly disappointed when they did not.

We also choose to reject Nietzsche's pessimistic viewpoint mentioned earlier, that '*hope ... is the greatest evil of all*' (Haramati, 2010, p. 144). In this version, Zeus gives man hope to torment him again and again; it is the most evil of evils because it prolongs man's torment.

### **A Positive Slant on Hope**

As dichotomous views exist on the concept of 'hope,' perceived both negatively and positively in accordance with the particular philosopher's stance on the subject, we have chosen where we stand. In Geoghegan's (2008) reflections on the myth of Pandora, we are provided with an interpretation that is deemed appropriate for this book. Hope, remaining in the jar represents an expression of the merciful side to Zeus, akin to the Christian belief of hope as a virtue derived from the classic text from Paul – '*And now abideth faith, hope and charity, these three.*' In this book, we choose to perceive 'hope' as a mitigating force instead of a cruel joke played on humanity because we reject the



pessimistic interpretation; we do not believe that it is just another evil in Pandora's Box; rather, it is a gift from the gods, a force more powerful than sickness, insanity and vice.

In *Women and War: Opening Pandora's Box*, a positive spirit of hope allows the women involved to regain their dignity through the telling of their story. We are not suggesting that through the revelation of their harrowing tales that all of our female authors will necessarily overcome adversity, or become victorious; we hope, rather, that through the therapeutic and cathartic process that this effective coping strategy offers, that the women can become more resilient, that the shackles that have bound them for so long to their suffering may loosen their hold on them, freeing them from a burden for too long carried alone (See also Shoebridge, 2010).

Hope provides them with the vision of a better world where understanding, tolerance and compassion become manifest as a result of the disclosure of traumatic events that have defined their lives, no longer trapped inside. Hope that those who would doubt their integrity, who would deny them a sense of justice, who would judge and criticize them for their loyalty to their spouses in the case of the War Veterans' wives, can see the light. Hope that those who were unable to share their stories, for very legitimate reasons, will find solace; that perhaps vicariously through the revelations disclosed in this edition, their yoke can be lifted and their burdens reduced in intensity. As we bring awareness of these powerful testimonies, we essentially help them carry their heavy load.

## **Lessons for Mankind**

The literature on this popular legend suggests that the motive behind the myth of Pandora's Box was to instruct mankind about the weaknesses of humans as well as explain the misfortunes that afflicted the human race, essentially explaining why evil exists in the world (Mythology, 2016). From this perspective, evil, in the context of this book, is synonymous with war and its manifold consequences, implying that Zeus's desire was to ensnare humanity, by giving them what they wanted in order to bring about their downfall. This version would be an appropriate metaphor for this book, if the moral of the story were that once evil has been unleashed it cannot be contained. This would not however, fit the themes of our book.

If we adopt, instead, the version of this myth where hope does escape from the box, hope can be perceived as a powerful force in spite of the evils of war. Epimetheus and Pandora allowed the spirit of hope to get out in a symbol of

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hope as the only good thing left for the world that Zeus had included in the box. An alternate approach for the redemption of man is applicable if hope remains in the box. Hope then represents a wondrous force where salvation, consolation and recovery for the unfortunate humans becomes possible; the only recourse for mankind to make their condition more tolerable.

An equally plausible interpretation is derived from a feministic point of view. Given the patriarchal world we live in, especially with the familiar and somewhat misogynistic, woman-blaming parable often adopted from the myth of Pandora's Box, Senior researcher at the Finnish Academy, Kaarina Kailo's (2007) goals consist in '*reclaiming gynocentric imaginaries with their implicit ecological economics and sustainable worldview, one that also honours women and nature*' (Kailo, 2007, p. 1). Kailo praises feminists today, who are making a difference through their engagement in politics and consciousness-raising. She calls them the '*transgressive women opening Pandora's Box, prying into patriarchal secrets and exposing the roots of inequities and inequalities*' (Kailo, 2007, p. 5) that make the world a precarious place to live in. The optimistic conclusion of her essay is worthy of noting:

It is not only possible to reconstruct the woman-friendly and ecologically sustainable imagined communities of the past, it may well be that without a radical change in our worldview, there is not much of a world left to defend. Patriarchy as institution and the master imaginary as its psychological order have let so many scourges out of its arsenals of violence and destruction that hope is indeed the only thing we now have left of a sustainable future (Kailo, 2007, p. 5).

The lessons that mankind needs to learn are complex and difficult to learn it would appear. Some philosophers interpret Pandora as a 'beautiful evil,' whose superficial image lures men like Epimetheus through her wiles. This interpretation is reminiscent of Mata Hari, the infamous German spy who lured men to their deaths and paid for her treason in France with her life, during WW1 by firing squad. As it is largely the male figureheads of nations who wage war against each other, like Epimetheus, where is the foresight to see beyond the decisions they have taken to defend their country, to satisfy avaricious appetites for power and vengeance? Whether it is deemed to be a 'good war' or an 'evil war,' do these Heads of State not realize the evils they have unleashed from Pandora's Box as they take instead of give, provoking countless wars where innocent bystanders, women and children become collateral damage? The current Syrian humanitarian disaster is living proof of the impacts of wars on

humans; of the rippling effect of war as European nations and other first world countries slam their doors shut on the tragic human sea of refugees; except perhaps ironically for Germany, thanks to their fearless Chancellor, Angela Merkel. Not since Nazi Germany with Hitler's maniacal persecution of the Jews and the massive destruction of human life, has mankind witnessed such evil perpetrated on a country's own people. Ethnic cleansing continues in all corners of the earth, yet the lessons are not learned.

Other moral lessons embedded within the myth of Pandora's Box demand that as human beings, we examine our conscience to see how we can change our lives, and indeed our world for the better. We, as individuals, and indeed as civilized societies, need to focus on self-discipline and self-control, especially when it comes to our haste to press the trigger when engaging in wars, or even figuratively. Evil emanates from a thirst for power, narcissism, ethnocentrism, greed and avarice and the need to control others. Like Pandora, who could not contain her curiosity and greed to examine what the box contained, first world nations need to stop and reflect and find diplomatic solutions to world problems. If, in the end, we have unleashed a series of unfortunate circumstances by our actions, Pandora's Box teaches us that there is still hope for redemption. There are ways of remedying a situation, no matter how dire, if we have the will to change and make things right. After all, if we give up on hope, we might as well check out!

Campbell (2016), psychologist, examines the similarities between Pandora and Cain, from the Bible, confirming the difficulty that humans have in learning from past mistakes, quoting George Santayana's warning that *'Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.'* With Pandora's Jar, it appears, *'curiosity killed the cat and the Greek golden age of innocence.'* Whilst attributing blame to Pandora for the mess she has left us in, a wise god did leave us hope, amongst death, pestilence and ravages of war. Pastor, as well as academic, Campbell cautions us that if we ignore the fact that we have hope, we will not access it when we most need it. We need to regard hope as a gift from the gods, accept it in lieu of dismissing the consequences of bad decisions and acts. In the case of Cain, who murdered his brother, Abel, God also left him a life-line, the Mark of Cain. Fearing retribution from others on earth, God explains to Cain that the mark is for his own protection. Similarly, Pandora's salvation lies in the last remaining force in the jar 'hope.'

## **The Significance of Hope**

Hope takes on special significance in our book. In *Women and War: Opening Pandora's Box*, 'hope' is the gift that was protected and safely kept to save, in this context, the women involved. Biliias (2010) defines hope as: '*Openness to the future, with the possibility of agency...*' claiming that '*... hope is fundamentally connected to goodness.*' The sense of agency allows us to feel in control of the things that happen around us, a feeling that we can influence events. This definition ultimately suits the parameters of the anthology of narratives provided by our authors because we suggest that the gift of hope can be offered to the women who have dared to confront their demons, sharing their stories with the world. In raising awareness of their plight, their condition may be taken more seriously and action can be taken on many levels. The various associations can offer physical assistance as well as coping strategies; and empathy and understanding can begin to heal the wounded souls of so many.

Ultimately we hope that these women can become empowered to change their lives for the better, in their own individual way. Realistically however, resilience, stoicism and victory cannot be guaranteed through the process of disclosure. It is gratifying, however, to note that with increasing awareness in research on the women committed to their returned Veterans, findings show that in lieu of being portrayed as 'victims,' '*the majority of narratives from these women ... offer very different stories – stories of coping, adjustment, surviving, defiance, resilience and strength, of refusing to remain ... the 'handbag'*' (Shoebridge, 2010, p. 3). The therapeutic and cathartic value attached to ethnographic writing is not always a panacea for all concerned unfortunately. There is much at stake but we have begun our journey, one that may take us on a circuitous route before reaching our destination, but we will get there, safely and soundly and hopefully healed in some measure.

## Conclusion

In this book, *Women and War: Opening Pandora's Box*, optimism is at the crux of our endeavors, in spite of the tragic stories that are unveiled. Hope rests at the culmination of the painful trajectory on which the brave female authors take us. At the nexus of their journeys, the damaging, abusive tales they recount are intercepted by the positive effect of ethnographic writing – achieved through the purifying outcome of telling their stories to the world. The therapeutic effects of relinquishing long held, burdensome secrets through writing are well

documented (Dolinska, 2008; Patron & Holden, 2015; Pennebaker, 1997; Poulos, 2008), auto-ethnographic accounts allowing authors to release their demons. Many female victims of psychological or emotional abuse suffering from the treatment they have experienced in destructive relationships with war Veterans, have succeeded in overcoming their adversity as they emerge triumphant, healed, resilient and victorious. This is an important coping strategy of Positive psychology.

Whilst the positive outcomes of baring one's soul are widely documented in literature, one cannot naively believe that the process will leave one unscathed. We cannot negate the potentially damaging consequences of the decision to disclose intimate secrets. For this reason, as a duty of care, we, the editors involved in this project, Mrs. Roni Wildeboer, Prof. Ami Rokach and myself have recommended that all contributing authors write their stories under the guidance of a counsellor or therapist who can monitor their psychological well-being as they progress along their journey. These health professionals can thus allay the fears these women may have as they divulge atrocities that can arise from their disclosure, especially if they have been diagnosed with PTSD, Secondary Traumatization or severe depression. These women naturally fear that the living Veteran, husband, partner, father, may retaliate as a result of the revelations. A chapter on Posttraumatic Relationship Syndrome (PTRS) is featured in this book where Prof. Rokach, a clinical psychologist, academician and prolific researcher, examines the sociopsychological predictors, the potential causes and the coping strategies for dealing with these conditions.

## **PART 2. THE LEGACIES OF WAR**

What has not changed over the centuries is the profaneness of war; the frustration of returning to a society preoccupied with mindless vicarious thrill seeking, enthralled by "reality" shows; the loneliness one feels even in the midst of a crowd; the terror of the unexpected sight or sound or smell; the rage so easily triggered; and the profound disquiet of the wounded soul (Cutter, 2013, p. 1).

### **Introduction**

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### *The Complex Histories of War*

From time immemorial, it has been impossible to fathom, at a glance, the intricacies that the concept of war conjures, as it represents a mine field, pun intended. At the risk of trivializing the complex histories of the wars featured in this book, in this chapter, I offer only précised insights, a brief overview into WWII from the perspectives of war historians, academics and military experts. The factual and documented events relating principally to WWII provide a mosaic, albeit cursory, on which to frame the testimonies of the female authors who have so generously contributed to our book. The series of events and circumstances that have led to war will be included to provide perspective on the consequences that have ultimately impacted on the lives of countless individuals over many decades.

I am no war historian, nor do I intend to pontificate on the rationale adopted by those who have perpetrated injustices in the name of God and country; rather I wish to articulate the views that the erudite circle has proffered over the years. The poignant narratives of the courageous women who have entrusted us, the editors, with their heart wrenching stories, speak for themselves. It is up to you, the reader, to remain dispassionate or be deeply moved and inspired; to pass judgment, or not, on the machinations of those who should be held accountable for the devastation of innumerable lives. On the other hand, with awareness comes compassion, tolerance, empathy and hope, always the hope that the victims portrayed in this edition will one day emerge victorious. There are no guarantees in life, except death. Yet we soldier on.

The literature on war that I have researched is derived from scholarly publications such as those recorded by the War Memorial in Canberra as well as other recognized reputable sources, articles and papers that expose the ideology, political rhetoric, propaganda and justification that led so many countries to join forces in WWII.

### **Was WWII Justified?**

World War II is a war that stands in stark contrast with other wars as its purpose was the liberation of oppressed nations, religious groups and displaced peoples. Was it however, an example of 'a just war' or a springboard for the justification of subsequent wars? No one can deny that defeating Adolf Hitler and Nazi Germany constituted a worthy cause to eliminate this 'evil' from the world. Nor can anyone rate this decision as an unworthy and unjustified sacrifice. Hitler's senseless slaughter of millions of Jews and other foreigners

whom he wished to conquer and exterminate, included many of his compatriots who suffered untold misery at the hands of a conspiratorial dictator; all of this perpetrated on the basis of bigotry, superiority, hatred and greed by a madman (McCullough, 2014). There can clearly be no excuse for these barbaric acts. The moral decision to go to war with Germany to prevent further annihilation of the Jews is reinforced by the transformation of that nation today, peaceful, free and powerful in diametrically different ways, if we consider her role in the European Union.

There are suggestions however that the excuse of ridding the world of lunatics such as Hitler, justifying war in order to eliminate evil governments from doing depraved acts can be conflated with illogical and immoral objectives to go to war against other countries in spite of the consequences. The moral rationalization behind the decision to go to war in Vietnam and the fevered rallying of the Allies to overthrow Saddam Hussein in Iraq to rid the world of weapons of mass destruction has been debunked and censured globally, yet still the lessons of WWII have been ignored. Wars are still waged on the premise of righteousness, with the validation of rescuing oppressed peoples and nations from notorious and ruthless dictators such as Colonel Khadafy in Libya, Bashar al-Assad in Syria and Kim Jong Un in North Korea. And what of Afghanistan and Zimbabwe? How ethical is it for the US and her Allies to go to war against evil doers to save the world from tyranny on the premise of moral high ground? Have they stopped to consider the impact of those decisions on those who are left behind to pick up the pieces of shattered lives? The wives and families of the soldiers can certainly voice their opinions on that issue.

## **The Legacies of WWII**

The legacies of WWII are multifaceted to say the least, and one cannot do justice to the diverse cultural histories of the nations implicated and affected by them, in a cursory manner. This is not a history book, however, therefore a compromise is necessary. It is not the objective of this book to pass judgment on the ethical debates raised. In an attempt to demystify the socio-political and cultural decisions that led to WWII, and to situate them in the context of our book, it is necessary to examine the diverse consequences of these wars for their impacts on unsuspecting individuals. For the purposes of this chapter, I turn to

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Associate Professor of Military Studies at the Joint Forces Staff College, National Defense University, Keith D. Dickson (2001) for his uncomplicated yet expert consideration of this war. In his role of Lieutenant Colonel in the US Army Special Forces (the Green Berets), he is perfectly positioned to unravel the convoluted historical literature that has been documented on WW11. I therefore now provide, based on his research, an abridged, and layman's version of the vast historical research on this war in order to provide a framework on which we can contextualize the narratives of the women authors who recount the impacts of WWII on their lives.

According to Dickson's (2001) report, the invasion of Poland by Nazi Germany signaled the beginning of WWII in 1939, triggering the subsequent declaration of war against Germany by the French and the English. This was, however, not a simple scenario. Much has been written about the precursor to this war, poor global economic conditions, political propaganda and socio-cultural factors that, compounded with nefarious ideological forces at work, provoked an explosive climate. The disgruntled nations of victors of WWI, (Britain, France, the US and Italy) and losers (Germany, The Ottoman Empire and the Austro-Hungarian Empire) could not agree on many issues. Germany balked at the decisions stipulated in the peace agreement with regard to paying for the ravages of the war because, in addition to their humiliating defeat, they found themselves almost destitute and solely responsible for financial restitution. The victors each had their gripe; Italy felt 'cheated'; France sought more severe punishment for Germany to atone for their 'evil' deeds; and the US wanted out of the equation. Germany's predicament was exacerbated because the pre-existing nations that constituted their tri-partite alliance had been dismantled and re-structured in a hap-hazard way that created new problems.

### **The Rise of Totalitarianism, Fascism and Nazism**

Dickson describes the global economic situation as dire but the war debt weighed most heavily on the European nations, especially Germany, that struggled to extricate themselves from the mire. As they rose above these adverse economic times, the stock market crashed in the US in 1929, provoking a domino effect on the economies of European nations. The perception that capitalism and democracy had failed gave rise to dictatorships and totalitarian rule in Italy, where Benito Mussolini came to power and then Germany, where the people shunned democracy and placed their faith in the tyrant, Adolf Hitler. Taking advantage of a fledgling democracy, Hitler consolidated power under



his sole leadership by eliminating dissenters who would oppose him, promising the people stability and order. It was Spain's turn, after the Civil War, to become Fascist, where the State was exalted above all else.

Dickson explains that the focal point of difference between Nazism and Fascism is racism. At the top of the German hierarchy, the Aryan *Master race* assumed its ostensibly lawful position as the superior race with less salubrious classes ranking beneath this ivory tower. Ranked last along the racial hierarchy, the Jews bore the brunt of Hitler's spurning. Despised for their ideologies of equality among people and individual freedom, and tainted for their betrayal of Germany during WW1, the Jews posed a significant threat to this abusive leader who wielded his power ruthlessly and defrauded his people into believing that his Master race was the only race entitled to rule the world. The unfortunate by-product of this fanatical and ethnocentric view is that Hitler had the power to export his policies across Europe, promising to rid other European nations of the Jews and thus establishing a Jew-free Europe. Regrettably, he led his people down this path of iniquity.

In their attempt to avoid being dragged into another war, the British and French surrendered to the demands of Hitler, a strategy that failed dismally. The Americans also did all they could to avoid another war but in spite of having an ocean dividing them from Europe, they naively chose to adopt an isolationist policy toward Europe, on the premise that they would not be affected by what happened on that continent. Meanwhile, Japan, a key player in Asia, was on a quest of empire building, seeking to benefit from its victory during WW1 by laying claim to German bases it had held during the war, large sections of Chinese territory and islands once controlled by the Germans. These plans were at odds with the Chinese of course but also the Americans, who had interests there too.

In conclusion, WWII turned out to be one of the most destructive wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, so encompassing that very few nations were left untouched and unscathed. This very brief overview is but an insight into what is a most complex war with major issues that cover Pearl Harbor and the Holocaust to D-Day and the Battle of Midway. The literature on this war is voluminous and anyone wishing to instruct themselves on the intricacies involved, be our guest. Suffice to add, that our objective was to create a framework on which to base our European stories.

## **WWII, the 'Good War,' or Was It?**

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Whilst on a global scale, hardened warmongers of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, like their predecessors, continue to glorify and justify wars as necessary 'evils,' perpetual debate surrounds the legitimacy of the decisions to engage in wars in the first place. Have the lessons of the past been learned? Current trends suggest an acute deficiency in this area. WWII has, for decades, been referred to as 'The Good War' in many quarters, though the jury is still out as to the dubious tactics employed by the Allied forces to secure peace and the real motives behind the invasions (Smith, 2000; Weber, 2008). Further, was this war waged to defend or ultimately to establish empires? This was a war that provoked mass destruction; saw the demise of tens of millions of individuals, men, women and children; and was responsible for the immeasurable suffering of so many. Call this war 'good'? (Kelly, 2012).

'The Good War,' credited for the profound social, governmental and cultural changes that ensued in the US, was considered thus because of the impact it has had on that nation. It is portrayed as '*a morally clear-cut conflict between Good and Evil,*' a conflict dichotomously divided between the US and the other 'Allies' on one side, and Nazi Germany, imperial Japan and the other 'Axis' countries on the other (Terkel, 1984, p. vi.; Weber, 2008). Mark Weber (2008), director of the Institute for Historical Review and a graduate of several universities in the US and Munich, Germany, is not convinced that this view is meritorious, sincere and accurate. He argues this interpretation has been supported for decades in education and all forms of media, portrayed with reverence by Bruce Russett, a professor of Political Science from Yale University who proclaimed:

Participation in the war against Hitler remains almost wholly sacrosanct; nearly in the realm of theology ... Whatever criticisms of twentieth-century American policy are put forth, United States participation in World War II remains almost entirely immune. According to our national mythology, that was a 'good war,' one of the few for which the benefits clearly outweighed the costs. Except for a few books published shortly after the war and quickly forgotten, this orthodoxy has been essentially unchallenged (Russett, 1972, pp. 12, 17).

## **The Origins of the Just War**

Whilst this chapter discusses contemporary thinking on the Good or Just War, it is important to contextualize the principals of the classic Just-War

Theory for our readers. The purpose of the theory, or indeed doctrine is to ensure that war is ethically justifiable; it is a set of rules for military combat that has its roots in Christian theology, focusing firstly on the morality of going to war and secondly on the moral conduct within war. The doctrine was conceived by St Augustine and fully formulated by St Thomas Aquinas. Initially, decisions to engage in a Just War with other nations to right the wrongs perpetrated by the assailants were contingent on three important criteria: it must be declared by a legitimate authority and not by private individuals, citizens or groups; there must be a just cause; and they should have the right intentions, such as the advancement of good or the avoidance of evil (Guthrie & Quinlan, 2007; Hittinger, 2000).

With this brief historical perspective on the Just War in mind, it would be interesting to examine each of the wars that have taken place since the 20<sup>th</sup> century to gauge exactly how many have observed these traditional principles. As the world observes from a distance the horrors that are unfolding in Syria and Iraq where the greatest human tragedy is occurring since the Holocaust in Hitler's Germany, are we finally seeing an outbound American President, Barack Obama heeding the words of the critics and the historians? There is a definite reticence to repeat the errors of President George W. Bush who sought support for the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 or to follow in the steps of Franklin Roosevelt during WWII. However, just how much power does an individual Head of State wield these days when dirty politics has become *de rigueur*? Weber argues Americans who admire their role in WWII '*have little moral right to complain when presidents follow [Roosevelt's] example and lead the country into war by breaking the law, subverting the Constitution, and lying to the people*' (Weber, 2008, p. 4).

The women's narratives included in this book testify to this view in a very convincing way. In saying this, however, it needs to be reiterated that the war against Adolf Hitler and Nazi Germany was a necessary evil; there could be no more compelling of reasons than to put an end to the Holocaust, the most horrific episode in history, and one that must never be repeated. I now turn to a brief discussion on the Vietnam War.

## **The Vietnam War**

The Vietnam War was a tragic, senseless war in the eyes of so many ordinary individuals and the political complexities of that war created excessive debate in the US, Australia and New Zealand. Intolerant attitudes exacerbated

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the physical condition and psychological well-being of the Veterans who were repatriated. As public reaction grew more vitriolic, the situation became untenable and the mental health of many returned soldiers escalated. Rehabilitation became impossible for a great number of them, resulting in reported grievous injustices perpetrated on loved ones in the homes of these veterans. The real and perceived lack of welcome for the returned soldiers who fought in a perennial battle with no apparent end in sight and no winners is an important factor to consider when analyzing this sensitive issue. Those students and rebels, whose ideologies induced them to mobilize the public in massive protest marches against this unfortunate war, must take some responsibility for the disastrous effects of their humiliating treatment of returned soldiers; many of whom effectively became pawns in a game of politics they could never win. Yet the Vietnam Veterans were castigated in the most shameful way.

The testimonies of our women authors attest to a high incidence of PTSD in that generation of veterans, undeniably excessive as a result of this state of affairs. Yet many people reject the existence of these mental disorders, considering them as imaginary, in denial that the effects of war on the soldiers and their families cannot be that bad if they have survived and returned home.

For those returned soldiers who have not been diagnosed with any form of disorder, the stories their children have to tell are not for the faint hearted. A litany of insults and abuse define the stories of some narcissistic and self-serving fathers and husbands, angry, agitated war veterans who torment and punish their families because they feel entitled. Are outbursts of anger, denigration and agitation not symptoms of PTSD? (See also Shoebridge, 2010). Yet many of these veterans remain undiagnosed. Or worse, they refuse to heed the advice of family and friends to seek help from psychiatrists and counsellors who could assist in mitigating the effects of their illness. Those who suffer the most from these situations persevere in the marriage with children who have no option but to stay in the family home. Why? The Battered Wife Syndrome provides some of the answers to this question whilst the Stockholm Syndrome offers other avenues of explanation. Roni Wildeboer elaborates briefly on such issues in her chapter.

The narratives of some of our female authors also relate to these matters in our book, women who have endured real hardship during the absence of the loved soldier only to find their situation exacerbated upon the return of the Veteran to his family. How they tolerate the unexpected adversity is unfathomable! The loss of generous government pensions and health benefits that extend to the wife of the Veteran could explain their decision to make the break or to stay. Paradoxically, many of these women who have had to assume

the mantle of role model for both sexes, suddenly realize that they have become self-sufficient. Empowered, they are beginning to leave, no longer reliant on the male to do the things they used to do. Yet, some continue to stay. Out of a sense of duty, pride or shame, stories that can shock the world remain untold by so many women, some for fear of reprisal from surviving husbands or fathers, others from a misplaced sense of duty or family honor. As these women shield themselves behind their secret society, the heinous crimes remain hidden, their narratives locked in Pandora's Box of negative emotions.

The impacts of the Vietnam War have been the subject of much debate for many decades now. The American, Australian and Vietnamese standpoints vary dramatically when the question of legacies of this war is raised. Political rhetoric, particularly in the US has heated up considerably in each election race to win over the popular vote, new candidates and incumbents vying for the top position engaged in heated arguments over the Vietnam War and its impact on the country's economy and psychological well-being of the people. The lessons from this long and senseless war have been analyzed and recorded in history for all to learn but debates on this issue that became a recurrent theme in the 1970's and 1980's have not died down. The long race to the White House that defined US politics post-war provoked much soul searching as the legacies of the Vietnam War and subsequent wars were dredged up to remind the people of former disastrous decisions of their leaders to go to war. A provocative admission from the Former Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara, in his *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* (1995) gave rise to increased discussion on the lessons we were meant to have learned: *'We acted according to what we thought were the principles and traditions of this nation ... we were wrong, terribly wrong.'* (2015, p. 1).

## **Conclusion**

How did we get it so wrong, so terribly wrong? What are the legacies of wars on the Veterans and their families? We, the Editors of this book are not here to lay blame on any faction or nation for the horrific impacts of wars, nor give voice to the heated argument on the frequently bandied terms *'never-ending atonement'* and *'German collective culpability'* (Leick, 2013). These terms have provoked heated debates in the press for decades now and more recently these issues have been globally disseminated through the instantaneous messaging of social media. The recurrent themes have been discussed ad nauseam in the literature on the aftermath of WW11 with bloggers contradicting each other on

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the veracity of claims made with reference to the role of the Germans and their descendants. There is prolific research on the effects of wars, and particularly on the Vietnam War, on the Veterans themselves and their respective countries. Suffice to say that the ethnographic testimonies of our women authors provide convincing evidence, just as convincingly as those found in the history books.

### **The Intergenerational Impacts of War**

The intergenerational impact of the decisions to go to war, be they through forced or voluntary recruitment, is still reverberating within the walls of a great number of homes. The wives of veterans and their children witnessed untold grief upon the return of their loved one and many continue to suffer silently, ashamed of the atrocities perpetrated by those they held dear, the husbands and fathers who have been irrevocably changed. Is it the fault of the wounded souls that they have been irreversibly changed, damaged mentally and some physically also from their participation in a war?

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