



A HIT AND MISS SURVIVAL STRUGGLE OF TRAUMATIZED CIVILIANS IN SERHIY ZHADAN NOVEL THE ORPHANAGE

Amna Subeen

*MPhil Scholar, Department of English Literature,
National University of Modern Languages (NUML), Islamabad, Pakistan*

Email: amnasubeen3@gmail.com

Tasmia Khanum

Lecturer (English), University of Education Lahore, Attock Campus

Email: tasmia.khanum@ue.edu.pk

Saimaan Ashfaq

Lecturer (English), Islamia University of Bahawalpur

Email: saimaashfaq040@gmail.com

Radiya Rani

Lecturer (English), Rashid Latif Khan University

Email: radia.asif1990@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

*The present study attempts to look into the sufferings, and trauma of people living in Ukraine, a conflict zone, a country in Eastern Europe. Ukraine is one of the invaded lands and a center point of conflict between Russia and Ukraine. Russia started sending troops near its Ukraine border saying it to be for "training exercises" and, it launched an invasion of Ukraine. The Ukrainian civilians had become the direct target of all the violence caused by the invaders. Despite the serious nature of the traumatic experiences of the people living in Ukraine, and as depicted in the literature produced therein, little scholarly attention has been given to it to voice out these accounts, which are necessary for claiming the truthful depiction of the Ukraine. This article uses Social Realism, modern art movements embodied in the work of Ben Shaw and Kai. T. Erikson's Collective Trauma as the theoretical framework along the thoughts of Clausewitz to analyze the selected Ukrainian literary text titled *The Orphanage* by Serhiy Zhadan. Much of the novel describes Pasha and his nephew's, journey through the post-apocalyptic ruined landscape, with shells still falling, seeking shelter in various ruined buildings and with different groups of desperate, displaced, citizens and their dealings with troops on all sides and this war does not care that Pasha just wanted to lead a normal, unremarkable life. The investigation concludes that fictional narratives, through traumatic experiences, bring a compelling tale of eternal suffering, establishing the fact that it is not the individual that must bear the moral responsibility; rather, it should be the collective.*

Keywords: *Ukraine, traumatic experiences, collateral damage, collective trauma, social realism, Russian invasion, literary texts.*

Introduction

War has been a part of human culture since its birth. War adversely affects combatants and non-combatants alike, both physically and emotionally. Literature reflects the social, political and economic atmosphere of society and a war novel or military fiction is used to encapsulate the war and its participants with all its facets. It is a novel in which the primary action takes place on a battlefield, or in a civilian setting (or home front), where the characters are preoccupied with the

preparations for, suffering the effects of, or recovering from war. Many war novels are historical novels. All of these epics were concerned with preserving the history or mythology of conflicts between different societies, while providing an accessible narrative that could reinforce the collective memory of a people.

The selected novel for the present research is *the orphanage* by Serhiy Zhadan which truly falls on the merit of war literature. An overwhelming, heartbreaking novel that closely resembles the actual hellscape of Russian-Ukrainian conflict. Author Serhiy Zhadan is a poet, songwriter, and novelist. The images he creates are disturbing and potent in the novel. He seems to ask if one can remain neutral in the face of such evil. Russia and Ukraine are currently in a state of war. Russia and Ukraine have been hostile to each other since Ukraine's independence in 1991. Following this, Russia started sending troops near its Ukraine border saying it to be for "training exercises" and it launched an invasion of Ukraine. After that invasion the people in Donbas, as a community, have been suffering from collective trauma, collateral damage, horrors of war, inadequate living resources.

The orphanage is a portrayal of life in the war, where the focus is on the sufferings of the civilians of Ukraine who are trying to survive in an invaded Ukraine. Pasha, a 35-year-old teacher of Ukrainian is the personification of "ignorance is bliss" except that war is unavoidable. Pretending it doesn't exist doesn't stop it from happening or keep him out of danger. He sets out to rescue his 13-year-old nephew Sasha from an orphanage in the newly occupied territory. To do that, and then to come back through the ever-shifting front lines back to his little town requires three days of hell, full of people shell-shocked by war, shelled out cityscapes and burned-out villages, and what feels like hordes of angry hungry dogs. These traumatic experiences become part of Pasha and Sasha's life who just want to lead a peaceful life.

This research endeavors to achieve the following research objectives: to analyze the ways in which the collective trauma of Ukrainian civilians has been portrayed in literary text, specifically, in Serhiy Zhadan *The orphanage* and the traumatic experiences of common people of Ukraine by the depiction of how social environment affects civilians through the use of theory of social realism.

Literature Review

Serhiy Zhadan's novel *The Orphanage* (Ukrainian: *Інтернат*) has garnered significant scholarly attention since its original publication in 2017 and its subsequent English translation in 2021. Contrary to earlier assumptions, a robust body of research now exists, exploring various facets of this impactful work.

Prior scholarship has extensively examined the novel from multiple perspectives:

Research has focused on the linguistic deformations and psycholinguistic distortions that occur in translating modern Ukrainian war fiction like *The Orphanage* into English. This includes analysis of lexical, stylistic, and grammatical changes, and their impact on reproducing the author's individual style and creative intent. Scholars have interpreted *The Orphanage* through the methodological lens of memory, trauma, and resilience studies, investigating how the novel highlights crucial questions of remembering, forgetting, traumatization, and healing in the context of ongoing war. It depicts the authentic experience of collective trauma in the Ukrainian community and its effects on individuals, emphasizing the sense of danger to society through traumatic experiences and the resulting loss of community bonds, distrust in the future, and one's

neighbors. The novel also explores how characters "work through trauma" and shed melancholy in response to violence.

Studies have concentrated on "family frames" and the role of family in constructing cultural memory about present and past atrocities, showing family as a complex source of both vulnerability and resilience. The novel has been praised for dismantling stereotypes about the inhabitants of eastern Ukraine, showcasing them within the context of complicated family relationships. It examines the individualized perspective of those experiencing loss, trauma, and the breakdown of home and family. *The Orphanage* is recognized as a "synchronous war novel" that emerges parallel to unfolding warfare, focusing on the "ordeal of the unarmed person" or civilian in a warzone. It delves into the depiction of "civilian suffering and trauma," illustrating how war replaces normal life with a horrifying new normal. The novel's portrayal of homelessness, both literal and metaphorical (as a loss of security and a sense of being uprooted), is a central theme, indicating how individuals redefine their identity in the face of traumatic experiences.

Building upon this valuable existing scholarship, this research offers a distinct contribution by systematically examining the novel's portrayal of civilian suffering and trauma through a specific, integrated theoretical framework. This study uniquely combines the perspectives of Social Realism, Kai T. Erikson's theory of Collective Trauma, and Carl von Clausewitz's insights on war's impact on civilians. This multi-faceted approach allows for a deeper and more nuanced analysis of the "hit and miss survival struggle" of traumatized civilians, going beyond broader discussions of trauma or purely literary features. By focusing on Pasha's harrowing journey and the experiences of common people, this research aims to realistically depict their daily struggle to survive and live a simple life amidst conflict, thereby giving voice to their suppressed experiences in the bombed-out atmosphere. Ultimately, this investigation reinforces the critical argument that the moral responsibility for the "eternal suffering" inflicted by war should be attributed to the collective, rather than solely to the individual. This provides a unique perspective for future researchers exploring the profound human cost of conflict in contemporary Ukrainian literature.

Research Methodology

This research employs textual analysis as its central methodology, aligned with Alan McKee's approach which posits that there is no single 'correct' interpretation of a text, as all versions of reality are themselves texts. Instead, the analysis focuses on making "educated guesses at some of the most likely interpretations" by meticulously examining the text within its various contexts. This involves an intrinsic analysis of elements within the text itself, alongside extrinsic techniques that consider the text's genre and the wider public context of its circulation. The design for this research is qualitative in nature because the researcher analyzes the selected texts descriptively and subjectively. In examining *The Orphanage*, the researcher has adopted an integrated approach. The theoretical framework for this textual analysis is anchored in Social Realism, utilized to depict the profound sufferings and violence endured by civilians and to illustrate the influence of the social atmosphere on individual lives, particularly focusing on social injustice and the struggles of working-class protagonists. Furthermore, Kai T. Erikson's Collective Trauma theory is applied to elucidate how traumatic experiences damage social bonds, foster a social culture of trauma, and lead to a loss of communal ties and distrust within a community. Lastly, the research incorporates the insights of Carl Philipp Gottfried von Clausewitz, specifically his moral opposition to the

targeting of civilians in warfare, viewing it as morally wrong, strategically ineffective, and politically counter-productive.

Data Analysis

To accomplish the objectives of research, the researcher employs the theoretical framework of First, Theory of Social Realism, which has its roots in Russian belief and is embodied in the works of Ben Shahn, is used to depict the real sufferings and violence that civilians had to endure as social realism is used to depict life with all its facets. as well as the ideas of Carl Philipp Gottfried von Clausewitz, a Prussian general and military theorist, who voiced his opposition to violence against civilians in war in his work ON WAR, Finally, Erikson's collective trauma theory is used to bring forth Ukrainian literary voices to claim the authentic experience of their collective trauma and how that trauma affected their personality.

In the present research the researcher first describes the term social realism and describes the parameters to analyze the sufferings of common people due to prevailing trauma in Ukraine. The term social realism has its roots in the Russian belief that literature can be used as a medium of social reform and the social revolution. Social realism is an artistic movement especially in literature and visual art like painting. Presenting social reality accurately is to describe, influence of the social atmosphere over the individual's life requires the knowledge of the cultural, social and political scene of the period in which the action of the novel took place. In short, realism is a tendency of expressing real life with all its facets.

Social realism is the combination of two different terms one is 'social' and second is 'realism'. It signifies an artistic movement which focuses on social injustice, economic backwardness, and racial discrimination and draws the pictures of the working class protagonists which can't be ignored. These artists are generally motivated to demonstrate the political and social protest with the sharp edge of satire. A fierce advocate of social realism, Khwaja Ahmad Abbas, defines it: Social realism, then, is the acute awareness of the social forces that surround the individual, their power to influence the lives of men and Women for better or for worse and the overall interaction of the Individual and the society.

Social Realism shows the influence of society on an individual. In the beginning of 19th century, the focus of literature has shifted from the aristocratic to working class life who are suppressed by the economic crisis, over burden of the power politics, and the dynamics of culture. In this time creative writers shift their focus from the romantic idealism to the realities of the civil war, extensive westward expansion and effects of industrial inventions. Their narrative depicts a 'slice of life' as it is.

When it comes to presenting literature in a realistic manner in accordance with society, which presents the ongoing problems, issues of suffering of the common people, Ukrainian people are one of the most relevant to present such literature. It's easy to try to distance yourself by stating, "I just don't follow politics". It's tempting to try to claim neutrality. War doesn't care. War will run over you like a bulldozer with no regard for whether you deserve it or not. And trying to remain detached from it won't protect you same happen to the civilians of Donbass of Ukraine. war replaces normal life with a new normal that is by all means horrifying, if you manage to survive. There are several instances in the novel where the major character and the minor character suffer because of the consequences of the war described below through instances from the chosen texts.

“All the wells dried up in the summer. They are too scared to drink from the tap who knows what's floating in the pipes now. So, they boil their water and steer clear of lakes and rivers”(Zhadan 15). At another place in the novel when pasha and peter (journalist from Russia) were accompanied by Russian soldiers. Peter escaped but the naïve pasha left behind and became the puppet in the hands of Russian soldiers who know nothing except to oppress civilians, locals. While pasha was locked by the soldiers in the room at low temperatures in the winters, pasha thoughts were. “Pasha took out his phone and checked the time, it was twelve o clocks. He has been sitting here for about an hour, but nobody comes for him, nobody lets him out. I will wait a little longer. Pasha tells himself. He waits and then waits more than the longer time, the colder it gets since the plastic sheet is doing nothing to keep the place warm. Waves of brisk air burst inside. At first, Pasha tries to ignore the cold. Then he tries to feel sorry for himself- just had to leave the house today of all days- and then he gets angry at soldiers for holding him here in the cold room. Even they have no right to do so” (zhadan 41).

Another element of social realism is the helplessness and sufferings of the civilians which they have to face as a price of living in their so-called country. Trains and buses, which are the main sources of transportation, are in trouble. Drivers, civilians had to stop at each checkpoint and had to endure the rage of the soldiers to prove their citizenship. These were the words of the driver. “mother fuckers, the drivers mutters. The place is packed with soldiers. Just how many times has he driven through this area over the past six months since the government returned after brief intense fighting? When he was heading to the city or coming back home to the station he had to wait for them to check for his paper, wait for his trouble. But they always let pasha go. Because, he has the paper to prove” (Zhadan 18).

There was so much horror and fear of the soldiers and the bomb shelling that people locked the door of their houses from outside so that nobody could come in and check and that's one incident that is reflected in the novel when pasha reached the orphanage and it was locked from outside. He knocked at the door but nobody responded. When he spoke, I came here for Sasha Nina replied from inside. “Are you alone? It's just you, no soldier's right? He replied it's just me. Then she lets him in” (Zhadan 124).

At another instance when Pasha called his sister Zhenya whose kid he picked up from the orphanage. When he called his sister and asked about the situation there in the station she replied: “it's fucking, shit show here. The army attempted a breakout. The station was packed. Everyone is leaving. They are afraid that the station gonna get attacked.. He replied. I am with Sasha and I am gonna take him with me. His sister replied: with Sasha, she yells surprised. How did you get there? How are you gonna do that? His sister shouts indignantly. There is no getting through. There are soldiers everywhere. Just sit tight at the orphanage. At Least they will feed him there” (Zhadan 151). It shows that even the mother of the kid thinks that it's safe for them to stay in the orphanage instead of coming home now. Instead of becoming prey to death it's better for them to sit there and enjoy food.

At another point there was a heated argument between the gym teacher (velra), pasha and Nina. They were talking about their childhood memories and comparing their childhood with the childhood of the orphanage children. There is hell of a difference because the memories of such children are bitter to remember, not the sweet ones. Also they talk about how the government and soldiers blame civilians for the wrongs done by them in reality and make civilians barbaric in front

of the world. As at one point Valera says: "You are right though, obviously they are gonna try and pin it all on us, on the people who stuck around. Yeah that's how it will play around for sure. But no way in hell are they gonna pin anything on me. Valera says heatedly, "not gonna happen. I don't have anything to do with all this! And they don't either! Clearly he was pointing towards the kids, about the ones who took off and about those who stuck around. I feel sorry for them. They were born at the wrong time in the wrong country. They are not like us. We have something to remember" (Zhadan 164).

At another instance, when Pasha and Sasha left the orphanage and set out for their journey towards home but the cold outside and the horrific night did not let them to travel so they decided to come back to the orphanage. But the whole situation changed within few hours as the soldiers attacked on it. Pasha asked Gnome about Valera. He didn't know who he was then he asked. "The gym teacher. He replied. They took your gym teacher away. Where would they take him? To the hospital. Gnome replied. What happened? They stabbed him. Where is everyone? Everyone is gone he mutters nastily. And you should leave too it's just not safe around here" (Zhadan 185).

After visiting and seeing the dreadful picture of the orphanage such as scattered sheets, rumpled things and mats. Dishes all over the floor trampled metal bowls, the bent forks. "Damn, they cleaned everything," Pasha says. Who did this? The kid asked. Well those guys, the locals, those bastards." What you expect from them, the kid replied. They hate Nina. Nina stood before them for the sake of their identity, their country and did not let them hoist the flag of their country.

Ukrainians had to suffer from identity crisis while living as a prisoner in their own country, where at every other minute they hear the firing, bomb shelling, see tanks crossing their path, identity checkup at every checkpoint, humiliation at the hands of soldiers become part of their social life that's what the point of view of social realism.

As an identity he memorized these few words as he had to utter these at every corner those words were. Teacher, kid, orphanage, station, papers, local. At the very start of the novel, Pasha told Peter about his nephew to Peter and that he is going to rescue him at home. Peter said to him "go pick him up now, it will take them a few days to move on out" he points at the soldier around them. The new government is coming, won't be messing around with orphanages, after your boys pull out they are gonna clean houses. That "other boy" hit him very hard" (Zhadan 37).

The hoisting of flag is symbol of identity but in Ukraine there were no Ukrainian flags hoisting anywhere in the city and around. People were afraid to highlight their identity, to take any position with any particular party because it put their life at risk. Either they can retain their identity or their life at one time.

While in orphanage when Sasha was angry at Pasha for not taking him home, he locked himself in the room. All the kids in the orphanage came out of their rooms to hear the conversation between the two. Sasha's thoughts about those kids were like this, "all of you, why did you crawl all of you out of your borrows? Haven't you seen how big, happy family disputes settle? Yeah, how would you know, what's the last time you visited your parents? you are sitting around here like the rats in the hold of the ship, waiting for them to smoke you out like the poisonous fumes. What do you even know about living the normal life? Then Pasha pointed towards their makeup. First, Pasha surprised but then he began to understand that, "well, what else they are supposed to do here all day in the basement? He looks at the makeup under their eyes, at the fear they are trying to cover up, their fear runs too deep. It's constant; it's part of their lives" (Zhadan 155).

It shows the horrors and the sufferings kids had to endure due to the war, as they are small enough to understand the meaning of war but they had to go through the horrors of war as they are left with no other option.

Though somehow pasha and Sasha survived through all the bomb shelling and bloodshed, the trauma and the memories they collected from their three days' journey will continue to haunt them all of their life. As at the end of the novel Pasha questions himself and tries to be optimistic about his experience in these words, "Can someone forget all this? of course they can, he answers his own question, of course I will forget all this. And the kid will too..there is no need for him to remember all this. He has no need for the smell of sulfur and the human flesh. He should not remember the dirt under fingernails. People are not meant to keep so much fear and anger in their memories. But how do you live with this? He will forget everything, he will be fine, he will forget about the orphanage, about being abandoned, about the feeling of being boxed in when you wake up in the black basement. Let him have good memories, memories that don't stir up hatred or despair. Pasha assures himself. He definitely will, no bloodshed, no metal. And the more passionately he is telling himself all this, the more distinctly and firmly he understands. Nope, nobody will forget anything; nobody will leave anything in the past. The kid keeps carrying these memories, like bags filled with rocks and the torn skin and salty tears will pursue him till his last years and he won't be able to do anything about it and nobody will be there to help him with it" (Zhadan 323).

Erikson's concept of collective trauma: Trauma is defined by Erikson (1995) as a blow that produces disordered feelings and behavior. It damages the basic fiber of the society by damaging social bonds and creating a social culture of trauma. Erikson depicts traumatized communities as a group that act as the collective sufferers from trauma. Erikson specifies the sense of danger to the society in the form of traumatic experiences. Collective trauma manifests loss of community bonds, distrust in the future, and one's neighbors and nobody can escape the violence that has accompanied many events. The magnitude and collectivity of the trauma in Ukraine can be well judged through factual accounts as well. The most frequent events cited have been firing, explosion, and exposure to combat zones that have rendered life at a halt. The nature of the violence included many facets such as torture, rape, firing, physical mistreatment, roundup raids, explosion of mines, damage to property, cross fire, burning of houses, arrests, kidnapping, forced labor, injury, and violation of modesty. Erickson's model can be aptly applied to the Zhadan Ukrainian community which has developed a kind of resentment, anger, and distrust. At one point in the text, the protagonist describes the condition of the city due to war. "It's bad," Pasha says quietly. "Bad?" The soldier suddenly understands him. "Bad," Pasha agrees. "It will get worse, the soldier assures him".

It must be kept in mind that Erikson studied the Buffalo Creek disaster that presented collective trauma as characterized by perseverance on the traumatic occurrence. It consisted of illogical fear of the event accompanied by agitation and sleeplessness. The occurrence was over, but the feeling and the collective mood stayed. Days passed on, but the collective trauma lingered on. There was waiting and uncertainty. People were not sure when the death-like condition would end. Same is the case with the Zhadan community of Ukraine. "Smoke rises out of the valley, where are those explosions, pasha asked? Pasha realizes that the city is over there: thousands of houses, thousands of trees, thousands of borrow and basements with thousands of residents hiding in them now. Can't

hear their breathing, their heart beating, can't hear anything. This thick fog filled up wrecked apartments, blocks and mutilated manholes. That's all there is. There is nothing you can do to help them, pasha thinks. Even if he wanted to get them out of there, try and pick them out of that stew. All he can do is stand there and listen to everything around him give way to destruction and death" (Zhadan 142).

Although Kai T. Erikson talks about natural disasters as traumatic in nature as in the case of Buffalo Creek, where an individual feels as if having no defense other than to make himself small, to take his inner self out of the field of combat, so that there is less of him being wounded and less of him implicated in the insanity of what is happening. The Zhadan protagonist does the same. In the face of death, as put by Erikson, death seems to be the ultimate reality. There is a close encounter with the dead. When a dying Soldier was asking pasha to call at his home and tell them he is fine but no one is picking up the call from his home. Pasha says, "No pity for anyone, no pity for anyone at all. He can feel death retreating him, sidestepping him moving on to someone else. Pasha suddenly senses some sort of danger, something irreparable, something that will usher in the end of this, something he has to escape as far as possible, as fast as possible" (Zhadan 342).

The condition was almost like what Erikson depicts while analyzing the situation of people in the Buffalo Creek disaster, "so death seemed to be everywhere, overhead, underfoot, couched in every pile of wreckage."

Carl von Clausewitz was a Prussian general and military theorist, professional combat soldier who was involved in numerous military campaigns, interested in the examination of war, utilizing the campaigns of Frederick the Great and Napoleon as frames of reference for his work, *ON WAR*. Clausewitz was not an amoral theorist. He was morally and theoretically inclined towards conventional warfare between regular armed forces. He generally regarded the targeting of civilians, at least in his own times, as morally wrong, strategically ineffective and politically counter-productive. He was raised as an officer and gentleman and exhibited both a cultural and theoretical preference for battles between armed forces rather than slaughter of individuals outside the *Haupt Schlacht*.

Clausewitz certainly did not suggest that one threaten civilians for military intelligence in the way recommended by Frederick the great and *petite guerre* writers. The French governors and secret police in Spain made extensive use of intelligence gathering techniques such as spies, informants, and surveys of the population. Anyone absents from their home for an unauthorized period would have goods and property confiscated. The guerrillas also resorted to intimidating civilians in order to gain food, money and information at the expense of the French. In short, killing non-combatants did not reverse the deteriorating situation for the French and made matters worse. To fight back Clausewitz preferred battle-centric warfare, not the massacre of enemy civilians. The fact that civilians were becoming an important factor in the capacity to make war did not lead him to advise harming them directly in either defense or attack.

Conclusion

In establishing the victims and the perpetrators, in defining the role of soldiers, civilians, and in attributing responsibility, the collective traumatic experiences are depicted which are connected to the sense of identity. Ukrainian, as a collective force, only think about how to end this atrocity, how to defeat death. Pasha says that "he will forget everything. He will forget blood and metal." (Zhadan 324). Pasha wants to succumb him to the new normal, forgetting the entire bitter and



horrifying three days journey to orphanage and back home. In doing so, the Ukrainian narrative takes the responsibility of presenting the reality of life. Through memory and the past, it brings a compelling tale of eternal suffering. It is not the individual that must bear the moral responsibility; rather, it should be the collective. The collaborator is an effort, in this regard, to fictionalize the narrative through memory and experiences of war horrors and collective trauma, along with the point of view of Clausewitz who condemned the countries to inflict the war and its violence on the civilians who had nothing to do with war. All they want is to lead a simple life.

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