

## **Post-traumatic Stress Disorder: A Critical Study of *Red Birds***

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### **Abstract**

This study explores the absurdities of war which not only kills but its consequences extend far beyond deaths in a battle. It adversely affects and impairs one physically, emotionally and mentally, and more importantly it leaves a scar on the heart and mind of people. In the past decade, up to two millions of those who are killed in armed conflicts are children, creating extensive emotional and psychological stress in those children. Post-traumatic Stress Order (PTSD) is one of the psychiatric disorders which were faced by those children. War affects the creative development of a child and that result in behavioral transitions; issues which are explored in this study with reference to the scholarly work of Muhammad Hanif's (2018) *Red Birds*. The study is qualitative in nature and employs Defense Mechanism theory of Sigmund Freud and Anna Freud (Cherry, 2022). From Psychodynamic perspective, the textual data is explained by drawing on the interpretation and dialogues among the characters. The findings of the study are that war traumatize people, creates economic and social issues, propagates negative feelings towards own land, and destroys life and people etc. It was also concluded that the overall psychosocial functions and psychiatric disorders are the results of war that lead to traumatized life, affecting the innovative social activities and creative economic techniques and skills.

**Keywords:** Behavior; Transition; Trauma; Violence; War

### **Introduction**

The world scenario took a new shape after 9/11. This occurrence brings about new change in the political, sociological, and psychological lifestyle of the human beings throughout the world. The shift in behavior is basically a normal reaction to abnormal events. On the basis of today's conflicts, psychiatric and psychological studies show that conflicts frequently involve in different ethnic or

religious groups combining political, communitarian and criminal violence which leave enduring impressions on children and adolescents. These experiences lead to many behavioral transitions. The shift in behavior can be depicted in day-to-day activities.

Hanif's novel *Red Birds* (2018) spans themes of class anxieties and oppression that is the result of global politics. The most essential and noticeable feature of his writing is the description of the brutal aftermath of war. Although, the novel is set in an unnamed country, it may be conjectured to be somewhere in the Middle East where American forces rained down bombs in order to decimate the country. The novel is a scathing but wry critique of American war policies and coercive US involvement in the Middle East. Often satirical in tone, the book put down the absurdity of war in a highly provocative and intriguing fashion. Hanif's contextualization and representation of Pakistan provide a remarkable insight into how it has come to be the nation that it is today.

War not only leaves one physically and mentally impaired but also hits the heart and mind with sharp blows. Scars of war cannot be erased by fighting with evils as they are evil. It is said art for the sake of art but then it changed into war for the sake of war. It destroys families and communities and frequently thwarts a nation's efforts to develop its social and economic system. One cannot continue to lead a normal life after such incidents. The progression of the past, present, and future is what defines life. The past has passed away and we just have one fantasy for the future to live in it. War causes varieties of problems such as psychological disease, poverty, starvation, disability, economic and social deterioration, and longstanding psychosomatic sufferings, equally in teenagers and grownups. The current study concentrates on the profound sufferings in the head and heart of the people, caused by undue wars.

### **Summary of *Red Birds* (2018)**

The initial lines of the novel say about an American fighter pilot Major Ellie who fails to bomb the refugee camp and who is supposed to attack these people. He has no food and water. Although, having no rescue team or backup plan, a young boy Momo, who is an inhabitant of that refugee camp, saves his life and rescue him. He walked here and there in the desert for eight days without food and water. Momo, a teenage boy, considers himself an entrepreneur despite being a part of his life in war. The camp's condition is very bad. Everyone is selfish and does not care for others; they steal food and goods from each other. He can change any undesirable situation, such as from sand of the desert to Falcon birds and then upgrade into a commercial empire, which he can make advantageous. His business plans are Falcon Flight, business education, and so on. After meeting

with Major, he devises a plan to rescue his beloved brother Ali who is the mysterious hanger for the job at the US Army camp.

A dog named Mutt, is a highly trustworthy speaker in the novel, *Red Birds* (2018). He is a truth-seeker and a deep observer of human nature with his canine sense of smell. He shows his humiliation and hate for white people in such words “smell like boiled cabbage” (Hanif, 2018: p. 27); indifference smells like the bleached bones of fellow dog. The major character is Mutt who perceives and elucidates the Red Birds. The mother of Momo and Ali, Mother Dear has a significant role in how much sadness is conveyed in the story. She feels guilty while sending her son Ali to the camp. She tells the USAID consultant nicknamed Lady Flowerbody that her research is not solely to study the young Muslim minds but to study the feelings of the people too. In addition to his business aspirations, Momo has the mission of locating his lost brother in mind. Father Dear, a resigned observer, meticulously preserves documents that no one needs or cares about Ellie. Father of Momo and Ali, Father Dear has some bluff ideas in mind which mostly fail at work and in his personal life too. The Doctor thrives despite having little to eat and has penchant for novelty. Cath, Colonel Slatter, and Ali spread this unsettling dust throughout the air as they worked together to save Ali from the dead. Momo is interested in learning more about Ali’s absence at the end of the novel. The child comes up with a strategy to find his brother. In the midst of all this, strange things are happening in the desert beyond the compound. Momo’s quest to retrieve his brother places him in the center of American influence in his nation, which is not at all what he anticipates.

### **Objectives of the Study**

Following are the main objectives of the study:

- To know about the unpleasant traumatic consequences of war
- To explore different incidents caused by war.
- To analyze how war changes the behavioral transitions of children.

### **Research Questions**

The interpretation of the data will be guided by the following research questions:

- What are the traumatic consequences of war?
- What are the different incidents that show the impact of war?
- How does war change the behavioral transition of children?

### **Theoretical Perspective**

Psychoanalysis is the main theoretical perspective of the study with a focus on the Defense

Mechanisms of Freud for personality (Cherry, 2022). Programs of a specific sort, Defense Mechanisms (DMs) are described as having the ability to solve intra-psychic conflicts, working subconsciously, and include a broad set of problem-solving techniques.

### **Tenets of Defense Mechanism**

There are nine points in the Anna Freud's Defense Mechanism as follows: 1. Denial i.e., involving a refusal to accept reality, thus blocking external events from awareness, 2. Repression i.e., an unconscious defense mechanism employed by the ego to keep disturbing or threatening thoughts from becoming conscious, 3. Projection i.e., a psychological defense mechanism in which an individual attributes unwanted thoughts, feelings and motives to another person, 4. Displacement i.e., the redirection of an impulse (usually aggression) to a powerless substitute target. The target can be a person or an object that can serve as a symbolic substitute, 5. Regression i.e., a defense mechanism whereby the ego reverts to an earlier stage of development usually in response to stressful situations, 6. Sublimation, which is similar to displacement, but takes place when we manage to displace our unacceptable emotions into behaviors which are constructive and socially acceptable, rather than destructive activities. It is one of the Freud's original defense mechanisms, 7. Rationalization i.e., involving a cognitive distortion of "the facts" (Moodley, 2005: p. 45) to make an event or an impulse less threatening. We do it often enough on a fairly conscious level when we provide ourselves with excuses, 8. Reaction Formation, which Freud called as "believing the opposite" (Moodley, 2005: p. 44), is a psychological defense mechanism in which a person goes beyond denial and behaves in the opposite way to which he or she thinks or feels, and 9. Introjection, also sometimes called identification, involves taking into your own personality characteristics of someone else, because doing so solves some emotional difficulty.

Psychoanalytic theory, a psychological view of personality that sees personality as the interplay within oneself, is where the concept of defensive mechanisms originates. This idea, which is initially advanced by Sigmund Freud (Macleod, 2023), maintains that some activities, such as defensive mechanisms, are not under a person's conscious control. Actually, most people do them without being aware of the tactic they are employing. It is a typical and natural aspect of psychological growth, knowing which kind you, your family, or even your coworkers employ, will be useful in future interactions. It is a psychological form of study that enables one to modify the fixed mindset of a person and also to get access to that fixed reality. Its main function is to protect oneself from highly disturbing feelings that drives one to the negative side (Grabowski, Porcerelli, & Richardson,

2021).

Defense mechanisms are recurring patterns of emotions, ideas, or actions that are mostly uncontrollable. Instability in the internal or external environment, thoughts of psychological threat or conflict, or cognitive dissonance are all causes of their emergence (Lefler, & Hartung, 2020). They mask or minimize distressing mental images which, if left unchecked, might result in sadness or anxiety.

## **Literature Review**

In modern wars, societies prepare themselves for the enemy who is both inside and outside, according to their society's needs. Most of the literature focuses on the public discourse in war rather than on political issues. The last 20 years concentrate on the social behavior change that was the result of wars. One must focus more on the things that existed before by dividing them into parts to solve them (Fink & Wright, 1970).

Behavioral changes help actors act peacefully in society rather than disturbing the community. Soldiers can make this happen by eliminating the actors from the community but it often does not work. The more focus is on how to change the behavior of actors. Boko Haram is an Islamic sect that believes politics in northern Nigeria has been seized by a group of corrupt, false Muslims (Walker, 2012). It is the best example pointing out that the psychological process is very important. Such processes come out of people's emotions and needs (Berry, Garcia-Blanco, & Moore, 2016). The military forces should focus on how to focus on the good behavior rather than the bad one.

Rapaport (1960) states that mental disorders are an essential part of a person's personality which happens genetically. Some behaviors are unconscious and some are due to mental illness. All of them happen because of psychological energy. During the war, children are reported to have been treated violently which damages their humanity. Time does not heal up the trauma; history is full of such statements which lack validity. The observers did not notice the persons with healthy mental health (Summerfield, 2002).

According to Smith (2001), a report published in June by the London-based International Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, an estimated 300,000 children were taking part in armed conflict in more than 80 countries by carrying weapons, engaging in combats, working as spies, porters, and cooks, as well as being used as soldier wives. Child soldiers are created due to many reasons like poverty. Armed groups or organizations ill-treat them, brainwash them, and take control of their minds. Regardless of their role, the recruitment and use of children by armed forces is a serious breach of both international humanitarian law and children's rights.

Family relationships are strained; many children have relatives who are taken away or killed in a battle, while others are abducted from their families and made to join the military. While escaping warfare, other people lose their parental units. The ability of families to deal with trauma as a team and the importance of strong family relationships has been supported by numerous researches (Punamaki, Qoutta, Miller, & El-Sarraj, 2011). In families, experiencing war and armed conflict, parental love, and family closeness have been demonstrated to help children gather their resources and to improve coping (Punamaki, Qoutta, & El-Sarraj, 2001). Children exposed to political turmoil are more resilient when their families are cohesive and provide them a sense of stability especially, when these factors are combined with maintaining a regular schedule (Laor et al., 1997; Pat-Horenczyk, 2006; Pat-Horenczyk et al., 2006). Children, who perceive their parents' protection, support, and supervision as positive, often recover psychologically and functionally from the traumatic events associated with political warfare (Barber, 1999).

## **Methodology**

The study is based on the information provided by the extensive reading of the text of the novel, *Red Birds* (2018), from the psychological perspective. The overall nature of the study is qualitative. The lines are explained in the contextualized content. The dialogues among the characters are explained and interpreted in a qualitative way. The subtle use of darkly humorous, piercing reality and truth, and satire are deeply analyzed.

## **Data Analysis and Discussion**

War victims are affected badly. The traumatic feelings can make people dangerous for themselves as well as for others (Summerfield, 2002). The feelings of hatred and revenge are perceived for their nation. The prevalence of vengeance attitudes demonstrates significant cross-cultural diversity, the link between support for revenge and war at the individual level connects to variances in support for war between nations (Stein, 2015). An increasing amount of research supports the idea that people's willingness to use aggression against others is significantly influenced by their desire for vengeance. There are the same feelings of vengeance for one another: son for father, wife for husband, and local communal people for the man working in the hanger. One man's justice is revenge for the other one; the feelings of anger, hatred, and revenge in people are often disastrous. It is the inquiry into the social justice, accountability, and implementation of laws (Summerfield, 2002). The social injustice or delay in justice encourages moral evils. Such factors result in social and individual disturbances. *"There is a war on and what is a war if not an opportunity, an opportunity to make up those extra*

*points*". (Hanif, 2018: p. 6)

Children and their families face many challenges such as negative thoughts, nightmares, fear, anxiety and depression during the war. Not only do civilians feel and perceive the violence but the soldiers deployed in the war are also exposed to such traumas. Those parent-soldiers who are deployed in the war zone leave the responsibility of their family members alone. The post-deployment soldiers often face mental and domestic problems, violence and depression issues. The wives of these soldiers face many issues in the absence of their spouses, and so children's age and their developmental stages get disturbed because of the absence of their fathers. Treatment is very much important for the veterans and their family too to get out of the traumatic problems. The significant role is that of the family to support and involve the veterans in such activities to take them out of the worst situation. The deployed soldiers suffer and become introverts despite coming back home. The post-deployed soldiers have many issues at homes also; their past memories disturb them during sleep. Major Ellie, the American pilot, also becomes the victim of hallucination and depression.

*"People who had not left their little hamlets for centuries ... eat exotic food donated by USAID and burp after drinking fizzy drinks"*. (Hanif, 2018: p. 33)

Conflict may cause loss and extended family separation for certain children. Even though few child-tracing interventions have undergone thorough evaluations for their efficacy in enhancing mental health outcomes and reuniting divided families is typically a step in improving mental health in war zones. There are several methods for preventing separation, providing choices for temporary and long-term care (such as foster care, and peer-group care), and bringing families back together. Dear Father shows his love, kindness, and affection to his son in the last stages. The negative feelings and attachment fade away at once. The encouragement of passion is at its height. The father's attitude toward his lost son is felt and his loyalty to foreign people is overcome over blood relations. The father's support gives a sign of extraordinary courage to face the hardships of rescuing his brother from the hanger.

*"I know people who work specifically on cases where people disappear. ... next to the main gate and you'll not leave the Camp until my son is back"*. (Hanif, 2018: p. 48)

On the part of behavior, collective and individual alterations in perception, cognition, and behavior occur during times of war. All of this is required for a man to be able to engage in warfare. It affects everyone equally. Children's exclusion from the public domain and the establishment of a legal suitable location for them legitimizes and promotes their marginalization and silence. They are sometimes seen as pre-social, which prevents them from having the ability to express political or

social viewpoints. The concept of the kid as specifically nonpolitical has been contained, resulting in a conceptual separation of the child and the political. As a result, the child might occasionally be used to inspire political action.

*"Soldiers traumatized in conflict areas go home and take it out on their pets, sometimes on their fiancées, and sometimes on other people's pets. But mostly on their pets".* (Hanif, 2018: p. 73)

Children experience stress which results in the disturbance of their mental and physical development. Effects stay for long even after the end of war (Samara, et al., 2020). Wars have much longer time and continuous effects on the people which are shown either on their health and mentality or spread many diseases resulting in depression, anxiety, and social distancing. These diseases remain for the long term and even in adulthood. It should be diagnosed and treated on time, otherwise, they may be harmful to others too (Samara, et al., 2020). Children who live in war-damaged areas have many risks of suicidal attempts, anxiety, disturbed night sleeping, aggression, absence from school, and other physical activities due to personality disorders. In the words of Major Ellie, "I have lost many of my own comrades, some in the bombings, than living with the memory of those who have already left" (Hanif, 2018: p. 101).

*"One son is gone, the other one out of control, a husband who has brought that very lady friend home".* (Hanif, 2018: p. 136)

There is little doubt that specific terrorist activities will result in severe psychological problems. On every occasion the annoying reviews are marked with the aid of the perceived danger to existence, lack of predictability, low controllability, high loss and harm, the chance of recurrence, and publicity to dying and mutilation(Nizami, Rana, Hassan, & Minhas, 2014). For persons suffering from such psychological problems, there is a severe lack of specialized and organized psychological support in the West part of Pakistan. The majority of mental health practitioners lack the knowledge and consequently, the necessary abilities to treat disorders like Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, mental disturbance, nervousness, and despair caused by terrorist activities, are of no use. The care and tangible compensation are very much low in the West part of Pakistan. The health department and emergency managements are failed to treat the people mentally. The act of terrorism has changed the whole life style of the people and they have no future plans for living as there is no ray of hope for support and compensation by the authorities. The Mother Dear has some strange feeling for her son, Momo and doubting him: "My boy with a gun and a jeep" (Hanif, 2018: p. 269).

*"We survived the bombs but we are not going to survive our greed".* (Hanif, 2018: p. 172)

Every place has its importance and some feelings are attached to it whether good or bad. The place



which gets badly affected by war has some harsh memories related to it. People flee in quest of safety and security during times of war which contributes to hunger, poverty, and the loss of hope for a worthwhile career. Insecurity and violence become commonplace occurrences. Fighting and violence lead to anxiety, panic, and terror among those compelled to flee in quest of safety and security. They constitute refugees and immigrants; the majority of them are often children, women, and senior citizens. The vast majority of displaced people are housed either as refugees or internally displaced individuals in developing countries. Momo and his brother Ali has built the house with help of USAID but that is more than a palace for them. The researcher lady Flowerbody does not feel the attachment regarding it. Momo let Flowerbody to study the young minds of the Muslims and then extract the meaning for their interest. The aim is to reconstruct the society, rebuild and reshape it after conflict, and show concern for the people to move on or become silent (Sorensen, 2015). When property and places are destroyed by war, then trauma needs attention and concern to overcome the loss and reconstruct the society to make the future better.

*"My son, I think it's time to go. Nobody has ever called me my son".* (Hanif, 2018: p. 214)

There are various factors for creating trauma and war is one of them. Almost all the conflicts are man-made disasters. It not only harms people physically but also mentally. It has a direct impact on the mind that remains as long as life is sustained. Sometimes, the trauma exposes itself when the same situation occurs or gets exposure to that event. The complexity of personality makes it hard for the children to live peacefully. It is found that the psychological costs of combats are larger than the non-combats. Violent combatants such as firefighters and soldiers who kill others, get injured in combats and witness death or injuries of civilian depression anxiety — all these are the symptoms of PTSD. The law and policymakers do not care for soldiers and civilians but to make money and run their businesses. The ideal state without war is closely related to the Western theories like democracy, human rights, rule of law, stability of the nation-state, freedom of religion, free markets, business, and much more. The cultural views and political persons mainly view the value of freedom and peace; they have additional merit in preventing wars. Peace-keeping societies and peace lovers with similar interests are not usually interested in war (Cesur, Sabia, & Tekin, 2013).

The major effects of the war fall on those who are not willing to become part of a war. Particularly, those who are caught up in war-zone or forced to participate in war-related activities such as murder, reverse and act against the will, are affected the most. Fighting organizations frequently provide membership and acceptability in a group as well as what are believed to be attractive or honorable roles (soldier, hero, leader, or guardian). Many are enthralled only by the prestige and pleasure of

carrying a rifle while serving in a unit. In some cases, indoctrination starts even before recruitment: organizations like the Taliban, for instance, strongly link religion with violence throughout the early years of education before a kid can exercise critical thinking. Powerful people subtly mix morality with brutality. Those who are involved in terrorist activities and are caught red-handed, prove themselves to be “The folks discovering a new strain of PTSD” (Hanif, 2018: p. 197). Moreover, the collaterally damaged population is those helpless children and adolescents who are in the war torn area. The direct area impact, life-threatening conditions, and environment faced by these innocent people, is a great threat to their emotional sufferings. The worst part is the indirect involvement of the stress, death, illness, hardships, displacement, and disturbance of daily routine (Jensen & Shaw, 1993).

*“We can sell these toy guns to tourists ... people will come and buy guns from you because they are scared of you”.* (Hanif, 2018: p. 223)

Young people have been shown to suffer from negative consequences of disclosure to armed clash, conflict, and dogmatic violence, particularly, in the form of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms and a variety of other evident and hidden mental conditions (Betancourt & Khan, 2008). There is shift in the behavior of the young child. The teenager Momo lives for a long time in the war conflict zones. He called himself an entrepreneur. He can turn any unfavorable situation into advantageous one. He has many business plans and models. The plan is for rescuing people who are caught in troubles. At the same time, he is planning for the rescue of his brother which changes his whole thought into a consoler for the family. At last, his mindset changes and thinks that the government and authority let the foreigners to bomb and destroy us. The huge package of dollars is attracted by the false flag operations towards his own land and people: “The bigger the guns behind you, the bigger the aid package you attract” (Hanif, 2018: p. 203). Mother Dear also recognized: “what come after war is USAID. So we lived on rations of tinned beef and complaints about logistical delays”. (Hanif, 2018: p. 235).

## **Conclusion**

Basic resources are destroyed during the armed war, including water, food, shelter, schools, and medical services. Communities find it challenging to provide children with a setting that encourages sound cognitive and social development as a result. A negative view of loss of hope is also one of the biggest effects. When young people lose all hopes, they give up. They do not take the actions that could help to create a positive future. Conflict leads to harm, sickness, and collapse of the systems that offer preventative, curative, and remedial care. It has significant social impacts that provide a

favorable environment for the consequences.

The study concludes that war trauma may leave a scar on the mind and heart. It transforms a person into something else than a normal human being or leaves one with missing of some parts in the psyche and physique: “A child without arms, a child without legs. I thought, as fucked-up ideas go this was pretty fucked up, especially for my childless self” (Hanif, 2018: p. 179).

On the part of behavior, collective and individual alterations in perception, cognition, and behavior occur during the times of war. It affects everyone equally. Indeed, war damages are a great loss to human life. After war, people struggle to recover their mental states, build family relations, adjust to the new environments, and construct homes again. They try to achieve the inner peace of mind with the remaining broken resources: “We can sell these toy guns to tourists and with that money ... where people will come and buy guns from you because they are scared of you” (Hanif, 2018: p. 223).

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