



TOTAL WAR UNVEILED: ANALYZING THE SUFFERINGS OF UKRAINIAN CIVILIANS IN SERHIY ZHADAN'S "INTERNAT"

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Abstract:

This study aims to explore the suffering and trauma experienced by individuals residing in Ukraine, a conflict-ridden country in Eastern Europe. Ukraine has become a focal point of the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine, with Russia deploying troops near the Ukrainian border under the pretense of "training exercises" and subsequently launching an invasion. As a result of this invasion, Ukrainian civilians have been subjected to direct violence and its associated consequences. Despite the severe nature of these traumatic experiences, and the corresponding literature that has emerged from within Ukraine, there has been limited scholarly attention given to amplifying these accounts, which are crucial for an accurate portrayal of the situation in Ukraine.

This article utilizes the theoretical framework of Total War Theory, as outlined in Martin van Creveld's "The Transformation of War," to analyze a selected Ukrainian literary text titled "The Internat" by Serhiy Zhadan. Through this analysis, the study examines how the collective traumatic experiences endured by the Ukrainian people as a community, due to the ongoing Russian invasion, have led to immense suffering and the degradation of their quality of life. In this context, the Ukrainian narrative assumes the responsibility of presenting the harsh realities of life in the midst of conflict. The findings of this investigation highlight how fictional narratives, through the depiction of traumatic experiences, convey a compelling narrative of perpetual suffering, underscoring the notion that moral responsibility should lie with the collective rather than with individuals.

Keywords: *Ukraine, traumatic experiences, collateral damage, total war, civilians' sufferings, Russian invasion, literary texts.*

Introduction:

War has been an integral part of human civilization since its inception, causing detrimental effects on both combatants and non-combatants, physically and emotionally. Presently, Russia and Ukraine are engaged in a state of warfare, characterized by hostility between the two nations since Ukraine gained independence in 1991. Russia's actions have included the

deployment of troops near the Ukraine border under the guise of "training exercises," leading to an invasion of Ukraine. Consequently, the community residing in Donbas has endured collective trauma, collateral damage, infrastructure destruction, the horrors of war, and limited access to essential resources.

This research article focuses specifically on Serhiy Zhadan's literary work, "The Internat," as it pertains to the Ukrainian context. The study employs the Theory of Total War to highlight how modern conflicts mobilize entire societies and resources to support the war effort. This concept surpasses the traditional understanding of warfare solely as a confrontation between armed forces, encompassing all aspects of society. To elaborate on the Theory of Total War, insights from Martin van Creveld, an Israeli military historian who extensively explored this concept in his book "The Transformation of War," are incorporated. Creveld discusses the evolution of warfare, blurring the lines between military and civilian domains, and encompassing entire societies.

This research aims to accomplish two primary objectives: firstly, to analyze the role of memory and trauma in relation to Ukrainian suffering during total war as depicted in the novel "The Internat"; and secondly, to examine the casualties and collateral damage suffered by ordinary Ukrainian civilians, highlighting the impact of social disruption using the Total War theory. Addressing the research questions, this article explores, what are the sufferings faced by the civilians of Ukraine by Russian Invaders? 2: what is the role of authorities portraying trauma in the Ukrainian civilians? The significance of this study lies in giving voice to the suppressed narratives of Ukrainian civilians, shedding light on their experiences of war horror. The analysis focuses on the novel "The Internat," published in 2021 and previously unexplored, allowing for a fresh perspective on the subject matter.

Literature Review

Mental health after trauma article provides a detailed theoretical foundation for understanding the essence, formation, and consequences of trauma for both the individual and the community. It traces the study of mental trauma back to Sigmund Freud, who explicated trauma as a destroyer of "protection" and noted that the real source of trauma is often not the event itself, but the memory of it, which acts like a foreign body. The source discusses key concepts of trauma theory, including Cathy Caruth's view of trauma as a form of communication ensuring its continuous presence, and Dominick LaCapra's argument for trauma processing through rationalizing the past to move from melancholy to mourning. Crucially, the research emphasizes that trauma, whether individual or collective, requires political support and an external audience to facilitate testimony and overcome the traumatic syndrome; without such support, trauma can lead to social exclusion.

My study, which aims to analyze the role of memory and trauma in relation to Ukrainian suffering during total war, builds directly upon the foundational understanding of trauma theory provided here. By noting that trauma arises as an emotional reaction to violence that destroys identity, my research validates the central focus on the collective traumatic experiences endured by the Ukrainian people. While this work provides a broad, interdisciplinary, and hermeneutic analysis of trauma's psychological and sociological mechanisms, my research fills a gap by embedding the analysis of suffering within a military

and systemic framework: Total War Theory. My study goes beyond the general consequences of violence by specifically applying Martin van Creveld's assertion that total war systematically involves the deliberate targeting and destruction of civilian infrastructure (hospitals, schools, transportation). This provides a structural explanation for the collective suffering observed in *Internat*, allowing my analysis to move beyond solely psychological manifestation to explore the systemic forces that shape civilian experiences amidst conflict.

The Synchronous War Novel: Ordeal of the Unarmed Person in Serhiy Zhadan's *Internat* presents a critical interpretation of Serhiy Zhadan's *Internat* as a "synchronous war novel"—a text created parallel to ongoing warfare—focusing on the "ordeal of the unarmed person" (the civilian) in a warzone. It argues that the protagonist, Pasha, epitomizes the east Ukrainian who, through his grueling three-day journey, transforms by working through trauma and replacing melancholy with triggered mourning. This transformation is initiated by the need to protect his nephew, which activates his inner strength and provides a sense of purpose and belonging. The article uses trauma studies to explain how the trauma of imperial collapse leaves an inner void and posits that the novel challenges the simplistic "Two Ukraines" narrative by asserting that the strength of the Ukrainian nation is reaffirmed by fire, not newly born.

My study explicitly acknowledges and reinforces the foundational literary assessment of *Internat* as a powerful narrative focusing on "civilian suffering and trauma". It builds directly upon the core finding that the novel depicts the harrowing journey of an unarmed civilian (Pasha) forced to navigate a devastated, shell-shocked landscape. Furthermore, my study shares the objective of giving voice to the suppressed narratives of Ukrainian civilians, echoing the source's observation that the protagonist incorporates the missing voice of the local population deprived of articulation. While this work provides an insightful literary and psychoanalytic reading of Pasha's individual journey of recovery from trauma (shedding melancholia for mourning), my research provides a distinct, macro-level theoretical lens to analyze the causes and scope of the collective suffering. My study employs Martin van Creveld's Theory of Total War to highlight how the experiences faced by Pasha and the community—such as displacement, targeting of infrastructure, and social disruption—are systemic dynamics of modern conflict. This approach shifts the focus from the individual character's psychological resolution to the broader structural forces that subject the entire civilian population to total mobilization and direct consequences of war.

A hit and miss survival struggle of traumatized civilians in Serhiy Zhadan novel *The Orphanage* analyzes *The Orphanage* by Serhiy Zhadan, aiming to explore the suffering and trauma of Ukrainian civilians. It adopts an integrated theoretical framework encompassing Social Realism, Kai T. Erikson's Collective Trauma, and the moral insights of Carl von Clausewitz. The research specifically examines the influence of the social atmosphere on individuals and how traumatic experiences damage social bonds. It emphasizes the depiction of the civilian identity crisis and argues that fictional narratives convey a compelling tale of eternal suffering, concluding that moral responsibility for the conflict should be attributed to the collective, not the individual.

My study reinforces the critical argument that the moral responsibility for the immense suffering and subsequent degradation of life should lie with the collective. Both studies share

the core objective of analyzing the novel's depiction of the traumatic experiences of common people and emphasizing the pervasive horrors and sufferings endured by civilians (including children). My research also builds on the existing findings that the conflict disrupts normal life and forces civilians to face identity checks and humiliation. This article uses a complex, integrated framework of Social Realism, Collective Trauma, and Clausewitz, whereas my study offers a distinct and focused analysis using Martin van Creveld's Theory of Total War. By applying the Total War framework, this research focuses specifically on how the modern conflict mobilizes entire societies and blurs the lines between military and civilian domains. This provides a dedicated analytical lens to interpret the systematic exploitation and destruction of civilian life and resources as inherent characteristics of total war, offering a structural perspective distinct from the social and psycho-sociological theories employed in the reference study.

Data Analysis

The research at hand explores Martin van Creveld's theory of total war, as elaborated in his book "The Transformation of War," as a framework to comprehend the suffering endured by the common people in Ukraine due to ongoing trauma. Creveld's concept of total war encompasses a broader understanding of warfare, surpassing conventional military engagements. He emphasizes the involvement of entire societies, blurring the boundaries between military and civilian domains.

According to Creveld, total war represents a paradigm shift, wherein victory is sought not solely through the defeat of enemy armed forces, but by mobilizing and utilizing all available societal resources. This includes the active participation of civilians in various war-related aspects, such as production, logistics, intelligence, and propaganda. Consequently, civilians become crucial contributors to the overall war strategy, expanding the conflict's scope beyond the battlefield. A significant aspect of Creveld's concept is the deliberate targeting and destruction of civilian infrastructure. Total war entails the systematic destruction of economic, industrial, and social structures that support civilian life. This strategy aims to weaken the enemy's resistance by disrupting the functioning of society, resulting in civilians enduring the loss of vital services and facilities, including hospitals, schools, transportation networks, and communication systems.

Furthermore, Creveld acknowledges the displacement of civilian populations as a prominent consequence of total war. The destruction of homes and communities' forces civilians to flee, leading to the creation of refugees. Displaced civilians face numerous challenges in seeking safety, shelter, and basic necessities, exacerbating their suffering and vulnerabilities. The psychological and emotional impact of total war on civilians is also highlighted by Creveld. The extreme conditions and violence experienced during armed conflicts can result in long-lasting psychological effects, including anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among civilians.

Moreover, total war inevitably leads to civilian casualties and collateral damage. Civilians often become unintended targets or bear the brunt of direct attacks, resulting in loss of lives, injuries, and further suffering. The portrayal of civilian deaths and the long-term consequences endured by survivors exemplify the high human cost of war. Creveld also recognizes the social

disruption and cultural impact caused by total war. Social structures, relationships, and cultural norms within societies are significantly disrupted, sometimes irreversibly. The novel under study explores how war affects the identities, values, and relationships of the characters, as well as the broader cultural changes experienced by the community. Lastly, Creveld addresses the challenges of post-war reconstruction and recovery. After the conflict ends, societies face the arduous task of rebuilding lives, communities, and infrastructure. The consequences of total war extend beyond the immediate period of conflict, shaping the long-term trajectory of post-war societies.

In presenting literature that realistically reflects the ongoing problems and the suffering of common people, the Ukrainian context is particularly relevant. The impact of war does not discriminate based on personal political views or desires for neutrality. When war reached Donbas in Eastern Ukraine in 2014, it engulfed the people, regardless of their preferences or apolitical stance. The war disrupted normal life and replaced it with a new horrifying reality. This aligns with Creveld's assertion that society becomes entangled in war. The novel, "The Internat," depicts the lives of civilians in an invaded Ukraine who are striving to survive amidst the turmoil. The main character, Pasha, embodies the concept of "ignorance is bliss," yet he cannot ignore the war's existence or evade its dangers. His objective was to save his nephew from an orphanage located in the territory under occupation of Russians leads him through a three-day ordeal filled with war-shocked individuals, devastated cityscapes, burnt villages, and encounters with desperate civilians and various armed factions. A significant portion of the book vividly portrays Pasha's harrowing journey through a post-apocalyptic landscape ravaged by war. As shells continue to rain down, Pasha and his nephew desperately seek refuge in dilapidated buildings, encountering fellow displaced civilians and navigating their interactions with various military forces. Despite Pasha's desire for a simple, ordinary life, the war shows no regard for his aspirations. Throughout the novel, both major and minor characters

endure profound suffering and trauma as a result of the war's consequences, aligning with the traumatic experiences discussed in Creveld's total war theory. The pervasive presence of war in the narrative can be further analyzed through these instances, evoking a sense of impending death hanging over the characters' lives. "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).

In another instance within the novel, Pasha finds himself in the company of Russian soldiers, accompanied by Peter, a journalist from Russia. However, circumstances unfold differently for the two. While Peter manages to escape, Pasha, being naive, is left behind and falls victim to the manipulation of the Russian soldiers, who display a lack of regard for the well-being of the local civilians. Subsequently, Pasha is confined by the soldiers in a cold room during the winter. During this ordeal, Pasha contemplates the following thoughts: In accordance with Creveld's assertion, civilians are not only caught in the crossfire of warfare but also become active participants and targets, as their resources, labor, and support are exploited or directly impacted by the conflict. "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 aspect inherent in total war is the profound helplessness and suffering experienced by civilians, along with the consequential social disruption that they must endure as a consequence of living in their own country. The transportation system, particularly trains and buses, faces significant challenges. Civilians and drivers find themselves compelled to stop at each checkpoint, subjecting them to the wrath of soldiers as they strive to prove their citizenship. The disruption caused by the conflict raises questions regarding the very identity of the civilians, further exacerbating the challenges they face in upholding their sense of self while residing in their own nation. These sentiments were expressed by a driver who experienced these hardships firsthand.

“Mother fuckers, the driver’s 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).

But the irony is that pasha being the local had to prove his identity at every checkpoint from station to station every time he had to repeat to the soldiers.

The pervasive horror and intense fear induced by the soldiers and constant bombardment compelled people to adopt extreme measures for their safety. Locking their doors from the outside became a common practice to prevent unwanted intrusions and inspections. The phenomenon of total war frequently results in the large-scale displacement of civilian populations, as individuals are compelled to abandon their homes and become refugees due to the violence and instability inflicted by the conflict. The novel potentially explores the experiences of these displaced civilians and the numerous hardships they encounter as a consequence. This central theme is exemplified through the character Sasha, who resides in an orphanage in an attempt to escape the casualties of war. However, even within the confines of the orphanage, he is not entirely safe. A specific incident depicted in the novel occurs when Pasha arrives at the orphanage, only to find it locked from the outside. Despite his attempts to gain entry by knocking, there is no response. Eventually, Nina responds from inside, stating that she opened the door because Pasha had come for Sasha. These were the words of Nina: “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 Shasha he picked up from the orphanage. Her mother was furious that why her brother is taking back him home instead of home orphanage was considered a safer place but in reality, orphanage was not even free from the horrors and the terror of war. 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).

Instead of becoming prey to death it's better for them to sit there and enjoy food. The above-mentioned quotation also highlights the scarcity and shortage of food there for the people of Ukraine.

In another instance, a heated argument ensues between Velra, Pasha, and Nina, revolving around their respective childhood memories and the stark contrast between their experiences and those of the children in the orphanage. Unlike the sweet and cherished memories of their own childhood, the memories of these orphaned children are characterized by bitterness and hardship. Furthermore, the discussion delves into the blame game perpetrated by the government and soldiers, who unjustly hold civilians accountable for their own misdeeds, thereby portraying them as barbaric in the eyes of the world. As expressed by Valera during the conversation: “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).

The quoted passage from the novel aligns closely with the argument of total war theory, which asserts that civilians can be deliberately targeted by military forces or unintentionally harmed in attacks. Through its narrative, the novel may vividly depict the profound toll exacted on human lives during war, encompassing civilian fatalities, injuries, and the enduring physical and emotional consequences endured by those who survive.

During another moment in the story, Pasha and Sasha departed from the orphanage, embarking on their journey back home. However, the freezing cold and the terrifying night impeded their progress, prompting them to reconsider and return to the safety of the orphanage. Unexpectedly, the situation dramatically shifted within a matter of hours as the soldiers launched an assault on the orphanage. In the midst of the chaos, Pasha sought information from Gnome about the whereabouts of Valera. Initially unaware of Valera's identity, Gnome inquired further to provide an answer. “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).

In total war scenarios, there is often a deliberate focus on targeting and demolishing crucial infrastructure necessary for the functioning of civilian life. This encompasses vital establishments like hospitals, schools, transportation networks, and communication systems. The destruction of such infrastructure contributes significantly to the suffering and disruption endured by civilians within the novel. An example of this can be observed in the depiction of the orphanage, where the narrator visits and witnesses a distressing scene: strewn bed sheets, disheveled belongings, and mats scattered haphazardly. The floor is covered in broken dishes,

trampled metal bowls, and bent forks. Traces of blood further intensify the harrowing image of destruction. "Damn, they cleaned everything, " Pasha says. Who did this? The kid asked. Well, those guys, the locals, those bastards".

Another description of the destruction of infrastructure is quoted from the novel:

"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).

The child's response reflected their uncertainty and lack of understanding about the situation. They questioned the motives of those who harbored hatred towards Nina, who bravely stood up for their identity and country, preventing them from raising their national flag.

Ukrainians faced an identity crisis, feeling like prisoners in their own homeland. Constant exposure to gunfire, bomb shelling, and tanks passing through their paths, coupled with frequent identity checks and the humiliation inflicted by soldiers, became an integral part of their daily lives. This perspective aligns with the essence of total war theory. As a way to establish his identity, the child had memorized a set of words that he had to utter repeatedly in various locations: teacher, child, orphanage, station, papers, local. At the beginning of the novel, Pasha confided in Peter about his intention to rescue his nephew and bring him home. In response, Peter expressed his thoughts on the matter. "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 absence of Ukrainian flags being raised in the city and its surroundings symbolized the fear and hesitation of the people to assert their identity and align themselves with any particular party. Taking a stance or displaying their identity would expose them to grave risks, where they had to make a difficult choice between preserving their identity or protecting their lives. Total war necessitates the complete mobilization of a nation, requiring active civilian involvement through conscription, contributions to war-related industries, and enduring hardships on the home front.

During their time in the orphanage, when Sasha expressed his anger towards Pasha for not taking him home, he retreated into a room and locked himself inside. The other children in the orphanage, curious about the situation, gathered outside their rooms to listen to the conversation between the two. Sasha held his own thoughts about these fellow kids, and they can be summarized as follows: "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).

The depiction of the children's harrowing experiences in the novel reflects the profound horrors and sufferings they had to endure as a result of the war. Despite their young age and limited understanding of the true nature of war, they were forced to confront its terrifying realities with no alternative or escape. Even though Pasha and Sasha managed to survive the relentless bombardments and bloodshed during their three-day journey, the traumatic events and memories they accumulated will forever haunt them. The lasting impact of their ordeal will continue to linger throughout their lives. In the concluding moments of the novel, Pasha introspectively questions himself and attempts to find solace in his experiences, hoping to embrace a sense of optimism.

“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 stirrup 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).

The concept of total war encompasses both the immediate sufferings experienced during conflict and the enduring consequences that affect post-war reconstruction and recovery. Pasha's conversation highlights his optimistic outlook on war, yet it also emphasizes the time and effort required to overcome the horrors of war. The novel effectively portrays the difficulties faced by civilians in the arduous task of rebuilding their lives, communities, and infrastructure once the conflict comes to an end.

Conclusion

The utilization of the total war theory, particularly as presented by Martin van Creveld, offers valuable insights into the examination of the hardships endured by civilians in Serhiy Zhadan's novel "Internat." Through the lens of total war theory, we gain a more profound comprehension of the significant impact that war has on civilian populations. The Ukrainian

people collectively yearn for an end to the atrocities and strive to overcome death. Pasha, one

of the characters, expresses his desire to forget the gruesome experiences of the past and embrace a new normality. Total war theory acknowledges that in modern conflicts, civilians actively participate in the war effort and face direct consequences. By analyzing "Internat" through the framework of total war theory, we recognize that these sufferings are not isolated incidents but inherent aspects of the broader systemic dynamics of total war. The intentional targeting of civilian infrastructure and disruption of essential services exemplify the strategic tactics employed in total war, exacerbating the challenges faced by the characters in the novel. By adopting the theoretical framework of total war theory, our analysis of "Internat" delves beyond individual sufferings and explores the structural and systemic forces that shape the experiences of civilians amidst war. This approach provides a comprehensive understanding of the multidimensional impact of total war on the lives of ordinary individuals. In conclusion, applying the total war theory to analyze the sufferings of civilians in "Internat" enhances our understanding of the profound human costs of conflict. By highlighting the broader societal, psychological, and cultural consequences of total war, this research emphasizes the significance of addressing the plight of civilians and working towards preventing such devastating conflicts in the future.

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