

Analysis  
on  
**The Triple Connections**  
**(War - Trauma - Art)**

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# CONTENTS

## I. Introduction

## II. Body

- a. Causes of War
- b. Negative Impact of War on Civilians
- c. Negative Impact of War on Soldiers
- d. War and Trauma
- e. Trauma and Mental Health
- f. Art and Trauma

## III. Conclusion

## **Abstract**

One of the most noticeable topics that negatively impact on veterans and civilians is war. Throughout human history, there have been many wars that took parts in different places around the world including Indochina war which mainly rise in Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia. This paper aims to provide a clear discussion on how war degrades the human mind which leads to mental disorders such as trauma and PTSD. This paper also provides an effective solution to heal trauma with art, with tangible evidence why art can heal trauma from people who suffer from war. Each section in this paper focuses on each important point step by step, starting from the way war causes trauma until the way using art to cope with trauma. The conclusion can be drawn that mental health is like a mirror and war similar to a bullet which can broke the mirror very easily; whereas art act as a shield to prevent the mirror to break or act as a special glue to attach the broken pieces of the mirror back together.

## **Introduction**

Everyone wants to avoid war since it is a terrible thing to go through. Unfortunately, it continued to happen in our lives. Every conflict requires a large number of people to participate and experience it, which may result in the sacrifice of human blood. Veterans find it difficult to transition and lead a normal life as they once did due to the sorrow and trauma that war delivers to individuals, and which haunts them for life. Some troops may be able to overcome their traumas and sadness once the battle is over, however others may commit suicide because the anguish is too much for them to endure. Some people may also turn to illicit drugs for relief.

War is an armed conflict between states or nations due to disagreement of political, economic, religious or territorial issues. In human history, there were countless wars which

included both internal war which most people known as civil war and external war which is the conflict between countries. War is the scariest word to citizens in every nation. Whenever people hear this word, three words will pop up in their mind listing terrify, sacrifice, death. War damages communities and families, and it frequently affects the development of nations' social and economic fabric. Long-term physical and psychological trauma to children and adults, as well as a depletion of material and human capital, are all consequences of war.

Arts give meaning to lives and aids understanding of the world. Furthermore, it improves our understanding of emotions, increases our self-awareness, and exposes us to new ideas and experiences. Art can also educate the masses about almost anything. Importantly, arts are also an opponent of mental illness.

## **Causes of War**

Although wars are meaningless to civilians, they are meaningful to political leaders. In the past, to kings, prime ministers, or presidents, they think the only effective way to show off their power and expand their territories is to use military forces invading other countries.[1] The causes of conflict are limitless. Historically, resource competition has been the root cause of many conflicts between nations. Imperialism, the use of sociopolitical military power to dominate a civilization, conflict over territory, religious divides, and nationalism, the nationalistic concept that a nation-state identity exceeds all others in sovereignty.[1] All these motives have traditionally been key motivators for conflicts among countries. The two most major conflicts in modern history, World War I and World War II, were fought over the question of nationalism. Besides WWI and WWII, Cold War, the rivalry between the United State and the Soviet Union, caused many deaths to soldiers and civilians. Even though, Cold War was a

non-violent and ideological geopolitical tension between the US and the Soviet Union, it has led to many small hot wars between their allies such as the Indochina war.

### **Negative Impact of War on Civilians**

One cannot exist in the absence of the other. Although health and peacefulness are desirable circumstances, we humans frequently try our best efforts to obtain and sustain them. Human health suffers greatly as a result of war. In addition to direct consequences, such as the fact that most of the deaths in recent wars were civilians, war has several direct and indirect consequences, such as long-term physical and psychological adverse health effects, damage to culture, infrastructure, displacement of people, environmental destruction, diversion of human, finance crisis and other social issues.[2] All these negative effects will make a tremendous decline in civilian's mind.

### **Negative Impact of war on Soldiers**

Soldiers undergo intense training in preparation for the outbreak of war. They sacrifice all to fight for their nation. When they return from the battle, they are left with sad memories and traumatizing experiences because of their unavoidable circumstances. Combat and its Aftermath examines the primary combat events that are thought to cause stress and psychological dysfunction.

In the movie, Apocalypse now, Captain Benjamin Willard is the main character of the film. From the beginning of the film, captain Willard has shown intoxicating behavior in a hotel room. He rarely takes showers and abuses alcoholic drink in his bed. Until one day when his soldiers came into his room and tell him that he has a mission to do which is to kill Walter E. Kurtz. When he travels along the way on the river to Cambodia to find Kurtz, he saw his soldiers

died one by one and this continuously hurt him so much. His mental health deteriorated and cannot be healed as he cannot escape from this war. Moreover, Colonel Walter E. Kurtz was intensely impacted by his experience in the war. He seems to have a post-traumatic stress disorder. He became mad and kill people very aggressively. He usually locked himself in a dark cave and never met people from the outside world. He utterly understands the war and sees its horror clearly. At the almost end of the film, he mentioned his bad memories about the war to Willard " I watched a snail crawl along the edge of a straight razor. That's my dream. It is my nightmare. Crawling, slithering, along the edge of a straight razor ... and surviving". In addition, Hubert Demarais was a French man who help Willard and his soldiers to have a place to stay for a while. When Willard asked him does he want to go to his home at French? Suddenly he became insane and spoke loudly as a response to Willard. His traumatic experience came from the war that he lost. He lost his family members in war which made him cannot accept the truth when Willard raised that question up.[3]

Tim O'Brien stories are all about lives in war, specifically in Vietnam war. Some American soldiers sacrifice their lives and others are able to return home. However, for those who can go back to their home, we might think that they have the best of luck, but in fact it might be better if they died in war so that they will not heavily suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder. As we can imagine, how hard to handle it is when a picture of our death friends always pop-up in our brains whenever we close our eye? If you can visualize this, you will be able to experience the same hurtful feeling as some characters do in Tim O'Brien's novel. For instance, Tim O'Brien himself is one of the characters in this novel, after returning home, he cannot sleep and live peacefully because he always misses his people who died in the Vietnam war. He said "I keep dreaming Linda alive. And Ted Lavender too, and Kiowa, and Curt Lemon, and a slim

young man I killed, and an old man sprawled beside a pigpen, and several others whose bodies I once lifted and dumped into a truck. They are all dead". In addition, Jimmy Cross is also a victim in this war too. He cannot stop blaming himself from the death of his men because he obsessed with his crush and not focus much on his work as a good commander. He states that "When a man died, there had to be blame. Jimmy Cross understood this. You could blame the war. You could blame the idiots who made the war".[4]

## **War and Trauma**

War will physically and mentally traumatize its victims, and they will have these scars for the rest of their lives. According to studies, the deadliest physical consequences of war include death, injury, sexual assault, famine, sickness, and disability, while the most dangerous mental consequences are post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety. Fear and panic caused by war's violence interrupt people's lives, breaks families apart, and produces emotional agony in both individuals and society. A victim may be triggered by a variety of factors, including noises and pictures from everyday life, the majority of which are accessible in some kind of media. People often turn to hobbies to help them cope with trauma. They can, however, deal with unhealthy coping techniques that serve as a temporary distraction rather than a long-term solution. The trauma within them may easily impact others around them by their behavior, such as employing violence to cope with an issue and even as a form of punishment to their own children. As a result, the child's mental stability suffers, causing them to carry trauma throughout their lives. [5]

## **Trauma and Mental Health**

No one in this universe is brave enough to reveal all their weaknesses. Having trauma also counts as a weakness. And the strengths of trauma are to make people over-worry and feel desperate. They worry about what they said, their actions, and the judgment of others on their behavior. However, they forget one phrase "Nothing to Hide means Nothing to hurt". Overtime, it is like a snowball effect.. When it is big enough, they will have no choice but to arrange a meeting with the Osiris.[6]

In a very bright side, arts are an effective treatment for trauma. However, what happens in people's mind when they hardly overcome their dark side and make a final decision to commit suicide? According to what I have researched, there are a majority numbers of victims who decide to end their life as their bad memories always revise in their head again and again. For example, As I close my eyes and imagine myself as Kurtz (a character in Apocalypse Now), I do not think that I can handle his situation as horror events always stimulate my neurons connection which make those scary events become unforgettable. This experience convinces me to carry out my research to answer my question above and find out the relationship between trauma and suicide. Kurtz is a fictional character, although he does not decide to end his life by himself, at the end of the film he was kill by Willard without fighting back. Normally, everyone in the world wants to wipe out the dreadful memories as much as they can, however it is impossible. Scientifically, the greater in revision time of an event the stronger it is to remember. The main ingredient that causes PTSD or trauma is that the bad memories always revise unconsciously. Over time, our mental health gradually declines like a snowball effect and finally when it is big enough the only solution is to end outlives. Moreover, people with traumatic memories tend to isolate themselves which allows their negative self-talk to come up which also deteriorates their



mind as the time passes by. In summary, I can say the connection between trauma and suicide is very tangible and the only way to cut it off is to heal them as fast as possible.[7]

## **Art and Trauma**

The vast majority of art is visible to our eyes. Arts, on the other hand, are an effective invisible medicine that can be used to clean up the filth in our minds. Treating trauma or PTSD with art therapy addresses the entire trauma experience: mind, body, and emotion. Working with PTSD through art can also turn a terrifying experience that resulted in numerous symptoms into a neutralized story from the past. As we've seen, the arts can take many forms, including literature, painting, drawing, acting, and even singing. For instance, this paper is centered on literature. Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried* demonstrates clearly how the author releases his stress throughout his writing.[8]

What is the emotion that comes right away to your mind when you hear about the word "ART"? Obviously, for all living organisms in the universe, we define art as a positive thing. Have you ever listened to music whenever you are sad? Have you ever been doing stressful work in parallel while listening to music or watching something that you enjoyed? Music, movies, painting, literature, sculpture, architecture, all of these are art which grow flowers in our mind unconsciously whenever we see them and wipe away all the negative thoughts in our mind. The main purpose of composing this paragraph is to reveal how we can use art to heal trauma. As can be noticed, throughout the whole essay, it focuses on trauma which is caused by war or in the modern term, it is called PTSD. According to Kolk, **"No pain is so devastating as the pain a person refuses to face and no suffering is as lasting as suffering left unacknowledged."**[9] As a solution, Kolk also stated that **"Verbalizing the contextual elements of the trauma is the**

**essence of the treatment of acute post-traumatic stress disorder."**[9] As mentioned above, Literature is also a kind of art. Tim O'Brien has authored a book called "The things They Carried". By writing down what he felt and suffered during the Vietnam war, this helped him drastically to cope with his trauma. In the things they carried, O'Brien described all about his awful experiences with his friends in Vietnam War. By writing his hurtful experiences down and filling them with his emotion, this will help him greatly in reducing his stress and overtime he will keep his PTSD in control. For instance, O'Brien tried to relieve his pressure on his imaginary world by recording the facts down onto paper.[10] In addition, there are also other methods which can be used to heal trauma beside narrating a story, such as drawing, painting, acting or even telling story to others by oral expression. According to Shay, he has mentioned that **"Like training for a marathon than a miracle faith healing."**[11] Moreover, a film producer, Francis Coppola noticed the relationship between art and trauma that was caused by war; he produced a film called "Apocalypse Now (1979)". Each scene in this film delivers an insightful meaning of PTSD and the way he translates his message into the film includes both monologue and dialogue which are very effective.[12]

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, war is one of the most scariest things to everyone including veterans and civilians. War cause tremendous damage to environment, culture, infrastructure and almost everything that related to humankind; and these deteriorations are sometimes irreversible which make war even the worst thing in our universe. Although war is ended, the death pictures of friends, family members, wife, husband, girlfriend or boyfriend still stick in the brain of people who survive and these hurtful pictures are extremely hard to erase which lead to trauma or PTSD. The present of art give a bright light to those who suffer in from war trauma. Art consists of variety of forms

and each form of art give each unique beautiful meaning for people to combat with trauma. Arts have no boundaries. It does not matter who you are and where you are, as long as we can see it or hear it, it can convey its meaning to our mind directly and effectively. Tim O'brien's book and Francis Coppola's film are very good examples of how art is used in treating trauma or PTSD. Consequently, this essay also depicts clearly the relationship between trauma and suicide. The way our brains respond to a tragic event is repeated. Although the event ended already, a picture of it can be seen clearly in our brain which is hard to wipe away. Over time, it leads the victims to commit suicide. The keys to take away are the awareness of how arts play a crucial role in treating trauma or PTSD which is caused by war and understanding why people decide to commit suicide so that we can prevent it to happen on time.

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