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Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in Andrea Jeftanovic's *Theatre of War*: A Literary Psychology Study

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ABSTRACT
This study examines the portrayal of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in the character of Tamara in Andrea Jeftanovic's novel *Theatre of War*. Using a literary psychology perspective, this qualitative descriptive research aims to identify the trigger factors of Tamara's PTSD and analyze its impact on her social relationships. The primary data consists of the novel's narrative and dialogue, analyzed through close textual reading with reference to the DSM-5 criteria for PTSD. The analysis reveals three major categories of triggering factors. First, psychological factors include lack of emotional support from family, traumatic parental conflicts, and maternal amnesia that causes identity loss. Second, social factors encompass economic inequality, physical and verbal violence, cultural differences, and sexual harassment. Third, genetic factors involve the inheritance of war trauma from her father, manifesting through intergenerational trauma and behavioral mimicry. The impact of PTSD on Tamara's social relationships is evident in her difficulty building trust, feelings of alienation from family and peers, dissociative behavior, and social withdrawal. Her decision to run away to find her father reflects both a traumatic response and deep loneliness. This study concludes that PTSD in children is a complex condition influenced by the interaction of psychological, social, and genetic factors, and that literature serves as a powerful medium for understanding the multidimensional nature of trauma and its effects on social relationships.

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1. Introduction

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a mental health condition triggered by frightening events and involves strong feelings and thoughts about the trauma. PTSD tends to cause sufferers to feel anxious and fearful when remembering the traumatic event, and can trigger symptoms including flashbacks, nightmares, excessive anxiety, and avoidance of situations reminiscent of the trauma. Traumatic events can trigger a variety of emotional and behavioral responses that significantly impact mental health and well-being.

In Andrea Jeftanovic's novel *Theatre of War*, the character of Tamara portrays an experience highly relevant to the factors of PTSD. Tamara is a child affected by the trauma of war, reflecting how traumatic events can shape personality and behavior. Anxiety symptoms that occur after exposure to a traumatic event create feelings of horror, helplessness, or fear (Erlin & Sari, 2020). Tamara struggles with painful memories and her inability to continue living a normal life. She is often trapped in memories of painful events, resulting in traumatic memories that interfere with daily life and social relationships. These criteria provide evidence of the diagnostic importance of PTSD in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of*

Mental Disorders (DSM-5), which underwent revision in 2013 by the American Psychiatric Association (APA). PTSD is no longer categorized as an anxiety disorder but is classified in a new category: trauma and stress-related disorders.

PTSD from war and displacement has a significant impact on daily life, especially in severely traumatized individuals like Tamara, and can cause psychological disorders that affect one's ability to function normally in society. Tamara, a child victim of war, experiences symptoms such as nightmares, excessive anxiety, and difficulty trusting others. This reflects how past trauma can stay with an individual and affect personal relationships within the family and in society. In the context of society, Tamara's PTSD illustrates how literature can be a medium for understanding traumatic experiences and their impact on everyday life. This impact not only affects Tamara's quality of life individually but also her relationships with others, as she finds it difficult to trust people, feels alienated, and has difficulty forming healthy relationships.

The novel depicts Tamara's struggle with inherited trauma, emotional neglect, and the challenges of growing up in a conflict environment characterized by poverty and environmental and economic instability. It presents some of the internal conflicts that Tamara experiences from the perspective of a child who feels neglected by her family. By exploring Tamara's character through the lens of PTSD, it is possible to see how a child's psychological state is affected when experiencing the same thing in community life. With the war still going on, children are no exception to this trauma, which can contribute to a better understanding of trauma in literature. Research on PTSD in the novel *Theatre of War* provides critical insights into the psychological consequences of war-induced trauma, while ensuring greater awareness and understanding of mental health issues in society.

Several previous studies have examined PTSD in literary works. Azizah (2023) investigated PTSD as a result of childhood trauma experienced by Ellice in *All Her Little Secrets*, emphasizing social and environmental factors that contribute to traumatic childhood experiences. Avinda (2023) analyzed the influence of PTSD on the main character's personality in *Girl Against the Universe* by Paula Stokes using Freudian psychoanalysis, focusing on how traumatic events linger in the victim's subconscious. Surayya (2022) examined PTSD in Kathleen Glasgow's *Girl in Pieces*, explaining the long-lasting effects of childhood trauma that continue into adulthood. These studies demonstrate that PTSD in literature has been approached from various psychological perspectives; however, none has specifically examined the interaction of psychological, social, and genetic factors in a child character affected by war trauma, as this study does.

Based on the background outlined above, this research identifies the following problems: (1) What are the trigger factors for PTSD on Tamara in Andrea Jeftanovic's novel *Theatre of War*? (2) How does Tamara's PTSD affect her social relationships as a result of the trauma she experiences in the novel? In line with these research problems, this study aims to identify the trigger factors for PTSD on Tamara and to analyze how her PTSD affects her social relationships in the novel.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Psychology of Literature

Psychology of Literature is a literary work that is believed to reflect psychiatric processes and activities (Minderop, 2010). In this context, the novel describes how Tamara's mental state as a child experiences PTSD due to the war she experienced and its impact on her social environment. Through the perspective of psychology of literature, we can see Tamara's psychological process and understand that this depiction is not just a fictional narrative but also represents the psychological reality experienced by war victims, especially children.

Andrea Jeftanovic's novel *Theatre of War* chronicles the emotional journey of Tamara, a young child grappling with the psychological repercussions of her traumatic experiences. As

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the daughter of an immigrant from the former Yugoslavia, she is caught up in the psychological fallout from her parents and the conflicts affecting her family. Psychological analysis of Tamara's life reveals a history of stress and trauma, which have had a profound impact on her interactions with others and her behavior as a child, resulting in long-term effects that persist into adulthood. The intersection between literature and psychology is evident in the study of a child's experience of trauma and stress leading to the development of PTSD. Therefore, a psychology of literature approach is considered appropriate to understand the psychological condition and its effects on a child, Tamara, the main character who experiences PTSD in the novel *Theatre of War*. Psychology might be defined as the study of human behavior (Hilgard et al., 1991).

2.2 Mental Disorder

Disorder generally refers to a condition that disrupts a person's normal physical, mental, or emotional functioning. In medical and psychological contexts, it is often associated with a pattern of symptoms that cause dysfunction in underlying psychological, biological, or developmental processes. Disorders are usually associated with distress or impairment in important areas. In this case, a mental disorder is defined as changes in thought patterns and emotions that easily interfere with daily activities due to significant disturbances in the brain. PTSD is a mental disorder condition that often occurs in people living in conflict-affected environments. It can develop after exposure to a highly threatening or terrifying event. PTSD can manifest as avoidance, dissociation, and social withdrawal, behaviors that greatly hinder a person's ability to build healthy relationships. Other factors, such as abuse, poor economic conditions, genetic inheritance, cultural differences, and habits, can also cause a child to feel traumatized and eventually develop PTSD.

Furthermore, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can affect an individual's emotional regulation, cognitive processes, and social interactions. Individuals experiencing PTSD may suffer from recurring distressing memories, nightmares, heightened alertness, difficulty concentrating, and intense emotional reactions to reminders of traumatic experiences. In children, these symptoms may appear through behavioral changes, fear, irritability, difficulty trusting others, or withdrawal from social environments. Such reactions can interfere with their sense of safety and influence their relationships with family members, peers, and other people. However, not every individual exposed to traumatic events develops PTSD, as the severity of symptoms and recovery process may vary depending on personal resilience, environmental conditions, and the availability of social support. Therefore, understanding PTSD requires attention not only to the traumatic experiences themselves but also to their psychological consequences and the social circumstances that influence an individual's ability to cope with trauma.

2.3 Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Trauma in children has serious long-term consequences, including the potential for the development of PTSD (Courtois & Ford, 2009). Childhood trauma can have a profound and lasting impact on mental health, particularly in the form of PTSD. As a child living in an unsafe environment, Tamara often exhibited symptoms such as nightmares, avoidance, and excessive anxiety that interfered with her daily life, including at home and in her social relationships. Trauma factors such as traumatic events, neglect, and her family's genetic factors may have led to the development of PTSD in Tamara. Her upbringing in an environment where her parents had PTSD due to the war had a significant impact, especially the behavior of her father who was still stuck in the war even though the family had migrated to another country not affected by the war. The effects of this PTSD were still passed on from

her parents, exacerbated by the unsafe and tense atmosphere of the home, thus contributing to the psychological development of the child, Tamara.

Tamara experiences PTSD as a result of several psychological, social, and genetic factors. One of the main factors is her traumatic childhood experiences, including violence and loss. According to Barlow (2017), trauma experienced at a young age can disrupt a child's emotional and cognitive development, increasing the risk of PTSD. Tamara witnessed and experienced frightening events, which led to a disturbing sense of alienation and disregard, which is a hallmark of PTSD.

2.4 The Factors of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

According to the National Center for PTSD, anyone at any age can develop PTSD. Several factors can increase the likelihood of someone experiencing PTSD, such as experiencing a traumatic event that is very intense or lasts for a long time. According to psychologists such as Judith Herman in her book *Trauma and Recovery* (1992), events that pose a threat to life or physical integrity can be a major trigger for PTSD. Everyone has triggers for trauma sensitivity based on factors such as genetics, personality, and previous adverse experiences. Family history contributes to a person's vulnerability to PTSD following trauma (Kessler et al., 1995). This vulnerability allows traumatic events to more easily trigger severe PTSD disorders. It also affects the events that shatter the psyche, thus creating an inability to continue living normally.

Yehuda (2007) states that psychological and social factors interact with genetic factors in an individual's life to influence the development of PTSD, indicating a relationship between these factors. Overall, psychological, social, and genetic factors interact to influence the development of PTSD. Therefore, it is important to understand how these three factors contribute to Tamara's experience of PTSD in the novel in order to help minimize the negative effects. In the novel *Theatre of War*, Tamara's journey illustrates the complexity of the recovery process, which is not only dependent on her personal psychological issues but also heavily influenced by the social environment and family harmony surrounding her traumatic experience. Evans et al. (2013) suggest that support from family and friends may be protective against the development of PTSD following a traumatic event.

2.5 Psychological Factors

Any individual who experiences a traumatic event over a long period of time can influence the development of PTSD, which is closely related to psychological factors (Ehlers & Clark, 2000). Psychological factors include self-defense mechanisms in which memories of the traumatic experience persist and interfere with the individual's ability to move on. This can lead to symptoms such as flashbacks, nightmares, and persistent anxiety. Personal factors such as previous exposure to trauma, age, and gender can influence whether an individual will experience PTSD. Post-traumatic events are also important, and stress is the leading cause of PTSD. An important psychological factor is the coping strategy used by Tamara. Coping strategies are efforts a person makes to manage stressful or threatening situations by changing behavior or understanding through thoughts, experiences, and senses. The goal is to reduce or eliminate stress and gain a sense of safety. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1985), individuals experiencing stress can use coping strategies to deal with stressful situations. Tamara's inability to cope with feelings of anxiety and fear is the source of her repetitive cycle of trauma, which exacerbates her PTSD symptoms.

2.5.1 Social Factors

Tamara's character may have experienced the effects of a lack of social support, resulting in her inability to cope with the trauma she experienced. The combination of childhood trauma and stress can carry over into adulthood, even if left unconsciously. In this

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novel, the tense and violent social context creates an unsafe atmosphere for Tamara that exacerbates the effects of her trauma. Brewin et al. (2009) explain that low social support can exacerbate PTSD symptoms. Lack of social support can exacerbate PTSD symptoms and complicate Tamara's recovery process. Without adequate social support, individuals tend to feel isolated and find it more difficult to cope with PTSD symptoms. The long-term effects of PTSD on a child's social relationships include difficulties in building trust. Traumatized children tend to be more wary of others and have difficulty opening up to friends or adults around them. This could affect Tamara's ability to form strong, healthy attachments in the future.

2.5.2 Genetic Factors

Genetic factors play a significant role in the development of PTSD, as individuals with a family history of mental disorders, such as anxiety and depression, have a higher risk of developing PTSD. Individuals with imbalanced levels of stress hormones, such as cortisol and adrenaline, are more susceptible to PTSD. These hormones play a role in the "fight or flight" response to stressful situations. Genetic factors can be passed from parent to child. A study by Gelernter (2015) found that genetic variations in genes involved in stress response may increase the risk of PTSD. This suggests that individuals with certain genetic variants may be more susceptible to the negative effects of traumatic experiences. Traumatic experiences experienced by parents can leave chemical marks on genes that can affect subsequent generations. This process is known as DNA methylation, where changes in the DNA structure can be passed on to the next generation. Children with a family history of stress and trauma may be at greater risk of developing similar disorders; for example, children born to parents who have experienced severe trauma, such as war, are more likely to exhibit anxiety and depression. Genetics can influence how children respond to their environment, and if they inherit genetic vulnerabilities from their parents, they are more susceptible to the negative effects of an unsupportive environment.

2.6 The Impact of PTSD on Social Relationships

PTSD can have a significant impact on the social relationships of children, including Tamara in Andrea Jeftanovic's novel *Theatre of War*. Between the ages of 5 and 13, children like Tamara are at a crucial stage of development when social relationships and interactions with peers and family are very important. When a child experiences PTSD, it can interfere with their ability to form and maintain healthy relationships, which in turn can affect their emotional and psychological well-being. One of the major effects of PTSD on social relationships is the child's tendency to become alienated or withdrawn from others. According to Garcia (2021), children who experience PTSD may show distrust of others, which can hinder the formation of social bonds. Children with PTSD often have difficulty expressing emotions, are confused, and feel uncomfortable in social situations. In Tamara's case, her inability to interact with peers can lead to loneliness and dissatisfaction in her social relationships.

Tensions in the family worsened over time and communication between Tamara and her parents suffered. Neither parent understood or supported her in an appropriate way, which could worsen her mental state and the development of social interactions, such as the ability to socialize, communicate, and resolve conflicts. The stressful environment at home may cause Tamara to blame herself for the family's problems, making her feel responsible for the circumstances. This can lead to feelings of guilt and shame, further exacerbating her mental health. Relationships with close relatives and intimate partners are often especially difficult and conflicted after the traumatic event (Cook et al., 2004).

PTSD in children like Tamara can have a significant impact on relationships, as the trauma causes emotional withdrawal, difficulty trusting others, and increased anxiety, which can create barriers to forming secure attachments and maintaining healthy interactions with those around them. The lack of effective ways to communicate and the poor condition of Tamara's home made it difficult for her to communicate with other family members. As a result, relationships that should have provided comfort and security became an additional source of stress and confusion for Tamara, complicating her social relationships.

3. Research Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design with a literary psychology approach. The qualitative method was chosen because it allows for an in-depth understanding of Tamara's experiences and perspectives as a child, particularly how PTSD is portrayed in the novel. Through literary psychology, the researcher analyzed Tamara's narrative and dialogue to reveal the psychological dimensions of her character, treating the literary work as a medium to explore the meaning and context of the phenomenon under study. A well-structured design is essential to obtain valid and reliable evidence to logically answer the research problems (Trochim, 2001).

Data collection involved library research using documentation techniques. The primary data source was the novel *Theatre of War* by Andrea Jeftanovic (2020), while secondary data included books, journals, articles, and other sources related to PTSD, literary psychology, and trauma studies. The data were collected by reading the novel thoroughly to identify narratives and dialogues related to Tamara's PTSD, analyzing how PTSD is portrayed and how it affects her character, and gathering supporting data from relevant literature. Data analysis was conducted qualitatively through four steps: identifying narratives and dialogues that depict Tamara's PTSD, classifying the data into psychological, social, and genetic factors as well as their impact on social relationships, interpreting the data using literary psychology theory and DSM-5 criteria for PTSD, and drawing conclusions based on the analysis. This process allowed the researcher to identify patterns, relationships, and deep meanings in the data, leading to a more complete understanding of the topic under study (Creswell, 2007).

4. Discussion

The analysis is organized into two main sections corresponding to the two research questions. The first section identifies and classifies the trigger factors of Tamara's PTSD, examining psychological, social, and genetic factors that contribute to her condition. The second section analyzes the impact of PTSD on Tamara's social relationships, exploring how her trauma affects her ability to build trust, communicate, and maintain healthy relationships with family members and peers. Throughout the analysis, the novel's narrative and dialogue are treated as primary data and examined with reference to the DSM-5 criteria for PTSD and relevant psychological theories. The findings demonstrate that Tamara's PTSD is a complex condition resulting from the interaction of multiple factors, and that her trauma significantly impairs her social functioning, leading to isolation, alienation, and difficulty forming secure attachments.

4.1 The Factors of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

4.1.1 *Psychological Factors*

Psychological factors that can trigger PTSD in children include a lack of emotional support from family members, traumatic experiences such as physical or sexual abuse, and unsafe environmental conditions. Children who have experienced previous trauma or have a family history of mental illness are also at a higher risk. In Andrea Jeftanovic's novel *Theatre of War*, the character of Tamara exhibits symptoms of PTSD, indicating the deep

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psychological factors of war and family disintegration from the psychology of literature perspective. The explanation for her mental disorder can also be seen through the narration and dialogue in the novel that reflects her psychological journey, and how these factors affect her life as a child living in an unsupportive environment.

The following quotation shows Tamara and her siblings experiencing psychological effects from their parents' quarrels:

> We're a captive audience. Our parents learned the art of performance on another continent. The showing begins after midnight. Dad is always delayed by his memories of the war. The show continues backstage. Lying in our beds, we hear Mum's shouts, Dad's hoarse exclamations. The rattle of drawers opening and closing. The floor shakes, they race around their bedroom, dented voices shuddering the walls. The foundation trembles. A movement that opens a chasm between us and within each of us. We don't want to listen to any more. We pull our wool blankets tight around our heads until we can no longer hear; our cheeks burn, our eyes fill with fluff (Jeftanovic, 2020: 16).

This section portrays a family atmosphere disrupted by the father's war-related trauma. Sounds of the parents screaming and drawers opening and closing create an eerie atmosphere that triggers deep anxiety and fear. The focal point of the performance is the violent nightly arguments between the parents. Caught up in the emotional performance staged by their parents, Tamara, her older sister, and brother witnessed the tension and conflict between mother and father. Sounds of slamming cupboards, shaking floors, and banging on walls depict physical violence and emotional turmoil that undermine family harmony. This illustrates that Tamara is affected not only by her father's trauma but also by the deep psychological impact of PTSD. Thus, this narrative illustrates how PTSD destroys not only the individual experiencing it but also takes away the entire family's sense of security and stability.

> Dad is still thinking about the war. He prohibits me from reading history books and scribbles a year on his legs. I record the same date like a tattoo on my brain. One day he discovers the encyclopaedia I have hidden under my bed and says nothing. I keep searching, getting lost in other books. I run my fingertips over the drawing of that continent and I stick pins into the cities I'll visit someday. A stain on the centre of a world map. I never knew if we were from here or from there. So I founded my own country in a blue notebook where I'm not a minority. Mum and Dad want me to be ignorant. They don't want me to study, to read so much. They say that just a few words are enough; that history is for those who have no present. I copy paragraphs from books, dates, heroic figures. I witness events I wasn't present for (Jeftanovic, 2020: 18).

In the data above, Tamara mentions that her father forbade her from reading history books, which reflects the impact of his trauma. He wanted to protect her from painful memories of the war. Tamara recalls the date scribbled on her father's leg and uses books and writing to try to understand the world around her. She seeks answers to many unanswered questions and escapes from the harsh reality of the conflict area. However, her parents wanted to keep her ignorant. They limited the knowledge of history and neglected her in an environment of tension and trauma, which exacerbated her PTSD symptoms.

> It's my parents' wedding anniversary. Mum refuses to open the present Dad has bought her. I lock myself in my room and turn the music up loud so I won't hear the shouting that reverberates through the house. The shouting absorbed by the walls, the beams, the windows. We all want this day to end. We're unable to face each other at the table. Everyone eats in their room or is mysteriously absent. I know that tonight, once again, I'll hear races in the dark, slammed doors, drawers opening and closing. In the morning, we won't see any crumpled wrapping paper, just broken dishes and a wine stain on the rug. On that date, Mum's shouting starts and ends the day (Jeftanovic, 2020: 35).

Based on the data above, the atmosphere at Tamara's parents' wedding anniversary was tense. There was shouting, and Tamara isolated herself in her own room and played loud music to avoid the conflict. This behavior reflects avoidance, a feature of PTSD, where a person tries to stay away from trauma triggers. After the argument, all family members began avoiding each other at mealtimes until they disappeared. Communication was disrupted by the emotional tension in the house. Even at night, the argument continued, leaving broken items and stains scattered on the floor in the morning. Mum's repeated screaming from morning to night and her family's lack of emotional support contributed to Tamara's development of PTSD symptoms. She was trapped in a cycle of fear and anxiety related to her unstable home environment. Overall, the text depicts a family in crisis. Tension and disharmony in the parental relationship negatively affect the child.

> She stares, she doesn't recognise me, she drinks all the water in one long sip. Her eyes close, she falls back into sleep. I rush out of the room, desperate to find the nurse. For a moment I think that Mum has died. The doctor explains that she's getting better, but doesn't remember the last fifteen years. I don't figure in her memory; I've been pushed out of her mind (Jeftanovic, 2020: 43).

On the data above, the sight of the mother not recognizing Tamara as her child triggers a sense of identity loss and alienation. The mother's inability to remember the past fifteen years, including Tamara's existence, creates deep emotional shock. Additionally, rushing to find a nurse demonstrates impulsivity and high anxiety, which are common reactions to situations reminiscent of trauma. Although the doctor stated that her mother's physical condition was improving, her amnesia became a new source of trauma for Tamara. Uncertainty about her mother's condition and feeling disconnected from Tamara's memories can exacerbate emotional stress, creating an ongoing cycle of fear and anxiety that are symptoms of PTSD. Trauma does not always stem from violence; loss of recognition from loved ones can also trigger PTSD by undermining a sense of security and self-identity.

a. Social Factors

Social factors are often triggered by poor interactions and traumatic conditions in a person's social environment, which exacerbates the impact of trauma. These factors include direct social traumas such as bullying, discrimination, racism, economic inequality, and social isolation from family or friends. These factors threaten a person's sense of safety, self-worth, and belonging. They can trigger or exacerbate PTSD symptoms by creating an environment that hinders recovery. This environment can become a source of chronic stress or re-traumatization.

> It's December. The neighbourhood kids are out on the streets with their new things: aluminium bikes, stylish clothes, battery-powered toys. I feel a

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> sudden fire in the pit of my stomach. The metallic spokes rotate around the twenty-four-inch wheels. They ask about my presents; I don't know what to say. I don't have any new toys to show off. They surround me and ask why my parents talk so strangely, where their accent is from, if I've been to their country. As they interrogate me, the world spins, like when I look at the bike tyres whirling around the axle spun by the gear. I hear laughter and more laughter. Their bodies rise over their bicycle seats; they pedal fast but don't move away. They ring their bells. Ring ring. Their laughing on the air as they turn the corner. I'm standing in the middle of the street, my shadow thrown over the pavement and part of the wall. I watch myself moving endlessly over a conveyor belt. My feet tire from this lonely treadmill race (Jeftanovic, 2020: 19).

In the data above, Tamara experiences several social factors as the situation she is facing creates deep anxiety. As the children around her play with new items and inquire about the gifts she has, Tamara feels confused and has no answers due to their impoverished family circumstances, which suggests a feeling of economic inequality. In addition, their questions about her parents and different accents reinforced feelings of not being accepted or considered foreign in her environment. Tamara's physical reactions such as abdominal heat, a spinning world, and images of herself falling on the sidewalk and against the wall indicate an acute stress response, due to the inability to participate in social interactions among children her age. These social factors of teasing, questions attacking identity and family background, and adverse social comparisons created a very painful experience for Tamara. Feelings of shame, humiliation, and being different imposed by her social environment can be a major stressor.

In addition to feeling alienated and different from the children in the neighborhood, Tamara also experienced physical violence from her mother at home:

> ... I notice that she looks at him with distrust, with rage in her eyes, with her nostrils flared. She insists we're both useless, good-for-nothings, disasters. She grabs my hair and pulls at the tangles. She shakes me by my sailor suit until the sleeves are deformed. She tells me again and again that I'm hopeless. I can't stand it anymore, I break down in tears. Hoarse sounds erupt from my throat (Jeftanovic, 2020: 35).

Social factors do not only occur outside the home; in fact, the family home is often the main trigger for Tamara's PTSD because physical violence in this environment can create deep emotional trauma. The data above shows that the mother's anger, as well as her demeaning words, created an atmosphere filled with tension and insecurity. Such aggressive treatment involves not only physical abuse, such as pulling a child's hair and shaking their body, but also verbal degradation, such as calling the child and their father useless and hopeless. Such statements cause physical pain and erode the child's self-esteem and confidence. The absence of support from the father exacerbates the situation, as the child has no protective figure to provide a sense of security. The combination of physical abuse, emotional neglect, and an unsupportive social environment puts the child under stress, worsening Tamara's mental state and becoming a major trigger for PTSD.

Apart from the physical violence she experienced, Tamara was also sexually harassed by an adult. This was influenced by her poor social environment, as seen in the data below:

> He doesn't say anything, just brushes the shoulders of his jacket. He looks at me through the thin strip between the maroon liquid and the edge of the glass. Then he tilts the glass and takes a long drink in thick noisy gulps. I sit

> with my legs pressed together, staring at the floor, and start to wiggle my toes inside my shoes. He sets the glass on the table and wipes his mouth with the back of his hand. He grabs me by the waist and I smell his vinegar breath, then feel his rough hands moving up my legs. The wine spills onto the floor. He explores me with urgency, whispering words in my ear, making way for himself inside me. He hooks my heels over his shoulders. Suspended in mid-air from the impact. I press my tongue to the roof of my mouth, I don't say what I want to say (Jeftanovic, 2020: 54).

As a minor, Tamara was traumatized by sexual harassment, which disrupted her sense of security. The debt collector used his economic and physical dominance to sexually abuse Tamara, creating an unequal power dynamic that she was unable to resist or fight back against. Her inability to express feelings reflected the social pressures that forced her to keep her suffering to herself. This was also influenced by her family's poor economic circumstances, which left her unable to defend herself and made her feel inferior due to economic inequality. The victim's young age magnifies the trauma's impact, as the absence of adequate social and psychological support can turn this abuse experience into a permanently embedded traumatic memory, contributing directly to PTSD development.

b. Genetic Factors

Genetic factors refer to the role of genetic variations that may influence a person's susceptibility to developing PTSD after experiencing trauma. The relationship between genetic factors and PTSD is complex, involving an interaction between genes and environment. Traumatic environments, such as parental fighting or poor parenting, can influence the impact that trauma has on an individual. If a parent has a history of PTSD, depression, or anxiety disorders, the child may inherit genes that make them more sensitive to stress or trauma. This can be seen in the quotation below:

> I'm the same age as Dad. He's stuck at age nine, which was how old he was when the war began. I don't want to get any older either. I want to stay with him in his nine-year-old sadness. Dad sleeps with the light on just like me. In the darkness, he says, the black trees might creep in. Dad is frightened by the siren at midday, when a moustached officer greets him with an outstretched arm. Dad is a six-foot-tall child, size xl, with wrinkled sleeves. I am the same age as Dad. Just that he's turned the same age several times (Jeftanovic, 2020: 11).

In the quotation above, genetic factors can contribute to a child's risk of developing PTSD, especially if the father experienced trauma. The father experienced childhood trauma at age nine due to war; he can pass on genetic variations that make his child more susceptible to PTSD. Additionally, the father's behavior, such as sleeping with the lights on and being afraid of sirens, reflects the impact of trauma that affects not only him but also creates a tense environment for the child. As a result, the child, now nine years old, exhibits similar symptoms to those experienced by her father when he was the same age. This trauma continues into adulthood. Growing up in an environment influenced by her father's trauma caused Tamara to mimic his behavior. Additionally, her genetics made her more susceptible to experiencing similar trauma responses when faced with stressful triggers or environments. This suggests that the interaction between genetic factors and environmental influences can amplify the risk of developing PTSD in children.

> He avoids me during those days. But his eloquent silence transmits his message. I don't want any blood in this house. My body doesn't listen. It

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> continues to erode. This is why I didn't want to grow up, why I wanted to stop at age nine. I feel bad, afraid of the lurking haemorrhage. Then the date comes, and the spring bubbles up from my body for no reason, weighing me down with the anguish of another time. And his first bounces off the dining room tablecloth (Jeftanovic, 2020: 23).

The father's PTSD from the war caused Tamara to develop a deep anxiety and aversion to blood. Traumatic experiences related to violence and death made him highly sensitive to blood, as it reminded him of painful memories from the past. She sees her father avoiding her and senses the emotional tension at home. This shaped her perception that menstruation is dangerous and unwanted. As a result, she felt anxious about her first period. This situation illustrates how PTSD can create intergenerational trauma that is passed down genetically. Tamara's father's aversion to blood could have been perceived as a normal part of puberty. As a result, Tamara lost a healthy understanding of menstruation and developed chronic anxiety about her body and her growing womanhood. Thus, her father's trauma affected not only himself but also Tamara's mental and emotional health.

> I feel our lives filling with warped dates, incidents we all regret having experienced. We're trapped in the contradiction between wanting to be apart and not being able to separate. When Mum gets angry at me she says I'm just like Dad, that we're exactly the same, that marrying him has been her greatest misfortune. I don't know what to say. It's her against Dad and me; we form two separate factions (Jeftanovic, 2020: 35).

Genetic factors can emerge in children in the context of these data through two main mechanisms: inheritance of biological vulnerabilities and interaction with traumatic environments. If one parent has a genetic predisposition to stress, the child may inherit the genetic vulnerability, making her more susceptible to excessive fear, difficulty controlling emotions, or retaining traumatic memories. In the excerpt, the mother's constant comparison of Tamara to her father indirectly highlights behavioral or emotional patterns that may be genetically inherited. The conflictual family environment of her mother's repeated insults and abuse, compounded by a genetic susceptibility to trauma, is already present. Thus, the interaction between the genetic inheritance from the father and the traumatic environment from the mother increases the risk of the child developing PTSD in the future.

4.2 The Impact of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder on Tamara's Social Relationships

Tamara's PTSD significantly impairs her social relationships. She feels alienated from her social environment and has difficulty trusting others, which contributes to her isolation. Cultural differences and her hard-to-pronounce surname intensify her sense of being an outsider. She exhibits dissociative behavior, mentally escaping reality during class or while reading, and desires to hide under tables or in closets to avoid a threatening world. Within her family, she feels like an outsider after her parents' divorce, with unclear boundaries and distant relationships with her siblings. Her inability to share feelings further deteriorates her social bonds. Ultimately, she decides to run away to find her father without informing anyone—a traumatic response reflecting her deep loneliness and neglect. This act shows how disconnected she is from her family and why she seeks safety elsewhere.

4.3 Findings

The analysis yields the following findings:

1. PTSD is not only experienced by adults; it can also occur in children like Tamara, and is influenced by complex factors that significantly affect their lives.
2. Psychological factors triggering Tamara's PTSD include lack of emotional support, traumatic parental arguments, family disintegration, and maternal amnesia leading to identity loss.
3. Social factors include economic inequality, discrimination, physical and verbal violence, cultural differences, and sexual harassment, all of which create an unsafe environment.
4. Genetic factors contribute to Tamara's vulnerability through intergenerational trauma inherited from her father, affecting her perception of menstruation and amplifying her anxiety.
5. PTSD impacts Tamara's social relationships by causing difficulty in establishing and maintaining trust, creating distance from family and peers, and leading to alienation, dissociation, and social withdrawal.
6. The unsupportive environment and neglect Tamara experienced, especially after her parents' divorce and her mother's illness, exacerbated her PTSD, evident in her decision to run away to find her father.

5. Conclusion

This study examined the portrayal of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in Tamara, a character in Andrea Jeftanovic's Theatre of War, through a literary psychology perspective. The findings reveal that Tamara's PTSD is influenced by three interacting categories of factors: psychological, social, and genetic. Psychological factors include a lack of family emotional support, parental conflicts, and maternal amnesia that contributes to identity loss. Social factors involve economic inequality, physical and verbal violence, cultural differences, and sexual harassment, while genetic factors are reflected in the intergenerational transmission of war-related trauma, behavioral mimicry, and heightened stress sensitivity. These findings demonstrate that childhood PTSD is a complex condition shaped by the interaction of traumatic experiences, family dynamics, and broader social circumstances rather than a single cause.

Furthermore, the study finds that PTSD significantly affects Tamara's social relationships, as evidenced by her difficulty trusting others, feelings of alienation, dissociative behavior, and social withdrawal. Her relationships with her parents, siblings, and peers are characterized by emotional distance, miscommunication, and tension, while her decision to run away to find her father reflects her loneliness and feelings of neglect. In conclusion, Theatre of War illustrates how war-related trauma can influence a child's psychological development, identity formation, and social functioning across generations. Through Tamara's experiences, the novel highlights the multidimensional nature of trauma and its consequences for interpersonal relationships, demonstrating the value of literary psychology in exploring the complex connections between traumatic experiences and human behavior.

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