



# An Analysis of the Effects of Post-War Traumatic Stress in the Lives of Soldiers and Civilians in David Grossman's *To the End of the Land*

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## Abstract

War, the humungous destroyer of humanity, leaves a dreadful mark on the hearts of individuals. The people who are mostly affected by it: Soldiers, and civilians who see it with their naked eye. During War, cities are bombarded continuously, while captured soldiers are tormented physically and mentally. The paper brings out the Physiological and Psychological trauma faced by individuals who have experienced war. It analyses David Grossman's *To The End of The Land*, and studies its characters that face the Post-war trauma, chiefly trauma present in the lives of soldiers and their relations. The novel is set in the country of Israel, so it focuses on Israelis and the struggles they face. The researcher has employed the Trauma theory of Judith Herman to study the Post-traumatic effects of war in the lives of soldiers and employed the Trauma Theory of Foa and Kozak to study the post-traumatic effects of war in civilians who experience bombings every day. By the application of the Theory, the researcher would study the effects of War and how it affects the physical and mental health of individuals. The paper is a theoretical study of War and its Post-traumatic effects in Israeli Society.

**Keywords:** post-trauma, trauma, post-war stress, PTSD.

War is a species in the genus of violence; more specifically, it is collective, direct, manifest, personal, intentional, organised, institutionalised, instrumental, sanctioned, and sometimes ritualised and regulated violence. These distinguishing features and dimensional delineations are not limiting. It should be perfectly clear; however, that war, or the state of belligerence, is a very special category of violence (Johan M.G. van der Dennen). War is a

conflict, acute, organized, unified and concentrated at the peripheries of a society's habitat. (Kallen, 1939). It has been used to settle disputes, to uphold rights, to remedy wrongs: and these are surely functions which must be served... One may say, without exaggeration, that no more stupid, brutal, wasteful or unfair method could ever have been imagined for such purposes, but this does not alter the situation (OLALERE, Kunle Oluwafemi).



War causes several damages to Society and the people who live in it. The effects of war are present in the minds of individuals for many years. It leaves an etched mark in their minds and their lives. The relationship between participants' individual experiences of war, the collective narratives about the war permitted by a participant society and the long-term psychological consequences of such a war seems to be a complex one (Davies, 99). War leaves a lifelong injury in the hearts of civilians and Soldiers alike. A fear starts reigning in their hearts, and they see every event in their life in the light of the dreadful war. They isolate themselves and harm themselves due to the trauma present in their minds.

PTSD is a complex disorder consisting of three sets of symptoms: intrusion (e.g., nightmares and recollections of the traumatic event), avoidance (e.g., emotional withdrawal, detachment, and loss of interest in previously enjoyed activities) and hyper-arousal (e.g., startle reaction, concentration, sleep difficulties and irritability) (Dekel et al. 498). These are present in all the Soldiers and Civilians who are part of a war atmosphere. The paper's sole motive is to study the post-traumatic effects on the lives of the Israeli people. Israel and War are inseparable. The country has faced a lot of wars since its origin. Thus, PTSD is present in large quantities in Israeli Citizens. The paper studies the effects of War in the minds of individuals through Fiction, as Literature is the mirror of life. Israeli authors like Amos Oz, Ron Leshem, A.B. Yehoshua, David Grossman, etc have given detailed accounts of the war's impact on Israeli Society.

David Grossman (Grossman), born in Jerusalem in 1954, is an Israeli novelist, journalist and children's story writer, who has examined in some of his works Jewish-Palestinian relations in the territories. Grossman received the Israel Prize in 2004 for his special contribution to society and the State of Israel. Politically a liberal, Grossman resigned in 1988 from his radio post to protest journalistic restrictions. In the same year, Grossman received the Har Zion Prize in recognition of his efforts to enhance peace and understanding between

Arabs and Jews. More recently, he experienced personal tragedy when his son, Uri, fell in the Second Lebanon War (Shoenfeld and Strous 197).

His famous works are *The Smile of the Lamb* (1990), *See Under: Love* (1989), *To the End of The Land* (2010), *The Yellow Wind* (1988).

*To the End of the Land* (TTEOTL) was published originally in Hebrew as *Isha Borachat Mibsorain* in 2008. The English version was translated by Jessica Cohen and was published in 2010. It was nominated for the 2010 National Book Critics Circle Award for Fiction and won the 2011 JQ Wingate Prize. Its French translation, *Une femme fuyant l'annonce*, won the 2011 Prix Médicis étranger award for the best book published that year in translation. In TTEOTL, Grossman talks about the post-traumatic effects of War in the lives, especially in the minds of Israeli citizens, through his wonderful characterisation and settings. The paper studies the post-traumatic effects in the lives of Israeli citizens through Grossman's TTEOTL.

Soldiers who fight in war face a lot of post-traumatic effects. Captors often go to great lengths to break the captive's spirit, utilising multiple assaults on the individual's physical and mental integrity, including torture, humiliation, deprivation, solitary confinement, and capricious cruelty. Studies consistently reveal that ex-POWs exhibit worse Post-traumatic stress symptoms (PTSS) and PTSD than non-captive combat veterans (Stein et al. 2). Grossman brought out the post-traumatic effects of war in TTEOTL through the character of Avram. He was one of the main protagonists and was a friend of Ilan and Ora. They met during the Six-Day War, where they were sick in a Hospital under the care of an Arab nurse. When Avram grew up, he was recruited for the Yom Kippur War. Uri Bar Joseph says this about Yom Kippur War in *Israel Studies: an Anthology*, "The Yom Kippur War is the most traumatic event in Israel's short, modern history. The Egyptian-Syrian attack that started on the Jewish people's holiest day of the year almost completely surprised the State of Israel. Within a few hours, the Arab armies broke the IDF defence lines along the



Suez Canal and in the southern sector of the Golan Heights.” (1).

Judith Herman, in her notable work, *Trauma and Recovery*, talks about the severity of Traumatic events as thus:

The severity of traumatic events cannot be measured on any single dimension; simplistic efforts to quantify trauma ultimately lead to meaningless comparisons of horror. Nevertheless, certain identifiable experiences increase the likelihood of harm. These include being taken by surprise, trapped, or exposed to the point of exhaustion. The likelihood of harm is also increased when the traumatic events include physical violation or injury, exposure to extreme violence, or witnessing grotesque death. In each instance, the salient characteristic of the traumatic event is its power to inspire helplessness and terror. (24)

Judith Herman’s words are echoed by Grossman in the character of Avram. He was a POW during the Yom Kippur War. He was the only survivor of his stronghold. He was tortured a lot by the Egyptian Soldiers. The torture led to his Post-Traumatic stress. Whenever something happened in his life that was similar to his abuse, the trauma-inducing thoughts would linger in his mind. When Ora, the female protagonist, dug into the ground and hid her face in the ground, Avram’s mind recalled his Traumatic Experience in Egypt. Grossman brings out the traumatic memory related to ground and dirt in *TTEOTL*, as such,

He knew the taste of dirt in his eyes and suffocation in his nose and the sting of clods thrown from above... Three times already they’d made him dig his own grave,... when they tied his hands behind his back and shackled his feet and pushed him inside and told him to lie there without moving... another stage in torture, but that they were doing it, burying him alive. (160-161)

This experience of Avram clearly shows the gruesome experience of soldiers in war. Dekel et al discuss the sufferings of post-war veterans as follows:

The literature consistently reports that men with PTSD often lose some of their sexual drive and have difficulties with sexual functioning. Moreover, they tend toward emotional numbing and withdrawal, and they are prone to outbursts of verbal and sometimes physical aggressive behaviours. In addition, symptoms of PTSD such as intrusive thoughts, lack of sleep or sleep difficulties, and recurrent nightmares tend to impair the individual’s abilities for intimate expression and self-disclosure, inhibit sexual satisfaction, and heighten the tendency to engage in conflict with one’s partner (506).

As spoken about by Dekel et al, Avram had lost his sexual drive and explained to Ora that though he had tried with different women, he had lost his affinity completely. Grossman brings out Avram’s words on his dissatisfaction with sexual life in *TTEOTL* as thus, “Ever since I got back, I’m this way. Can’t do it”... “I can’t get it up, Ora... I can’t come” (221-222). When Ora became pregnant with Avram’s child, he considered the pregnancy a mistake and wanted her to abort her child. The hardships he faced during his abuse in Egypt changed the once fun-loving and emotional Avram into a stone-cold man who was unable to embrace his child and dreaded sexual life. He never got to know his son and was paralysed by his thoughts.

Judith Herman says in *Trauma and Recovery*, “TRAUMATIC EVENTS CALL INTO QUESTION basic human relationships. They breach the attachments of family, friendship, love, and community. They shatter the construction of the self that is formed and sustained in relation to others. They undermine the belief systems that give meaning to human experience.” (37). As per Herman’s words, Avram isolated himself in the Tel Aviv apartment. He never met with his friends Ilan and Ora. They never knew anything about his existence. Isolation is the method used by every traumatised person. Avram began to consume drugs and medicines to help him sleep at night. Ora found Avram in such a state, years later, when she planned to take him on a trip to Galilee. That event was nearly eighteen years after the Yom Kippur War, but still the trauma lingered in his mind, and he was taking steps to forget it.



Judith Herman says in *Trauma and Recovery*, “The victim retains the dehumanised identity of a captive who has been reduced to the level of elemental survival: the robot, animal, or vegetable” (68). This was the condition of Avram when he was brought back from the Yom Kippur War on a Stretcher. Grossman brings out his undesirable condition through Ora’s eyes in *TTEOTL*, as such,

She saw a large, round head, undoubtedly Avram’s, rocking this way and that, covered with an oxygen mask. He was bald, and the top of his head was shaved and partly damaged... His chest, stomach, and shoulders were covered with open, infected ulcers, deep gashes, bruises, and strange, lipped cuts... “Open fracture, dry blow, cut, edema, whipping, electrical, compression, burn, rope, infection... He (doctor) and the nurse turned Avram over and exposed his back... a lump of raw flesh bubbling in red, yellow and purple. (343-344)

The above-mentioned words depict the wounds that Avram had suffered during the Yom Kippur War. The pain of Avram annotates the suffering of every soldier who goes to. Avram’s traumatic memories expressed his pain and the painful deaths of all the soldiers who were taken in as POWs. This is a complete account of the Post-Traumatic stress experienced by Soldiers during War.

An obvious way to access a fear memory is confrontation with an actual feared situation (Foa and Kozak 25). According to Foa and Kozak’s words, some fearful event echoes a trauma of their own. Civilians who witness a bomb blast often fear, which becomes a trauma. In countries like Israel, there are frequent bomb blasts. They occur randomly in so many places. Fear of violence is an important result in its own right, as it affects quality of life in multiple ways. As a form of chronic stress, fear of violence might also be a key mechanism that affects other mental and physical health outcomes during and post-conflict, including PTSD, depression, and anxiety (Williams et al. 2). Grossman talks about violence throughout *TTEOTL*. He brings out the fear of Terrorism in *TTEOTL*, where civilians constantly

fear war and bombing. Their conversations are often coloured with elements of War. This is brought out when Ora and her family members dine at a restaurant, but instead of normal conversations, they talk about War casually. It is brought out by Grossman as such in *TTEOTL*: “Ofer told them casually that the suicide bomber who had blown himself up two weeks earlier at the Central bus station in Tel Aviv, killing four civilians”(441). This conversation clearly shows that bombing happened naturally around Israel, and along with it, it took away the lives of innocent Civilians.

Grossman brings out another incident from *TTEOTL*, where a bomb blast had taken place near a bus depot. The people had all panicked and run away along the road. A few days after the event, when a bus crossed the same area, the civilians expressed the same fear, and it was roused to a higher level when a child’s balloon popped, reminding them of the sound of the bomb blast. Grossman brings out the fear of the civilians as such,

A group of kindergarten children got on the bus in Beit HaKerem, and a few of them were holding colourful balloons. When one inevitably popped, although everyone could see it was a balloon, a bitter screech of panic pierced the bus, and a few children burst into tears. The passengers, ashamed and exhausted, avoided one another’s eyes. (545)

This incident portrays the trauma present in the minds of the Israeli civilians regarding bomb blasts. It had become a crucial part of their society, and thus they are traumatised to a higher level.

Thus, through the paper, the researcher has brought out how post-traumatic stress is present in the minds of civilians and soldiers alike during and post-war. *TTEOTL*, by Grossman, wonderfully portrays how that trauma affects their day-to-day activities like parenting and having relationships, and how the soldiers opt to isolate themselves and lose connection with society.



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