

Colonial Trauma, State Violence, and the Ethics of Witnessing: A Postcolonial Trauma Reading of Mohammed Hanif's *Rebel English Academy* through Stef Craps' Theory

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Abstract

This article examines Mohammed Hanif's *Rebel English Academy* through the lens of Stef Craps' postcolonial trauma theory, arguing that the novel redefines trauma as a collective and historically embedded experience rooted in colonial legacies and perpetuated by postcolonial state violence. While mainstream trauma studies have traditionally privileged Eurocentric models centered on individual psychological suffering, Craps calls for a decolonized understanding of trauma that recognizes the histories of colonialism, political oppression, and structural violence experienced by formerly colonized societies. Drawing upon this theoretical intervention, the study explores how Hanif portrays trauma not as an isolated event but as an ongoing condition transmitted through authoritarian governance, linguistic domination, institutional repression, and collective memory. The novel demonstrates that the violence of the postcolonial Pakistani state cannot be understood independently of the colonial structures that continue to shape its political institutions, disciplinary mechanisms, and social hierarchies. Furthermore, the article investigates the relationship between witnessing and resistance, arguing that Hanif transforms marginalized voices into ethical witnesses who challenge official histories and expose the silences surrounding political persecution. Through its representation of memory, fear, resistance, and the enduring influence of colonial power, *Rebel English Academy* extends the boundaries of trauma beyond conventional Western paradigms and exemplifies the necessity of a postcolonial ethics of witnessing. By applying Craps' theoretical framework, this study contributes to the growing dialogue between postcolonial studies and trauma studies while offering a fresh critical perspective on contemporary Pakistani fiction. It also demonstrates how Hanif's novel reconceptualizes trauma as a political, cultural, and historical phenomenon inseparable from the unfinished project of decolonization.

Keywords: Postcolonial Trauma; Rebel English Academy; Postcolonial Witnessing; Trauma Out of Bounds; Stef Craps; Colonial Legacy; State Violence; Postcolonial Witnessing; Collective Memory; Political Trauma; Ethical Witnessing; Resistance; Contemporary Pakistani Fiction.

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Introduction

The dawn of postcolonial statehood in South Asia was generally acclaimed as the end of structural and physical violence of European Imperialism. However, the architectural legacy of colonial arrest, confinement and control mechanisms within the nation-states it helped to bring into existence, has produced an uninterrupted series of forms of state organized oppression. For Pakistan, its historical legacy comes in the form of an “old sociopathic colonialism” in the form of military-bureaucratic institutions, political domination, and institutionalized force routinely repeating themselves. Physical tools and equipment are well documented in political and historical accounts of the authoritarian governance, yet the interior/affective/psychological landscape of those who manage to stay alive under this weight requires careful and complex critical vocabulary. Names Like The Bible and other books on literature can be the most archival of these unmappable realities. Specifically, the contemporary Pakistani Anglophone fiction has come a long way from being a national-defining product and has become more of an aesthetic artefact of historical digging probing the seemingly mundane and omnipresent fear of colonial pasts and contemporary state excesses.

Rebel English Academy, Mohammed Hanif's most recent novel (2026), is a testament to this literary development. It's set in the famously crowded “town,” that is to say Fictional Cantonment Town, in the immediate wake of the execution of Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in April 1979, the novel follows the lives of ordinary people who were embroiled in all aspects of the negotiations of that time. Evergyed's central character is a middle eastern makeshift English language school in a local mosque, headed by a dissident, self-taught Marxist named Sir Baghi. Hanif builds a knitting-thin, black humour by characters most brilliantly brought together through the lives of his students, the most notable of whom was the young woman Sabiha Bano, with the weight of her family's political persecution on her shoulders. Responses to the novel in The Guardian and Financial Times were overwhelmingly enthusiastic, confirming that the novel has “hilariously sharp political satire,” “a deft dissection of linguistic imperialism,” and an “uncompromising confrontation with censorship and the violence of the genders” (Dawoor, 2026; Financial Times, 2026).

There is a big analytical blind spot in the immediate critical and journalistic reception of Rebel English Academy. Early reviewers all spot the ‘motifs’ of ‘grief’, suffering, ‘silence’, and ‘historical injustice’ which they see as the thematic ‘backgrounds’ of Hanif’s ‘political wit’, rather than as instances of trauma itself. This academic void has a long-standing history in the study of literature: from a Western perspective, the psychoanalytical approach to narrative suffering. Since the foundational theorists, such as Cathy Caruth (1996) and Shoshana Felman (1992), trauma has been understood as a sudden, abrupt and singular event that disrupts the psyche of the individual, leaving it without a voice, silence being the only sound heard, and the event “unrepresentable”. This Euro-imposed model falls apart in the Global South. It normalizes and pathologizes collective survival as an individual failure and entirely neglects the chronic, persistent and “insidious” structural mass forms of violence that result from colonial occupations and are perpetuated by authoritarian postcolonial regimes.

Stef Craps' Pathological Bias in Trauma: Removing the Word from Trauma Studies and in Trauma (2015) addresses trauma studies theoretically and politically from a decolonizing perspective. Craps' Pathological Bias in Trauma (2015), explains a decolonizing approach to

trauma studies from a theoretical and political standpoint. He claims that the transcultural scope must break free from the monocultural, event-based, Western understanding of trauma to include it as cumulative, historically sustained and ongoing.

This study draws on Craps' decolonised approach to consider Rebel English Academy as a conscious aesthetic endeavour that re-imagines trauma as a collective, socio-political and historically situated experience. This paper will discuss how Hanif challenges Western individual narratives of trauma by portraying trauma as a living condition that is passed from one generation to the next through the powerful apparatus of the postcolonial state, such as: its disciplinary practices, its surveillance networks and its linguistic control. Beyond this, it examines the repositioning and transformation of the marginalised homework papers of its characters as ways of creating ethically charged, postcolonial forms of witnessing, and constructing an archive of resistance to the enforced silences of the state. Conclusively, the purpose of the present study is to join and contribute to the expanding dispute regarding debate between the post-colonial studies and trauma theory with the hope of providing a new critical view on the contemporary writings of Pakistani produced fiction, as well as to make it clear that trauma is an inherently political phenomenon due to unfinished project of decolonization conceptualized by Hanif.

Literature Review

Mohammed Hanif's Rebel English Academy has generated enormous discussion amongst critics, who have hailed it as an important work of contemporary Pakistani Anglophone fiction. Formalized, peer-reviewed journal articles are still emerging and gestating since the novel is new but the first wave of literary criticism and initial academic reviews produce quite a uniformity of opinion. The book has garnered immediate critique of its approach to authoritarianism, the weaponization of different forms of language, historical memory and daily survival. However, while the initial few readings praise the novel as a trenchant political satire, they also easily reveal another missing element an extended, critical analysis of the text using the lens of postcolonial theory of trauma.

Focus on the structural critique of state terror and institutional power is the initial emphasis in the reception of the novel. Writing in *The Guardian* the author, Dawoor (2026), considers Rebel English Academy Hanif's biggest political project to date, as the book manages to merge the slapstick comedy that feels like a cat and mouse game with the serious, unsparing critique of a 'state-of-the-nation' novel. Dawoor (2026) notes that the narrative is a multi-striated attack on the ever-strong culture of martyrdom (shahadat) in Pakistan, censorship by the media, and the culture of rape in Pakistan. Even if state sponsored violence was an inefficient by-product of political tensions, Dawoor shows how Hanif makes it look as if it were a very systemic issue. What makes this review interesting, however, is the figure of Sabiha Bano, specifically the "homework essays" that are a subversive narrative force, raising the spoken word of hear-say and gossip as an official narrative force of its own that recovers the state-sanctioned truth by doing so.

The systemic dimension of postcolonial state violence is reflected in large literary reviews. *Financial Times* (2026), moves the focus on novel's treatment of history to "how the book redraws the line of historical events April 1979 is not portrayed as a one-time event, but a living

wound that affects people's thoughts and memory. In this context, the invented town of 'OK Town' is a metaphor for a hyper-militaristic society in which the institutions of hierarchy (bureaucracies), military intelligence (Captain Gul, the venal Kapitan) and religious orthodoxy (Molly) all work together to enforce 'submission' (Financial Times, 2026). While peppered with kebabs, the review noted that this creates a very dark and uncompromising picture of surveillance and ideological coercion (Financial Times, 2026).

Moreover, readers of the novel are questioning the basic fear of linguistic and cultural acquiescence at the novel's core. The central metaphor of Sir Baghi's academy (ironically situated within a local mosque) is unpacked by an analysis in the Asian Review of Books (2026) which reads it as a place where the tongue of the colonizer is curled and used against today's political power. It is a very ambiguous "device" to the marginalized hustlers, peasants and shopkeepers of the town, writes the reviewer; one it's a painful colonial inheritance, another it's a desperate path to social mobility, another it's a means of intellectual mutiny (Asian Review of Books, 2026). Likewise, about the book's religious and philosophical aspects, for Dunya Digital, Dur e Aziz Amna 2026 characterizes Hanif as a man who transcended the given poles, ideological binarism. She claims the story presents every normal 'Mehserle' to the center of the historical storm in such a way as to successfully humanize the grand politics of political trauma, by extending it into the actions of domestic spaces through fear and uncertainty (Dur e Aziz Amna, 2026).

These more mainstream reviews have since been quickly followed by conspicuous postcolonial readings. The Markaz (2026) derives from a Fanonian lens, delving into the negotiations surrounding power dynamics in oppressive institutional legacies, such as Sabiha Bano and Sir Baghi (an outcast Marxist) confrontations. The research has shown the novel which reveals the presence of the colonial approach in discipline that remains under postcolonial governance (The Markaz, 2026). The essay, using the theories of decolonization developed by Frantz Fanon, proposes that clean, idealized tropes of revolution are deliberately avoided by Hanif, in favor of fragmented, messy and psychologically charged strategies demanded by those who are subjected to decolonization that is, have not quite gotten there yet. (The Markaz, 2026).

Historic moments of reading postcolonial studies in the context of trauma have been marked by ideological and structural conflicts. However, the epistemologies that underlie the frameworks of trauma studies were born within the early 1990s when the humanities were impacted by the moralization of the subject and dominant Eurocentric and monocultural views grew strong (Craps, 2013). The early foundational theorists used primarily psychoanalytical frameworks and western historical events almost entirely, namely the Holocaust and the Vietnam war, as the basis for their conceptual models (Cathy Caruth, 1996; Shoshana Felman & Dori Laub, 1992; and Geoffrey Hartman, 1995). Caruth (1996) described trauma in her ground breaking book, *Unclaimed Experience*, as an unassimilated disturbing event that is so powerful, sudden and unexpected that it creates a break or rupture in the person's psyche. In this classical framework, trauma is seen as event based: a one off, catastrophic event which disrupts an otherwise stable reality like a car accident does to the children of Berlin. Also, this old conceptual order implies a clear aesthetic control system, one which holds that the correct way to represent traumatic suffering is with the use of a "modernist" literature of narrative fragmentation, disruption, aporia, and linguistic failure (Craps, 2013).

The most systematic and in-depth questioning of this paradigm is presented in a ground-breaking monograph by Stef Craps, *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds* (2013). In his critique of mainstream trauma theory, Craps challenges this notion of the theory's call for engaging with the other, for Cross-cultural solidarity, while affirming the theory's desire to treat and correct the trauma of positions different from their own. Mainstream trauma theory neither considers the actual experience of populations outside and beneath the West nor the possibility that these positions might have different traumatic experiences to address. Traditional models are less a universal diagnosis or critical analysis handy to utilize than a "cultural construction" that serves to disenfranchise the Global South's pain (Craps, 2013).

According to Craps (2013), there are a number of salient structural faults within the Eurocentric trauma canon, which start with the catastrophic event fallacy. Classical trauma theory is based on an event before trauma and a restoration to that existence which is a secure one, whereas Craps (2013), focuses on the concept of insidious trauma, and thus on a type of trauma that is not event based. This idea reflects the psychological erosion that happens daily and incrementally because of perpetual oppression, varying degrees of racism, poverty and the state's watchfulness. For populations who are subaltern or colonized, trauma doesn't happen after a life free from violence, rather than it is the historic fabric of the conditions of life for them.

Moreover, the psychoanalytical model pathologizes the collective viable. Developed in direct reaction to this focus, however, have been critics like Craps (2013) and Irene Visser (2015) who draw attention to the systemic and institutional nature of the struggles endured by historical Africans, and the intergenerational trauma that ensued. Critics, however, developed in direct reaction to this focus, such as Craps (2013) and Irene Visser (2015) who draw attention to the systemic and institutional nature of the struggles suffered by historical Africans, and the intergenerational trauma that ensued. So decolonizing trauma calls us upon to the wider socio-political networks that systematically produce violence rather than towards the internal psyche of an individual.

This Eurocentrism can also be seen as a "representational aesthetic imperialism". Craps (2013) is profoundly critical about the dogmatic belief that trauma can only be rendered in non-linear, disjointed and experimental styles of literature. He shows that this standard is based exclusively on a Western Holocaust-derived canon of Holocaust literature, and thus by default lacks any consideration of accessible, realistic, linear or even localized oral storytelling traditions. Inversions of alternate narrative approaches as "naïve" or "nontraumatic" efforts negate the power and agency of the subaltern writers as well as their ability to adapt in creative ways to traumatic times and situations (Craps, 2013). Last, traditional trauma studies define 'trauma' as either a western or a non-western issue - leaving out the relationship between metropolitan and the global. Craps (2013) argues for a comparative perspective, which connects between multicultural and minority traumas. Following scholars, including those who call attention to First World catastrophes and their entanglements with colonial violence, Craps demonstrates the need to recognize colonial violence's suffering condition insofar as it is part of a world-wide network of violence.

Theoretical Framework

Postcolonial studies and trauma theory have often been a source of conceptual and methodological conflict, both within and across genres, frameworks, and structures. Rather, trauma studies have been developed alongside a trend in the humanities during the late 1980s and early 1990s which coalesced around the question of ethics and denormalized, by default, the experience of a traumatic event. However, the frameworks that have been coalescing over the past few decades, especially those of trauma studies, have been heavily criticized for their Eurocentric and mono-cultural tendencies (Craps, 2013). In contrast, early models of foundation theorists, specifically Cathy Caruth (1996) and Shoshona Felman and Dori Laub (1992) and especially Geoffrey Hartman (1995), placed their models mainly in the realm of psychoanalytical approaches and mainly in the framework of historical calamities from the Western world, most prominently the Holocaust, the war fallout in Vietnam, and more recently the war in Iraq. Trauma, defined by Caruth (1996), is an unintegrated, extreme experience, it is shocking, unexpected, impacts such a dramatic dissolution of an individual's psyche. This is the classical view where trauma is considered to be an event-response phenomenon, something on a grand scale, a rupture of the otherwise stable reality. Moreover, this traditional model forms a rigid aesthetics gatekeeping model that defines the legitimate ways of writing traumatic distress as a modernist literature characterized by narrative fragmentation, disruption, aporia and language failures (Craps, 2013).

The most detailed and extensive deconstruction of this paradigm is that proffered in Stef Craps' groundbreaking monograph, *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds* (2013). Mainstream trauma theory however, fails to recognize the lived experiences of those outside the western world and marginalized, argues Craps, while displaying a commitment to cross-cultural solidarity and ethical engagement. The traditional model, like most cultural constructions, is not a universal diagnostic or critical framework, but rather a construct specific to a culture that pathologizes the misery of the rest of the world, the Global South (Craps, 2013). Craps (2013) outlines a number of what he calls 'structural failures', all centered on the imagery of trauma mediated by Eurocentric educational frames, most notably the 'fallacy of cataclysmic event'. Maria Root's notion of insidious trauma is introduced in Craps (2013), which deviates from classical trauma theory by instead positing the presence of a pre-trauma state of safety that the victim does not return to, but rather 'works through' grief. This is a concept that explains how the everyday, ongoing and cumulative psychological ravishment that is perpetuated through oppression, structural racism, poverty and state surveillance occurs over time. The trauma of subaltern or colonized and oppressed personnels is not a sudden collapse from a peaceful life, but is itself the positional model of life, that is, there is no untraumatized life to return to. Western theory fails to point to the systemic violence that underlies postcolonial reality when dealing with trauma as a punctuated crisis, as opposed to a chronic condition.

The traditional psychoanalytic model pathologizes collective survival almost entirely over individual psychological elements. This personalizing emphasis leaves unaddressed the collective, institutional and intergenerational trauma caused by history, such as European colonization, apartheid and state tyranny, that are explored by critics such as Craps (2013) and other critical writers, like Visser (2015). Threatening to define trauma as a rather limited and narrowly circumscribed medical or psychological condition like Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) removes it from its political setting. Decolonisation of trauma then has to be a critical

move to change the predominant focus on the individual's psychised inner world, to the networks, structures and institutions of society and the state which collectively and structurally produce violence. A similar Euro-centric perspective is evident as an aesthetic kind of imperialism in the ways stories are represented. The dogmatic belief that only a non-linear, fragmented and highly experimental modernist literary form can adequately represent trauma is strongly criticized by Craps (2013). He, on the contrary, proves that this benchmark is exclusively concerned with a collection of Western Holocaust works, which has overlooked the effectiveness of available, real, linear, local-oriented oral witness telling mechanisms. The mainstream theory's ability to rule out alternative narrative strategies as unhelpful to its project or as politically naïve and therefore valueless renders subaltern writers as politically inert, lacking in creative options, and conscripts under the conditions of the dominant Western aesthetic norms (Craps 2013).

A major thrust of Craps' (2013) project is his critique of empathy in the political economy of the global literary market. Much of the research literature on trauma prevails with universalist empathy that tacitly draws distinctions between the suffering of some and the 'grievances of others, as Butler has called them. The old frameworks in which the western reader has access to the narratives, explains Craps (2013), tend to be those in which a sense of comfort and ease can be found; sensibilities that are Eurocentric, yet facilitating western minorities, in nations in which they are not living in. The framework in which the western reader has access to the narratives, explains Craps (2013), are those in which a sense of comfort and ease can be found; sensibilities that are Eurocentric, yet aiding western minorities, in nations in which they are not living. To shift this selective empathy, postcolonial witnessing requires an ethical turn instead and an engagement with messy and politically inconvenient suffering testimonies, rather than the comfortable ones. In addition, studies on trauma tend to focus on securing historical isolatedness and individuality of the Western and non-Western traumas that result in an erasure of metropolitan and global connections. Craps (2013) calls for a comparative, relational analysis, explaining that the trauma of the metropolis and the trauma of minorities are problematically linked and oriented towards the history of what he refers to as another form of trauma: colonialism. Finally, the temporal dimension is most resemble to the postcolonial criticism of the state machine. History has shown that independence was seldom accompanied by a change of the rules of colonial governance as the postcolonial one was often left with the very same regulations and countermeasures as the colonial one: emergency regulations, surveillance networks and policing techniques, etc., to manage internal security. As Frantz Fanon (1963) and Achille Mbembe (2001) have pointed out, the institution of independence did not necessarily lead to the abolition of the colonial machine, but on the contrary, postcolonial states inherited the very same rules of the game and methods of control from the colonial state: emergency rules, networks of surveillance, policing practices, etc. So the present traumatic experiences are time-tangled with the past that has yet to be decolonized.

Finally, as Craps' (2013) theory of postcolonial witnessing demands, there is a need to reimagine bearing witness to the experience of pain in another for the stakes of Craps' current theory of film making. Craps' present theory of film making, there must be a radical making over of bearing witness to the experience of pain of others. It undoes the clinical and western insularity of trauma, turning it into a critical and political history and culture. Rather than being a passive, broken victim, forced into an endless silence, Craps imagines the postcolonial witness as an active agent of historical reclamation. As a decolonized framework, it offers the vocabulary to

discuss contemporary Anglophone novels, not as clinical case studies of psychological harm but as the sites of resistance that simultaneously carry the memory of the collective. Literature never only bears witness, it also gives voice to 'others', to 'messy' and 'traumatized' histories as they contrast state sponsored forgetting, in turn disrupting state narratives, and the impact of the colonial legacy.

Analysis

A Postcolonial Deconstruction of Trauma in Mohammed Hanif's *Rebel English Academy*

History of postcolonial studies in the terrain of trauma theory has a long history of tensions, not just of ideology and structure but also of cross-cultural relations. Trauma studies were developed in the wake of a late 1980s and early 1990s movement towards a "non-Western" or "ethical turn" that occurred in the humanities but have been criticized for their Eurocentric and monocultural representativeness (Craps, 2013). The initial theorists, particularly Caruth (1996), Felman and Laub (1992) and Hartman (1995), essentially based their models in the psychoanalytical tradition and within the context of the western historical mass traumas, including the Holocaust and the aftereffects of the Vietnam War. According to Caruth's highly influential work *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996), trauma violently and explosively breaks open one's psyche when it happens suddenly and unexpectedly, before one's coping mechanism "has had time to adapt to and resolve the shock of the event" (1996, p. 9). In this classical framework, trauma is regarded as an event-based phenomenon; an event or catastrophic blow to a reality that had not been previously threatened. In addition, this "traditional" model has a binding aesthetic blockading-mechanism: it sets the literature of modernism (the schema of fragments, disruptions, aporias and failure of words) as the only true and proper way to read a traumatic experience (Craps 2013).

This can be distilled to the most systematic and extensive deconstruction of the paradigm in Stef Craps' ground-breaking monograph 'Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds' (2013). Even as it supposedly claims a dedication to cross-cultural solidarity and ethical involvement, what mainstream trauma theory does not recognize is the lived experience of non-Western and marginalized communities, argues Craps. The traditional model is not a universal diagnostic or critical device, but rather a culturally specific device which puts a priority prism on the suffering of the Global South (Craps, 2013). If we wish to alter its structure, Craps (2013) pinpoints some central structural flaws in the Eurocentric trauma canon, starting with the fallacy of the cataclysmic event. By incorporating the notion of insidious trauma from Maria Root, Craps (2013) departs from the classic trauma paradigm, which presumes a sense of safety for the trauma, against which the individual can react, to emphasize attention to processes rather than events. This idea captures the ongoing, daily, and systematic psychological erosion that takes place due to the "constant" oppression, "structural" racism, poverty and state surveillance that we experience every day. The architecture of trauma will be different for colonized or subaltern populations: for them, trauma will not be abrupt or jarring like it is for someone without a colonized past, because there is already something of the oppressed minutiae of their lives. When trauma is understood as a crisis or rupture that occurs in discrete moments, rather than a chronic reality, as is the case in the West, the theory cannot acknowledge the violence operating at a systemic level in postcolonial reality.

Besides, the traditional psychoanalytical model concentrates mostly on the individual's psychological breakdown and pathologizes collective survival with it. Individualization and an ideological foreground of "ethical conduct" devised by such critics as Craps (2013) and Visser (2015) mask the systemic, institutional and intergenerational wounds of historical injustice such as the colonization of Europe, apartheid and the tyranny of the postcolonial state. Trauma becomes individualised as a medical or psychological condition when it's a Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), removing political context from the anguish. To decolonize trauma, the gaze is moved from the individual mind to the more institutionalized socio-political webs and systems that repeatedly generate violence. This Eurocentric bias is also an aesthetic imperialism about the way the narrative is represented. Within mainstream scholarship, the dogmatic belief is that only modernist and non-linear, broken up, and highly experimental literary forms are capable of representing trauma well (Craps 2013). Shows that this standard is based exclusively on a canon of Holocaust literature in the Western tradition, and does not account for traditions of accessible, realist, linear, or localized oral history. Despite its purported political realism, dominant theory castigates alternative narrative strategies as being 'political naïve' or 'not traumatic' while at the same time denying agency to the writers of the subaltern, and limiting their creative versatility to the canonization of Western aesthetic norms in order to legitimate themselves as voices of the suffering (Craps, 2013).

For Craps' (2013) theory of postcolonial witnessing, the answer to that is a radical redefinition of what it means to bear witness to the pain of others. It de-Westernizes and decosmopolitanizes trauma so that it becomes rather an active critique of politics, historical reality and culture. Graced with a postcolonial subjectivity, the witness is not a victim but a donor; not a victim but an agent; not a victim, but a champion of reclamation of one sort or another. The postcolonial subjectivity of the witness is envisioned as an agent of historical reclamation, more active than the victim suffered is silent. This decolonized approach offers a set of terms for the analysis of contemporary Anglophone texts as not psychopathologized traditions of collective memory but rather archives under siege. Literature starts to be a place of ethical witnessing, a space that speaks other histories, alternative histories, messy histories, traumatic histories, a space where state-sponsored amnesia is disrupted, other state stories speak out. If applied to the novel *Rebel English Academy* by Mohammed Hanif (2026), Craps' (2013) framework helps to explain the systematic nature of the works to challenge western paradigms of clinical trauma related to trauma and events. Hanif's mapping of the material conditions of structural surveillance and postcolonial subversion offers a subversive archive of memory imbued with political potency and collectivity.

Insidious Trauma and the Normalization of Violence

Embedded in the concept of Root's 'insidious trauma' (as quoted by Craps, 2013), Hanif (2026) takes the text in the context of what can be termed as 'the baseline architecture of subaltern life'. Violence is treated as an interruption to a safe reality, rather than being a part of a normal reality, in Hanif's text. sThere was a calm and calm order to the night of a political dissident's hanging, the text notes: "On the night of the hanging, everything is as calm and orderly as it should be in a jail devoted to the safety and care of one very important man" (Hanif, 2026, p. 25).

In this portrayal, the state's killing is a routine procedure that helps to maintain the peaceful, proper functioning of the "jail," calcining the expectation of an "excuse" or exception of sovereign killing into the day. Casual internalization of the severe violation occurs again and again in the casual treatment of history, where Baghi, for example, treats the memory of his personal torture by a chilli-powder-laced rod as a god [...]"Yes, we must honour the dead, Baghi wants to say, even if the dead once had a chilli-powder-laced rod rammed up my ass for writing a letter" (Hanif, 2026, p. 16). There are memories of being physically violated and a polite social obligation, 'honour the dead', and it's not that one comes at the expense of the other, because it does not happen that way. Insidious, a neglected, multi-generational traumatic ecosystem in which state terror is not a jarring shock but an embedded component of memory.

This normalised structural atmosphere is extended by the semi-permeability of political martyrs and dissidents of the minor force traditionally responsible for holding the country together. Resembling a chore in the bureaucracy or a routine for the psychiatrist, the tragedy of millions of human lives lost under the thumb of an authoritarian state is no tragedy to Hanif "A sick sister-fucker dispatched to hell and he can put it down as one more deranged jiyala on his quest to bring Bhutto back" (Hanif, 2026, p. 89). The state's description of the political victimiser as "one more deranged jiyala", is an act that insulates the violence of execution from the reality of what the execution entails, and makes it complete part of the business of judicial administration.

Likewise, when the local people evaluate the political situation they also express the extent to which the trauma experience is now embedded in their pragmatic social logic, such as when they look at the burning and say "they are being burnt, some by the police, some with the police's permission. Sir, even in poetry you wouldn't kill yourself to bring someone back from the dead. Why would anyone want to protest against such a soft martial law?" (Hanif, 2026, p. 225). Soft martial law is a semantic expression of insidious trauma: the citizens have internalized the permanent infrastructure of surveillance, of the collaboration of the police, of public burnings, and react to them as to a state of inner peace and security, questioning the logic of political opposition itself.

Collective trauma vs. individual trauma

Prophecy is a method of restoring and renewing context to historical and institutional trauma, the kind that can be experienced as one body rather than isolated cases of psychological distress, like post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). (Craps 2013) Hanif (2026) resistance to the pathologisation of individual grief's by the west, and shows how subaltern suffering is transformed into another kind of „communitarian territory of satisfaction and refusal, where another type of mourning takes place“ (Translation). "What can I do?" Molly asks, "What can I do? The bazaar is full of jiyalas and they want a funeral... we must honour the dead" (Hanif, 2026, p. 16), This is communally achieved in the realizing of a collective political identity: communal grief. Likewise, the casual reader on an individual level interprets the individual's citizenship in an example from Hanif, a character's father is described "a highly respected union leader and it's unacceptable for the proletariat to see their leader in handcuffs" (Hanif, 2026, p. 159)." These "psychological and physical fractures" are seen as a wound affecting the collective working-class movement rather than an individual's personal tragedy—and Hanif's characters' actions for survival are aligned with Craps' ideas of collective, socio-political endurance.

The commitment is further reinforced by the continuity of political institutions, and community based groups across the text across generations. When individual trauma is subsumed under the course of historical struggle within the realm of ideology, Sabiha Bano 'graves' into that of other chuckles: "'Told you there was never a good time to be Chairman Bhutto's jiyala.' Sabiha Bano grimaces" (Hanif, 2026, p. 22).. This is no face of personal and psychological stress but rather a worried expression which denotes a distinct class of political agents, a common, historicized fatigue.

Moreover, the novel's presentation of the infrastructure of "street-level resistance" starts from an individualistic perspective, moving from this holistic standpoint of an individual towards a larger network of coordinated solidarity: "The police seeing a small protest led by two harmless ladies and a few urchins will be lax in its response. Then from behind this peaceful façade the members of the unions, many veterans of street battles, will surge ahead, tear down the barricades" (Hanif, 2026, p. 207).. Builds on the structural coordination between "harmless ladies," "urchins," and "veterans of street battles" as strategies for coping with trauma, citing how the specific collective trauma each group shares is articulated through their shared tactics as a mechanism for physical and ideological resistance to colonization.

State Violence, Surveillance, and Postcolonial Oppression

The telling of 'witness' in postcolonialism is fundamentally about the exposure of the state apparatuses (Craps, 2013) which produce and control violence in a systematic manner. How heavily the postcolonial security state strikes Hanif in this story, is revealed directly. This mechanism of the state perceives a subaltern corpse as an internal threat and consequently, uses military apparatus in disproportionate fashion to propel up political mobilizations why he needed so much : "A military truck followed by six machine-gun-mounted jeeps made its way towards the airport... their commander wondering why a dead man needed so much protection" (Hanif, 2026, p. 11).

The paranoia of the internal security framework is echoed by intelligence officers who assert that the deceased "was lying and cheating even in his death" (Hanif, 2026, p. 12). Moreover, in acts of physical violence, Hanif denies it the dramatic and peculiar quality of an exception, but rather suggests he is dealing with an institutional management of pain, measured precision; "Laal Khan goes at him with a professional torturer's measured punches... Laal Khan knows the economy of causing pain" (Hanif, 2026, p. 278). This "economy of causing pain" depicts the bureaucratisation of trauma in the postcolonial state and defines a state of affairs whereby systemic torture is used as an ongoing policy to control the body.

The panoptic surveillance network of the state reaches far into the private sphere and even into educational institutions, and prohibits all notions of civic security. It becomes apparent when the movements of predatory military officers are arbitrary and there are no restrictions on their actions; their institutional authority is sufficient to hunt down those they deem as vulnerable "'I am looking for a girl,' Captain Gul says... 'I don't have a name or an address for her but hat shouldn't be a problem for a professional like you, a son of the soil'" (Hanif, 2026, p. 140). Nationalist notions of "son of the soil" become a very forceful and manipulative instrument of state, a weapon of state discourse to obtain "compliance" with the system of "absolute surveillance".

This nagging sense of danger affects the academy's administration that constantly has to deal with the unpredictable violence of the military elite: : "If I don't send him a girl he'll come to the academy to look for one... We don't want one of your students falling into his hands. I mean, he looks normal but you can never tell how far these hot-headed young officers can go when they are going around looking for a girl without a name'" (Hanif, 2026, p. 185). It is because of these destructive officers' normalcy on the screen that the narrative elucidates how the state terror accommodates in the everyday calculation of the domestic "normal," how the postcolonial state produces an unpredictable space of permanent vulnerability for the subaltern body.

Ethical Witnessing and the Recovery of Silenced Histories

Part of the trauma to which Craps (2013) refers is one of the subject's voice being muted, the need to remain silent, the passive state of the subject. Re-envisioned are not the silences, the mutes of that subject, but the act of the subject as a writer, an active agent of historical reclamation, a subject who writes back against state-sanctioned erasure. The military regime has a clear mission of historical suppression and rewriting in Rebel English Academy—even though such a mission is declared: "Now his mission is to bury the idea. To smash its hideout, to raze it to the ground" (Hanif, 2026, p. 204). In a process of counter-archiving and ethical witnessing to narrate histories contra to such institutional imperatives, writing becomes an important site. They are expressed like this: when a displaced subaltern character uses writing as a way to create his/her sense of presence and sense of structural belong; "Sometimes she scribbles on paper, laughs, looks up and says that she likes doing her homework because she doesn't have a home" (Hanif, 2026, p. 194). When what experiences you are tasked with depicting is not its normal, everyday space, or there is no such thing, "scribbling on paper" becomes a haven and a means to narratives' agency. Her writing is rebellious against the state's campaign to destroy her life, creating what becomes a space of resistance to save the other, less tidy stories of pain.

The physical landscape itself becomes a sort of picture frame, on which public space is cleared off in order to erase political memory. Hanif (2026) follows this process in the literal reconfiguration of city walls: "The new military regime was on a whitewashing mission with soldierly passion; the slogans in red on the wall had been painted over. Where once it screamed something about Martyrs' Blood, the wall had been painted white and the new message read 'It's forbidden to urinate here, violators will be prosecuted'" (Hanif, 2026, p. 215). Replace 'Martyrs' Blood' with the ordinary idea of 'civic' prohibitions, as the government tries to institutionalize public amnesia. In response to this systemic silences, subaltern agents seek means to produce clear counter-monuments and alternative texts that, through their writing, enable them to issue formal notices of political retribution: "Let this letter be a solemn promise from our Mazdoor Militia (Baghi Faction), let it be a historical document that you were warned about your ignominious end" (Hanif, 2026, p. 49). As a "historical document," these marginalized subjects attempt to be active agents in the preservation, exercising their agency in shaping the historical narrative over the regime's efforts to 'forget' or forget on their own terms the trauma that envelops their lives.

Trauma, Language, and Resistance

The path advocated by mainstream trauma studies long ago established an 'aesthetic imperialism' that set the interest of a high modernist experimentation or narrative fragmentation as the only

valid forms of representation of trauma (Craps, 2013). This expectation is challenged by Hanif (2026)'s pragmatic "busting down," fragmenting and tooling of language, in this case, English, the language machine of colonial regimes and elites, to engage in subaltern subversion. Borrowing from Andy Weidman's weighty push for 'Every Word Matters: The Grammar of Power' (2026), Baghi's pedagogy at the academy purposefully attends to a leap forward—one that rejects the strand of elitist syntax while accommodating the disconcerting material realities of his students" In five years of teaching English to sons and daughters of peasants and shopkeepers, Baghi has developed a revolutionary technique: single words spring up to describe a moment in life... Verbs and nouns and adjectives and qualifying adverbs could wait" (Hanif, 2026, p. 16). This "reduction of meaning" is not a cognitive deficit or linguistic failure, but is actually a political decision. Baghi aims to nurture "the rebels of tomorrow, rebels armed with a language that would pretend to serve power but in the end would smash it" (Hanif, 2026, p. 216). This strategic appropriation of the language used by the Hegemon is clearly dramatized in the classroom: "DUST. He writes. 'It's dust. But it means to clear it off.' He rubs dust off his blackboard with his duster. "See, I dusted the dust with my duster'" (Hanif, 2026, p. 217). It is in this place that the literal removal of the word "dust" becomes the pedagogical metaphor for clearing away the historical dust created during the colonial era and becomes a seedling political counter-hegemonic strategy in dismantling the language of the colonial state.

This counter-subversion of language is a structural penetration of language parameters by calculation of the very parameters of statehood. It is not an assimilation into the Western norm "Because while teaching them English, who sowed that first seed of doubt in them? ... He taught them to question power in the language of power" (Hanif, 2026, p. 216). In the academy, the "sons and daughters of peasants" acquire the language of the oppressor, thus undermining the expertise of those who oppress.

The language becomes the absence of an exclusionary, elite architecture and is recast as a kind of practical weapon. Hanif's educational approach to pedagogy and linear development in the classroom directly challenges Craps' (2013) critique of the Western academic gatekeeping system. In taking an active rather than passive approach to invest in the believer's own literacy, Hanif demonstrates that the systematic and relatively easy engagement with literacy is also a very effective and disruptions and revolutionary tool against state trauma at systemic level.

The Functioning of Colonies in the Postcolonial State: Colonial Continuities

In many respects, post-colonial independence does not overthrow the legacy of colonization; sometimes, as Fanon (1963) and Mbembe (2001) note, the new colonial state reaps the benefits of those very legal and social mutations as a tool for achieving its local objectives. Organized around his conception of an un-decolonized past, Craps (2013) points out that the traumatic legacy of postcolonialism is inextricable from this history. This intergenerational and continuous cycle of class privilege is illustrated in Hanif's (2026) description of the elites remaining elites even in their graves during a state-embellished burial: During this burial, he remembered that even when they were buried "elites stay elite even in their death, he thought" (Hanif, 2026, p. 11). It is this institutional continuity that is a part of a lesson that is as much a paradox as the educational mission of Baghi. Acknowledging that "the English language... was more accommodating, more precise" (Hanif, 2026, p. 17), Baghi's use of the language of the colonizer goes to the extent of ensuring that the postcolonial state continues to function on colonial

principles of access, power, and prestige. The subaltern's struggle to survive the structure will require him to learn the precise vocabulary for their subjugation.

Integration in these ways is explicitly or intentionally established by colonial legal remnants that remain as active instruments of state violence. The current administration has an almost direct connection with a historical approach of containment, which it effectively applies to subaltern assembly as seen in the case of the district administration placing section 144 in the city and criminalizing gatherings of more than three people. We are informed that the district administration has imposed section 144 in the city and it bans a gathering of more than three people" (Hanif, 2026, p. 206). The un-decolonized colonies of British policing providing repression to indigenous peoples is now in play and operating on the same colonial rule of containment.

The postcolonial educator, who has seen his youth spent in an effort to liberate people from the twin yokes of capitalism and feudalism, is now toiling away for the past to teach young minds the language of colonial oppression – what about Mother tongues? Why was he abandoning the people's very own language and why was he intent on teaching the new generation the ways of their oppressors?" "...after spending his youth trying to liberate people from the twin yokes of capitalism and feudalism, he was now embarking on a mission to teach young minds the colonizers' language. What about mother tongues? Why was he abandoning the people's very own language and why was he intent on teaching the new generation the ways of their oppressors?" (Hanif, 2026, p. 215). This contradiction becomes a blueprint for the repetitive experience of postcolonial trauma as Hanif shows how the subaltern is confined within a structure of the state which expects them to enact submission based on colonial norms for the purposes of articulating colonial demand for the most basic form of emancipation.

Trauma as Political Memory rather than Psychological Disorder

Last, cognitive disassociation/irrational behaviour is understood within a framework of defensive, rational responses that arise in reaction to sovereign violence, instead of being viewed as a clinical condition or medical psychopathology (Craps, 2013). The dominant power group does much to pathologize and debunk political opposition to its activities because of its need to render it systemic: "In her experience psychopaths turn on people who are trying to save them from their sordid destiny" (Hanif, 2026, p. 155). Diagnosing political subversion as a psychological ailment, or marking a person as a "psychopath," the state purges itself of structural crimes. This diagnostic erasure is brought into question by Hanif's (2026) affirmation of somatic and psychological withdrawal as a protective option: : "...the girl, who is limp now as if trying to dissociate herself from the act, a muffled, tired repetition of NO, NO, NO" (Hanif, 2026, p. 125). This dissociative condition is not seen as a failure in the clinical state or even a situation of mental retardation. Rather, this psychological withdrawal is cast as a way of surviving physically and opposing an extreme physical violation. In this way, Hanif recuperates lost psychologies, which reify as sites of intense political memory – and somatic negation – instead of merely clinical disorders.

That the state needs psychiatric institutions as instruments of political containment becomes obvious in their treatment of political dissidents. As Hanif (2026) observes,. Molly had already prepared a confession that read 'I am a drug addict. I was under the influence of strong

medication for my schizophrenia. I did write the letter but I wrote it in a state of delusion. I pledge and swear that I'll never again in my life indulge in any political activity of any kind" (Hanif, 2026, p. 49). Medicalized language (in this instance, "schizophrenia" or "delusion") is a weapon in which the state is prepared to use to "depoliticize" subaltern critique." This weaponized infrastructure, this is mirrored in the spaces where the political actors retreat, the spaces where they "retreat": Where junkies pretended to be schizophrenics and schizophrenics played at being crazy and made fun of junkies, which is where addicts went in order to become schizophrenics, a charity rehab clinic, "...Home of Hope, a charity rehab clinic where addicts pretended to be schizophrenics and schizophrenics played at being crazy and made fun of junkies"(Hanif, 2026 p. 138). The novel destigmatizes "madness" as a tactical performance and psychological effervescence as a survival. The novel is a kind of reframing of psychological instability as survival tactic for the face of state discipline.

This systematic critique also involves the cognitive conditioning of state's military agents whose institutional behavior is described not as professional duty, but as a profound cognitive impairment caused by state's training: "'During training we also parade all day long but these army men never recover from parade-ground pounding. They bang their boots on concrete all day long for five years and go soft in the head. Their reason barely survives'" (Hanif, 2026, p. 185). In his profound and meticulous critique of the state, Hanif purposefully turns the emphasis on the state's own enforcers and pathologizes them, implying that they have become "soft in the head". By means of this, subaltern dissociation as well as "madness" are thereby legitimated and deemed wonderful, highly strategic strategies to a fundamentally irrational and violently structured state architectural field.

Conclusion

Reading Rebel English Academy through Stef Craps' (2013) lens of the debate on postcolonial witnessing, the novel does not become a psychological study of the individualised damage done, but rather an archive that resists, actively reveals, and invades the social and political memory. Hanif's work deliberately critiques stereotyped victimisation, individual pathology and the modernist fragmentation of the image while challenging Euro-centric assumptions regarding a traumatic past rooted in events. The artwork, however, is composed of the "soft martial law" as a structural condition that is seen everyday, not a temporary shock of jouissance in a leisurely stability, is more concerned with the process of subaltern trauma, rather than with its disruption in post-traumatic stability.

Balakot is also away from the Western framework of clinical diagnoses of PTSD towards the integrated socio-political agencies and networks that actively produce violence. In the academy's pedagogical tactics Hanif demonstrates how the language of the hegemon can be used strategically to upend and redescribe as a counter-hegemonically subversive device. To sum up, Rebel English Academy is precisely that which Capital Craps requires from postcolonial witnessing: a celebration of the continued continuities of colonial violence in the postcolonial present that bends colonial curve to expose it; a challenge to "official" amnesia produced by the colonial State; and a recovery of "repressed" dissociation, madness and fragmentation as tactical and vital political resistances and somatic survivals.

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