



## FROM SUFFERING TO RESISTANCE: PALESTINIAN SHORT STORIES AS NARRATIVES OF COLLECTIVE AND CULTURAL TRAUMA

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### **Abstract**

*The selected Palestinian short stories construct a trauma narrative that moves beyond individual suffering to reveal the collective and cultural dimension of trauma. In line with Kai Erikson's concept of collective trauma, this study outlines how oppression disrupts family structures, communal bonds, and social life and leaves an entire community marked by rupture. Moreover, it engages with Jeffrey Alexander's theory of cultural trauma by framing these experiences through symbols, memory, and narrative. Symbols such as the olive tree, the land, and the kufiya function as cultural signifiers that transform personal grief into shared memory and embed communal trauma within a broader historical context. Through textual analysis of selected short stories, this study analyzes how trauma is narrated, mediated, and symbolized. The recurring motifs, narrative structures, and character experiences translate lived suffering into cultural memory. This interpretive approach situates the texts within both literary and sociological frameworks and allows for an interdisciplinary analysis that links trauma theory with cultural representation. Through this framework, the study highlights how Palestinian short fiction not only documents oppression but actively reconstructs identity. It demonstrates literature's role in mediating trauma, asserting collective experiences, and ensuring that Palestinian voices are carried into global cultural consciousness.*

**Keywords:** *Collective Trauma, Cultural Trauma, Identity Reconstruction, Palestinian Short Fiction.*

### **Introduction**

Trauma manifests on multiple levels and shapes both individuals and societies. On the personal level, psychological trauma disrupts mental and emotional stability. It is often expressed through anxiety, depression, or post-traumatic stress disorder. Such experiences fracture daily life and burden survivors with lasting distress. These experiences alter their relationships, work, and sense of self. Beyond the individual, however, trauma takes on a collective dimension. Communities struck by war or disaster experience shared grief, ruptured bonds, and loss of cohesion. This collective trauma lays the groundwork for cultural trauma which arises when societies interpret, narrate, and memorialize these events. Cultural trauma, ultimately, reshapes their cultural identity and historical consciousness.

In this sense, cultural trauma extends beyond immediate suffering to influence how groups remember their past and redefine themselves. Narratives, rituals, and collective memories preserve experiences of violence and oppression and transform them into symbols of identity. War literature plays a vital role in this process. Through storytelling, communities articulate their trauma, grapple with its meaning, and embed it within broader cultural frameworks. The act of narrating trauma becomes both cathartic and political, asserting presence, dignity, and the right to memory against forces that aim to erase them.

This study analyses two short stories, Hanan Habashi's *L for Life* (2014) and Sarah Ali's *The Story of the Land* (2014), taken from an anthology titled *Gaza Writes Back* (2014) by Refaat Alareer to vividly embody this process. These stories portray characters scarred by war, loss, and



displacement. The physical pain of death and destruction is entwined with the emotional turmoil of grief, longing, and disorientation. For instance, Mariam's father in *L for Life* is killed by an Israeli soldier and leaves her to wrestle with the absence and memory of her late father. On the other hand, *The Story of the Land* depicts the protagonist's father mourning the uprooting of olive trees that symbolize communal identity. These narratives move beyond individual experiences and present trauma as a shared condition that ties characters, families, and entire communities to one another.

As such, Palestinian literature broadly depicts characters who have been displaced from their homeland or subjected to atrocities within it. Their disrupted lives provide insight into the human costs of war while exposing the mechanisms of oppression that seek to erase identity and continuity. By amplifying the voices of marginalized communities, Palestinian fiction allows us to deepen our understanding of suffering and resilience. These narratives demand attention because they directly confront brutality at the hands of oppressors and document the lived realities of those silenced in dominant discourses. They illuminate aspects of Palestinian cultural trauma which is rarely represented in other mediums. As such, they offer a counter-narrative to dominant cultural frameworks that primarily shed light on Western experiences of trauma. Thus, this study seeks to bridge the disparity by foregrounding Palestinian voices and granting them due consideration.

The study of these short stories benefits from theoretical insights by Kai T. Erikson and Jeffrey C. Alexander. Erikson emphasizes that trauma extends to communities when social bonds and structures are shattered while Alexander argues that events become traumatic not by their occurrence alone but through cultural processes of representation. Palestinian writers act as "carrier groups" of memory, construct narratives that identify victims and perpetrators, articulate suffering, and transform raw pain into cultural discourse. In doing so, they turn the devastation into testimony which helps in making local experiences resonate with wider audiences. This process reinforces a collective identity that is rooted in survival and resistance.

By focusing on cultural trauma, this study highlights the enduring significance of Palestinian literature as a medium of both memory and identity reconstruction. The selected short stories illustrate how cultural identity is reshaped amid ongoing destruction of land, heritage, and community life. Ultimately, these narratives stress that war extends beyond the battlefield. It embeds itself in cultural memory and redefines collective belonging. The writers of these stories ensure that trauma is neither silenced nor forgotten. Rather, it is integrated into a broader cultural consciousness. As such, Palestinian literature becomes a powerful tool for understanding the human costs of war and offers insights into how communities preserve dignity, continuity, and hope through storytelling.

### **Literature Review**

This review takes a two-dimensional approach. The first dimension outlines the framework that underpins this study. It analyses dissertations and studies that employ related concepts. This not only reinforces the foundation of this study but also underscores the value of applying these theories to literary texts and situating the current study within the existing scholarship. The second dimension is textual. It examines secondary literature on the chosen fictional narratives to identify critical gaps. By addressing the gaps, this study highlights its contribution to the discussion of trauma and identity reconstruction in Palestinian short fiction.



Maeed Almarhabi's doctoral thesis *Cultural Trauma and the Formation of Palestinian National Identity in Palestinian American Writing* (2020) explores how the Palestinian diaspora sustains deep connections to the homeland despite the absence of a recognized state. He argues that Palestinian narratives emphasize collective experience and historical continuity. They function as mechanisms for preserving cultural and emotional ties. Central to Almarhabi's discussion are the themes of the right of return and *sumud* (steadfastness) which symbolize both aspiration and resilience. By analyzing Palestinian American writers, Almarhabi highlights how literature becomes a repository of memory and identity. His study provides a foundation for understanding cultural trauma in the diaspora but leaves room for examining how identity is reconstructed through war narratives within Palestine itself. This is the gap that the current study aims to fill.

Similarly, Tanya Geraldine Schaap's dissertation *9/11 Fiction and the Construction of Cultural Trauma* (2015) uses Alexander and Smelser's sociological framework to examine how literature engages with collective memory after 9/11. She critiques media portrayals of the event and emphasizes the role of fiction in questioning dominant cultural narratives. Schaap demonstrates that trauma is not static. It is shaped through storytelling and contestation. While her study is set against the backdrop of American context, her work underscores the importance of literature in constructing cultural trauma. This study builds on that importance by applying cultural trauma theory to Palestinian narratives. By doing so, it highlights non-Western perspectives that expand the framework's global applicability.

Magnus Ring et al.'s article *Cultural Trauma, Collective Memory and the Vietnam War* (2017) analyses how different groups such as the U.S., the Vietnamese communists, and diaspora communities constructed divergent trauma narratives. They show how cultural producers and veterans served as carrier groups who sustained collective memories. The article is relevant to this study because it demonstrates how trauma narratives shape national identity. Yet, it emphasizes historical rather than literary sources. This study fills this gap by analyzing how Palestinian short fiction conveys trauma and claims of suffering by establishing the writers as carrier groups.

Assaf Peled's paper *Descending the Khazooq: "Working Through" the Trauma of the Nakba in Emile Habibi's Oeuvre* (2016) explores Habibi's transformation of personal trauma into collective narrative for Palestinian Israelis. He situates Habibi's work within resistance literature and underscores its role in acknowledging trauma and encouraging communal solidarity. However, Peled critiques Habibi for portraying the Nakba as a natural catastrophe which does not shed light on the assignment of responsibility. The current study departs from this by identifying perpetrators within the selected short stories and highlights the reconstruction of Palestinian identity.

Elham T. Hussein (2021) analyzes *Gaza Writes Back* (2014) by focusing on Palestinian patriarchal family structures and the role of narration. By highlighting the effectiveness of self-representation, she emphasizes how young writers use storytelling to assert identity and resist erasure. Hussein also examines changes in traditional family roles due to the loss of land, thereby maintaining that the absence of the father figure affects familial cohesion. Although, her paper informs this study on narration and cultural creation, it lacks a framework for analyzing cultural trauma. This study aims to address that gap by exploring specific instances of collective trauma and its transformation into cultural trauma in selected short fiction.

Mehta (2020) examines creative resistance in *Gaza Writes Back*, arguing that writing serves as both a decolonial response to dominant narratives and a reconnection with older



generations. Palestinian writers claim ownership of their narratives by using fiction to challenge misrepresentations. This aligns with the focus of this study on trauma and resistance. The current study, however, delves further into the societal impacts of trauma on characters and communities and fills gaps in Mehta's broader analysis of creative resistance.

Isabelle Hesse (2017) studies sensory perceptions in *Gaza Writes Back* by analyzing how auditory and visual elements breed terror. Moreover, the study delineates the emotional impact of military interventions. Her work illuminates the sensory dimensions of trauma but leaves room for examining how these experiences feed into collective and cultural memory. This study addresses this gap by linking individual and group experiences to a broader cultural trauma in Palestinian literature.

In conclusion, this review situates the current study within the current scholarship and highlights the gaps related to cultural trauma, narrative resistance, and collective memory. By combining theoretical and textual analyses, it helps in examining Palestinian short fiction's treatment of trauma and identity.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The present study is qualitative in design and endeavors to unravel the concept of collective trauma and cultural trauma. It attempts to focus on theories of collective trauma and cultural trauma derived from the works of Kai T. Erikson and Jeffrey C. Alexander, respectively. It bridges Kai T. Erikson's concept of collective trauma with Jeffrey C. Alexander's theory of cultural trauma and delineates how both emphasize the collective dimensions of suffering. Drawing on Erikson's essay, *Notes on Trauma and Community* (1995), and invoking key concepts from his book, *Everything in Its Path* (1976), collective trauma is "a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality" (Erikson, 1976, p. 131). His work illustrates that trauma extends beyond individual psychology to affect entire communities. Alexander, on the other hand, stresses that cultural trauma arises not simply from catastrophic events but from the meanings communities assign to them. In his essay titled *Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma* (2004), he argues that "trauma is a socially mediated attribution" (Alexander, 2004, p. 8), constructed through symbolic representation, memory, and interpretation.

These theories show that trauma is both lived collectively and culturally mediated. Erikson insists that a traumatized community is "more than the sum total of traumatized individuals" (Erikson, 1976, p. 163), while Alexander emphasizes the struggle over meaning, identity, and representation that follows. This study applies both approaches to Palestinian short fiction. It identifies depictions of displacement, violence, and cultural loss as instances of collective trauma. It also examines how these narratives construct cultural trauma through symbols, memory, and claims of responsibility.

Erikson's case studies, such as his work on the Buffalo Creek disaster, reveal how even those who did not directly witness events were traumatized by "the loss of a sustaining community" (Erikson, 1995, p. 188). He describes survivors as "torn loose from their cultural moorings—alone, adrift, floating like particles in a dead electromagnetic field" (Erikson, 1995, p. 188). Such insights are crucial to understanding the Palestinian setting wherein, even in the absence of direct exposure to violence, disrupted communities and eroded traditions leave individuals collectively wounded.



Alexander builds on this by focusing on how trauma is mediated by “carrier groups.” Carrier groups are writers, intellectuals, political leaders, and artists who shape narratives of suffering for broader audiences. He argues that members of a community come to feel that they have endured a “horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways” (Alexander, 2004, p. 1). In this process, carrier groups answer four essential questions: the nature of the pain, the identity of the victims, the responsibility of perpetrators, and the relationship of victims to wider audiences (Alexander, 2004, pp. 11–12). These questions generate “master narratives” that transform communal suffering into cultural trauma, where “what is at stake, rather, is the collectivity’s identity, its stability in terms of meaning, not action” (Alexander, 2004, p. 10).

The present study aims to combine these theories. It focuses on stories of loss, exile, and resistance which not only illustrate collective suffering but also construct cultural trauma by assigning meaning and responsibility to historical events. The aesthetic realm becomes a vital institutional arena because Palestinian fiction mediates trauma through symbols like the olive tree or kufiya. By employing Erikson’s and Alexander’s theories together, this study highlights how Palestinian short fiction embodies both the lived reality of collective trauma and the cultural processes that redefine identity.

### **Method of Analysis**

To analyze the selected short stories to look for instances of collective and cultural trauma, this study uses textual analysis as the method of research. In an essay titled *Textual Analysis as a Research Method* (2013), Catherine Belsey argues that “textual analysis as a research method involves a close encounter with the work itself” (Belsey, 2013, p. 160). According to Belsey, the process of textual analysis includes an in-depth investigation of the text by means of a thorough interaction with the work which eventually results in an interpretation. Moreover, Belsey contends that “there is no such thing as pure reading” (Belsey, 2013, p. 163). The interpretation of a text always involves contextual knowledge. For this purpose, secondary sources that are relevant to this study are quoted that help in building a well-rounded argument.

The above-mentioned research method is useful in undertaking an in-depth study of the selected short stories to analyze the instances of collective trauma and cultural trauma of the Palestinian people. It allows to look for instances in the text to support the arguments of this study. It also enables to produce instances from the selected short stories that show how the Palestinian community undergoes collective trauma and what specific steps do the writers take in order to classify their trauma as cultural trauma.

### **Collective Trauma in Selected Fictional Narratives**

Kai T. Erikson defines collective trauma as “a blow to the basic tissues of social life” that “damages the bonds that attach people together” and “impairs the prevailing sense of communality” (Erikson, 1976, p. 131). He further notes that “trauma damages the texture of community” (Erikson, 1995, p. 187). Palestinian fiction vividly illustrates such blows to communal life. In *L for Life*, Hanan Habashi depicts Mariam, whose father is killed by an Israeli soldier. She feels his absence in the “tiny mark of the gunshot and the ugly crack it left there” (Habashi, 2014, p. 26) and recalls when the “huge creature grabbed you out of my bed” (Habashi, 2014, p. 26). His



death at the hands of a “faceless monster” (Habashi, 2014, p. 26) leaves her social life stagnant and she seeks comfort by addressing him directly. Her grief surfaces when she asks what kind of human would take pleasure in making her endure “the agony of living without a father?” (Habashi, 2014, p. 26).

The traumatic events in *L for Life* reveal a severe breach in the social bonds that attach people together. Mariam constantly seeks connection and laments her loss. Her reflections when she says, “I sit by the window to look past all those electricity-free houses, smell the sweet scent of a calm Gazan night. . . and think of you, of me, of Palestine, of the crack, of the blank wall, of you. . .” (Habashi, 2014, p. 27) show the rupture in her communal ties. Her search for Thaer, the boy her father often spoke of, becomes symbolic of this lost bond. Its incompleteness reflects her inability to reconnect. As Erikson notes, trauma signifies not only a “loss of confidence in the self, but a loss of confidence in the surrounding tissue of family. . .” (Erikson, 1995, p.198). Mariam experiences isolation and insecurity which are emblematic of her community’s suffering. Her mother, Mama, also displays grief and becomes cynical and emotionally withdrawn. Mariam observes this change and remarks to her father, “I know, Baba, you don’t know this new woman; I don’t either. . . Mom has become cynical. . .” (Habashi, 2014, p. 28). These altered relationships highlights how trauma destabilizes familial and communal bonds.

Erikson argues that when devastating events strike, communities can be damaged like organs in a body. In his study of Buffalo Creek, he explains that although residents retained memories and minimal contact, the cultural bonds uniting them were severed. Mariam reflects this impaired communality by stating, “Gaza is frustrating these days—well, these years. . . breathing some good air has become a luxury we cannot always afford” (Habashi, 2014, p. 26). Her “uncompleted story” (Habashi, 2014, p. 26) underscores the void in her life. Likewise, her grandfather, consumed by grief over a lemon tree and his son is no longer the companion Mariam once confided in. These depictions echo Erikson’s idea of communal loss by illustrating strained connections and disrupted family bonds.

Moreover, we observe the same in *The Story of the Land*. Sarah Ali discusses the blow that the society receives by Israeli soldiers as they uproot trees that causes a significant rupture therein. The land and the olive trees symbolize the cultural identity of Gaza. Showing Israel’s atrocious blow to the olive trees and lands of Gaza, the protagonist states that the “Lands were damaged during the Israeli offensive in 2008” (Ali, 2014, p. 47). The protagonist’s father sees that they are “ruined lands filled with bulldozed, dead trees” (Ali, 2014, p. 48). The father, upon witnessing the ruin, starts “crying as he saw people crying” (Ali, 2014, p. 48). The Israeli forces’ attempt to damage the trees indicates the act of destroying the connection of people with their lands. The actions of Israeli forces and their bulldozers stand as the oppression by the perpetrator which inflicts a blow to the basic tissues of social and communal life of characters.

Irus Braverman, in “*Uprooting Identities: The Regulation of Olive Trees in the Occupied West Bank*” (2009), highlights the central role of olive trees in Palestinian culture. She emphasizes their economic, cultural, and historical significance by stating, “the Palestinian tree is the olive” (Braverman, 2009, p. 237). Braverman argues that Israeli settlers’ uprooting of olive trees constitutes “direct and indirect sabotaging and denying the Palestinians access to the olive tree,” thereby imbuing it with “enormous power” (Braverman, 2009, p. 238). As such, the olive tree

becomes a symbol of “Palestinian nationhood” and “resistance to Israel’s occupation” (Braverman, 2009, p. 238).

In “*The Story of the Land*”, the protagonist’s father shows a deep-rooted love for his land and olive trees. He suffers immense pain when Israeli bulldozers uproot his 189 trees. The story portrays this bond as unbreakable yet shattered by the soldiers’ destruction. The protagonist recounts, “Our trees were gone” (Ali, 2014, p. 49). Both the father and the community feel anger and frustration at the disregard for their heritage. For Gazans, land embodies identity and belonging, so its destruction deepens their alienation and sense of injustice.

Erikson argues that trauma can affect people even if they are not present at the time of devastation because the loss is felt through the lack of a sustaining community. This is reflected in *The Story of the Land* where Sarah Ali depicts the deep-rooted attachment of Gazans to their land and olive trees. The protagonist’s father, though away from the destruction, “put his faith in his olives being an exception” (Ali, 2014, p. 48), only to find “ruined lands filled with bulldozed, dead trees” (Ali, 2014, p. 48). Witnessing the devastation, he and others “started crying . . . feeble and defeated” (Ali, 2014, p. 48), embodying Erikson’s view that communities become “empty of affection, empty of confidence and assurance” (Erikson, 1995, p. 188). The uprooted olive trees not only destroy the land but also shatter the community’s sense of identity and communality.

The selected fictional accounts vividly embody Erikson’s theory of collective trauma. They portray how war devastates communal bonds and shatters the sense of belonging. Characters reflect Erikson’s notion of losing a sustaining community by exhibiting trauma even without direct exposure to calamities. Their fractured identity and lack of reliable support highlight the blows to the social fabric of the community. Beyond individual wounds, the stories reveal a collective mood, a “group culture” in Erikson’s terms, that surpasses personal suffering. This lingering trauma permeates community’s consciousness and emphasizes loss of cohesion. Thus, the narratives exemplify Erikson’s framework by depicting how trauma reshapes identity and destabilizes community life.

### **Cultural Trauma in Selected Fictional Narratives**

According to Jeffrey C. Alexander’s theory of cultural trauma, a community suffers trauma when a catastrophic event fractures its collective identity and undermines shared values, beliefs, and cultural norms. Palestinian short stories vividly depict this rupture as violence and oppression erode communal ties. The deaths of loved ones and the collapse of social life force individuals to rely on weakened personal resources rather than collective support. This illustrates how cultural trauma dismantles communal bonds and isolates individuals in their suffering.

The devastating events that the characters experience leave lasting impressions on their memories. The distressing realities of their lives and the shattered community that surrounds them paint a bleak picture. In *L for Life*, Mariam’s memories of her father are etched deep even after eleven years of his death. Mariam exclaims, “Today marks eleven years since the day you were gone, but only now am I starting to realize how dearly I miss you, how your loss is too awful a beast to conquer” (Habashi, 2014, p. 26). Through an examination of Mariam’s character, it becomes evident that the memories left behind by devastating events never completely go away. Mariam’s memories are forever marked and they haunt her years after her father’s death.

Horrendous events marking memories of the characters are also evident in *The Story of the Land*. The protagonist exclaims that “my brother. . . told us that the trees were uprooted. . . During the weeks that followed my father’s visit to his land, he had a daily schedule: in the morning, he prayed and read Qur’an. At night, he cried” (Ali, 2014, p. 49). With the memory of a destroyed land, the protagonist’s father struggles to come to terms with the fact that his land has been destroyed by the oppressors. All these instances solidify Jeffrey C. Alexander’s claims that a horrendous event marks its memories on its victims forever. In the case of these characters, the memories of traumatizing events never actually fade away. They remain lodged in the mind and resurface at a slight poke. Even years later, they struggle to find relief by carrying a fractured sense of identity. Their homeland, once a source of solace, now feels alien under the control of oppressors. Henceforth, they witness oppression with little hope for justice by confronting shattered collective bonds and a tainted identity.

The characters’ identity exposes them to deep disparity which Jeffrey C. Alexander frames as part of a sociological process of trauma. For trauma to reshape collective identity, four questions must be answered: the nature of the pain, the nature of the victim, the victim’s relation to a wider audience, and attribution of responsibility. In the selected stories, this process can only revise identity if collective trauma is represented and accepted as cultural trauma. The process of meaning-making in trauma raises questions about the nature of pain whether physical, emotional, or both.

In the selected fiction, physical pain appears in the form of death of Mariam’s father by an Israeli bullet in *L for Life* (Habashi, 2014, p. 26), while emotional turmoil emerges in her longing for him after the loss (Habashi, 2014, p. 26). Similarly, in *The Story of the Land*, the protagonist’s father grieves the destruction of 189 olive trees which are symbols of heritage and identity (Ali, 2014, p. 50). These stories portray war-tormented characters whose suffering embodies collective pain and highlight both the brutality of oppression and the community’s struggle for normalcy.

The process of meaning making in connection with the nature of the victim can be understood in terms of questions such as who is the victim? This question, in connection to the process of meaning making, can influence how the victim perceives pain. The victims in *L for Life* are Mariam and her family. Mariam’s father loses his life while Mariam and her mother bear the loss of their father and husband, respectively. The entire family falls victim, physically and emotionally, to oppressor’s aggression. In *The Story of the Land*, it is the Gazan fathers who fall victim to the destruction of their lands and the uprooting of their trees. These instances exemplify that it is the people of the Palestinian community who fall victim to the brutalities of the oppressor.

After identifying victims and their pain, it is vital to show their connection to a wider audience. Palestinian fiction does this by transforming local suffering into universal appeals. Through themes of loss, violence, and survival, writers invite readers to share the community’s pain and assume moral responsibility. By portraying oppression, these writers act as carrier groups and link victims’ trauma to broader audiences. They ensure that their voices resonate beyond their immediate context.

Meaning making through responsibility asks: who causes the trauma? Is it an individual or a group? Palestinian authors attribute it to Israeli forces by portraying oppression as the source of collective suffering. In *L for Life*, Mariam’s father is killed by an Israeli bullet (Habashi, 2014, p. 26), while in *The Story of the Land*, it is the Israeli bulldozers that uproot olive trees and sever



bonds with the land. As part of the suffering collectivity, these writers act as carrier groups and construct narratives that identify victims and perpetrators. Their depictions of violence and loss shape a master narrative that reveals and preserves the community's collective trauma.

According to Jeffrey C. Alexander, a master narrative of cultural trauma calls to recognize a community's pain by identifying victims and perpetrators. Yet for trauma to gain broader acknowledgment, these narratives must be mediated through institutional and cultural arenas where they evoke sympathy and solidarity. When such narratives enter the aesthetic realm, they are channeled through genres that aid imaginative identification and emotional catharsis (Alexander, 2004, p. 15). In Palestinian short fiction, authors weave plots of violence and displacement that reimagine communal suffering and transform individual stories into representations of collective trauma. By doing so, these narratives move beyond storytelling to become agents of cultural memory and identity reconstruction.

Hanan Habashi frames his short story, *L for Life*, as an intimate letter from a child to a deceased father which creates a deeply personal and emotional connection with the reader. The personal reflection of Mariam when she says, "Today marks eleven years since the day you were gone, but only now am I starting to realize how dearly I miss you" (Habashi, 2014, p. 28), allows readers to empathize with the protagonist's loss. Mariam's musings on her father's absence and the impact of his death which she describes as "too awful a beast to conquer" (Habashi, 2014, p. 28) make the trauma feel immediate and real.

The story uses vivid symbolism and imagery to convey the trauma. The crack on the wall caused by a gunshot is a recurring symbol of violence and disruption. The protagonist describes the crack as "an eyesore" (Habashi, 2014, p. 26) and reflects on it as a physical reminder of the violence. This imagery mediates the trauma by providing a tangible representation of the protagonist's father's absence and the violence that led to it. Additionally, the olive tree planted by Thaer serves as a potent symbol of resilience and hope. When Mariam finally sees the tree, she realizes, "Thaer's seeds grew up. Nothing else was left but the tree was enough for me" (Habashi, 2014, p. 38). This growth amidst destruction underscores the theme of endurance and renewal and it offers a hopeful counterpoint to the narrative of loss.

The short story also makes use of the kufiya as a powerful symbol of Palestinian heritage and resistance. Mariam's mention of the kufiya, "I put your glorious kufiya around my neck" (Habashi, 2014, p. 37), highlights its significance as a cherished artifact passed down from her father. Its "worn out to a glorious gray" (Habashi, 2014, p. 37) appearance further signifies the passage of time and the enduring legacy of her father's ideals. This cultural symbol functions as a link between the past and present and allows Mariam to feel closer to her father and his values. The kufiya is a symbol of Palestinian identity and resistance against colonial and oppressive forces. Its serves as a tangible connection to the Palestinian legacy and struggle. By wearing the kufiya, Mariam reaffirms her own connection to Palestinian culture and the ongoing fight for justice.

Moreover, the setting of Gaza, plagued by violence and deprivation, enhances the story's aesthetic impact. Mariam describes Gaza as "frustrating" and "a good exercise in patience" (Habashi, 2014, p. 27) with electricity-free houses and oppressive heat contributing to an atmosphere of despair. This setting paints a picture of the daily struggles faced by the community.



The contrast between the bleak present and nostalgic memories of the father's stories such as the description of "the sweet scent of a calm Gazan night" (Habashi, 2014, p. 31) highlights the enduring impact of trauma and the difficulty of reconciling personal loss with broader social realities.

Similarly, *The Story of the Land* is framed as a direct and intimate view of the protagonist's father's experiences and emotions. Sarah Ali uses vivid imagery to convey the impact of the trauma. The narrator says, "All they saw as they walked was ruined Lands filled with bulldozed, dead trees" (Ali, 2014, p. 47). This imagery underscores the deep sense of loss experienced by the Palestinian people. The detailed portrayal of the grief helps readers empathize with the loss of the Palestinian people. The narrator highlights the personal connection of the father to the land through his sadness and his silent mourning and says, "During the weeks that followed my father's visit to the Land, he had a daily schedule: in the morning, he prayed and read Qur'an. At night, he cried" (Ali, 2014, p. 50). This depiction maintains a strong emotional connection with readers who can relate to the father's sorrow.

The writer's use of emotional resonance is evident in the depiction of the olive trees as symbols of the Palestinian identity and heritage. The contrast between the father's hope and the reality of the destruction of the olive trees reflects an emotional impact. The narrator says, "Our trees were gone. A miscellany of affliction and denial took over the place" (Ali, 2014, p. 50). The specific mention of the number of trees lost, "189 olive trees" (Ali, 2014, p. 51), adds a tangible sense of the scale of the loss and reminds the reader of the depth and gravity of the loss experienced by the people of Palestine.

The selected Palestinian short stories construct a trauma narrative that moves from individual pain to communal and cultural dimensions. Through symbolism, structure, and depictions of fear, loss, and hope, they mediate trauma in the aesthetic realm and encourage empathy by immersing readers in lived experiences. Publishing itself becomes an act of mediation that transforms local suffering into public discourse. As carrier groups, these writers project Palestinian trauma into global cultural memory. This analysis shows how literature serves as an institutional arena where collective trauma is reframed as cultural trauma. Fiction not only documents loss but reconstructs identity. By disseminating trauma claims, these writers universalize and preserve suffering and assert its place in global consciousness.

### **Conclusion**

This study examines collective and cultural trauma in selected Palestinian fiction. Kai T. Erikson argues that collective trauma damages social bonds and communal cohesion. It gradually enters the consciousness of those affected. Similarly, the characters experience events that erode their social connections. These events force them to rely on individual resilience as the community fabric disintegrates.

Jeffrey C. Alexander's cultural trauma theory emphasizes that social agents must construct trauma claims by addressing four questions: the pain, the victim, the victim's link to a wider audience, and the perpetrator. The selected texts symbolize Palestinian collective suffering, with authors acting as carrier groups who articulate trauma claims and construct a new cultural narrative, meeting Alexander's criteria.



The study further highlights how the aesthetic realm mediates trauma narratives. By publishing these stories, the writers engage readers emotionally and promote empathy for the Palestinian plight. Symbolic representation of traumatic events allows readers to connect with communal suffering by reflecting on moral and cultural responsibilities. This emotional engagement can catalyze social, political, and legal reform. It also demonstrates how literature broadcasts collective pain and strengthens claims of cultural trauma.

The selected Palestinian short stories act as constructs of collective memory that shape and preserve Palestinian identity. Through recurring symbols like land, olive trees, and the kufiya, these narratives document cultural experiences and embed them into communal consciousness. In Sarah Ali's *The Story of the Land*, the father's attachment to his land, his refusal of compensation, and efforts to help farmers reflect resilience and cultural continuity. Olive trees symbolize heritage, endurance, and resistance, as seen in *The Story of the Land* and in *L for Life*, where Mariam finds hope and legacy in a surviving tree amid ruins. Similarly, the kufiya embodies solidarity, resistance, and the enduring spirit of the Palestinian people.

These stories illustrate how collective trauma and resilience shape Palestinian identity. Characters actively resist oppression, preserve cultural heritage, and find meaning in broken familial and communal bonds. By emphasizing survival and resistance alongside trauma, the narratives construct a collective identity defined not only by victimhood but also by strength and endurance. Cultural trauma thus becomes a unifying feature that transforms shared suffering into a source of communal resilience.

The act of narrating trauma also serves as a form of communal responsibility and cultural claim. By externalizing their experiences, authors create spaces for collective reflection, healing, and social change. The texts highlight the enduring consequences of displacement, loss, and violence and underscore the need for reparations and systemic change to support justice and reconciliation. Ultimately, Palestinian short stories mediate trauma through the aesthetic realm, constructing a master narrative that reflects historical and ongoing struggles while redefining cultural identity in terms of resilience, resistance, and hope.



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