

**CULTURAL TRAUMA AND
RECONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY: A
STUDY OF SELECTED PALESTINIAN WAR
NARRATIVES**

BY

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**NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF MODERN LANGUAGES
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IDENTITY: A STUDY OF SELECTED PALESTINIAN
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ABSTRACT

Title: Cultural Trauma and Reconstruction of Identity: A Study of Selected Palestinian War Narratives

This study investigates the concept of cultural trauma in the selected Palestinian short fiction. It examines ten short stories by different Palestinian writers, including Hanan Habashi's "L for Life," Rawan Yaghi's "Spared," Sarah Ali's "The Story of the Land," Nour Al-Sousi's "Will I Ever Get Out?" Jehan Alfarra's "Please Shoot to Kill," Yousef Aljamal's "Omar X," Randa Jarrar's "Barefoot Bridge," and Mohammed Suliman's "We Shall Return," "One War Day," and "Bundles." The analysis of the traumatic experiences of the characters is framed through the theoretical lens of Kai T. Erikson's concept of collective trauma and Jeffrey C. Alexander's conceptualization of cultural trauma. In this study, Erikson's collective trauma works to highlight the trauma of a community. The study analyzes horrendous events of war and examines damaged social bonds that leave a traumatic impact on the consciousness of the community. The analysis of collective trauma in the short stories underscores a rupture of social bonds within the social setting and highlights an erosion of communal ties that the characters experience. This representation of collective trauma, through the suffering of different characters, marks the relation of trauma victim to the wider audience. Building on this foundation, the study further examines how these short stories construct claims of trauma that are mediated through aesthetic realm of cultural trauma. The study argues that the writers of the short stories act as carrier groups who represent the pain of their community. This representation transforms individual and collective suffering into a cultural trauma that resonates beyond the immediate context of the suffering community. The study highlights trauma claims through these narratives, which not only work to identify the sources of suffering of a collectivity but also implore moral responsibility within and beyond the suffering community. This research further underscores that by operating within the aesthetic realm of cultural trauma, these texts contribute to the reconstruction of Palestinian identity.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THESIS AND DEFENSE APPROVAL FORM	ii
AUTHOR’S DECLARATION	iii
ABSTRACT.....	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vii
DEDICATION.....	viii
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Introduction.....	1
1.2 Background of the Study	3
1.3 Thesis Statement	8
1.4 Research Questions.....	9
1.5 Delimitation of the Study.....	9
1.6 Significance of the Study	10
1.7 Chapters Division of the Study	11
2. LITERATURE REVIEW	12
2.1 Critical Scholarship on Collective Trauma and Cultural Trauma	13
2.2 Critical Scholarship on Selected Short Fiction	18
3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	23
3.1 Theoretical Framework.....	23
3.1.1 Collective Trauma and Cultural Trauma.....	25
3.2 Kai Erikson’s Theory of Collective Trauma.....	27
3.3 Jeffrey Alexander’s Theory of Cultural Trauma	29
3.4 The Method of Analysis.....	32
4. TRAUMA AND COLLECTIVE SUFFERING: AN EXPLORATION OF COLLECTIVE TRAUMA IN SELECTED SHORT STORIES.....	34
4.1 Collective Trauma in Selected Fictional Narratives	34
4.1.1 A Blow to the Basic Tissues of Social Life	34

4.1.2 Disruption of Social Bonds	39
4.1.3 An Impaired Sense of Community	43
5. AN EXPLORATION OF CULTURAL TRAUMA IN SELECTED FICTIONAL NARRATIVES	48
5.1 Cultural Trauma in Selected Fictional Narratives	49
5.1.1 Horrendous Events and their Impact on Group Consciousness	49
5.1.2 Memories of Horrendous Events	51
5.1.3 Horrendous Events and Future Identity	52
5.2 A New Master Narrative of Cultural Classification	54
5.2.1 The Nature of the Pain	55
5.2.2 The Nature of the Victim	56
5.2.3 Relation of the Trauma Victim to the Wider Audience	58
5.2.4 Attribution of Responsibility	59
5.3 Mediation of Trauma Narrative in the Aesthetic Realm.....	60
6. CONCLUSION	67
6.1 Findings of the Study	69
RECOMMENDATIONS.....	73
WORKS CITED.....	74

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this research to the stars in my life, Mama and Baba, whose love, encouragement, and unwavering belief in me have been the driving forces behind my pursuit of knowledge. Mama and Baba! Your belief in me has been the melody to my aspirations.

I also dedicate this research to all my adorable nieces and nephew with the hope that they will find the courage to pursue their dreams and the strength to overcome challenges. Their laughter and love bring me endless joy every day.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

In its many forms, trauma affects both individuals and societies. For instance, psychological trauma refers to the emotional and mental impact of a traumatic event on an individual. It manifests anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder in its symptoms. Such individual experience of trauma is profound and deeply personal. It disrupts the daily life and overall well-being of an individual. It also leads to long-term psychological distress and challenges the normal functioning of an individual. For example, survivor of a disaster may experience ongoing fear and anxiety that significantly impacts his daily life. The effects of psychological trauma can influence every aspect of an individual's life such as relationships, work, and self-perception.

Collective trauma, however, extends beyond the individual and affects an entire community. It refers to the shared emotional and psychological impact experienced by a group of people who have undergone a traumatic event together. On the surface, this type of trauma disrupts the social cohesion and unity of a community but it leads to a collective sense of grief and a communal loss. For instance, a community devastated by a war or a disaster may experience a breakdown in social relationships but the shared experience of trauma can create a collective memory of the event which alters the group's identity and social dynamics. The effects of collective trauma are long-lasting. These effects remain evident over generations and fundamentally alter the social fabric of a community.

Cultural trauma encompasses the collective processes through which societies interpret, narrate, and memorialize traumatic events. When collective trauma affects the social fabric of a community, cultural trauma works to shape its future identity. It influences how a community perceives trauma and relates it to the past. Cultural trauma leads to significant shifts in cultural identity, collective memory, and societal values. It alters the collective consciousness and leads to a reevaluation of historical narratives. The narratives that emerge from cultural trauma can redefine

identity of the suffering group. An example of cultural trauma can be seen in how societies remember and commemorate wars through their narratives. The act of remembrance of trauma and its representation through aesthetic realm ultimately shape collective identity of a group.

By understanding cultural trauma, one can appreciate the full spectrum of trauma's impact, from the immediate personal distress to the long-term societal changes. This study aims to explore the concept of cultural trauma to see how a collective experience of trauma reshapes the cultural identity of a community affected by war. It aims to highlight the importance of societal processes in integrating and responding to traumatic events. For this purpose, this study examines ten short stories of different Palestinian writers. These short stories serve as war narratives that display the traumatic conditions of various characters amid chaotic Palestinian conflict. War narratives, such as the ones taken under examination for this study, namely Hanan Habashi's "L for Life," Rawan Yaghi's "Spared," Sarah Ali's "The Story of the Land," Nour Al-Sousi's "Will I Ever Get Out?" Jehan Alfarra's "Please Shoot to Kill," Yousef Aljamal's "Omar X," Randa Jarrar's "Barefoot Bridge," and Mohammed Suliman's "We Shall Return," "One War Day," and "Bundles" offer a unique perspective on many facets of war including its influence on individuals, societies, and their cultures. One of the notable characteristics of these fictional narratives is that they possess the power to transport readers to battlefields by allowing them access to physical and emotional toll of war. These narratives enable readers to examine many aspects of war by delving into the lives of characters under traumatic conditions of war. These narratives offer terrifying exploration of the human experience and provide insights into concepts of trauma. They record tales that remind readers of the lasting impact of war on individuals and societies.

War narratives provide insights into the trauma of characters and their communities. They stress the idea that war extends beyond the battlefield and leaves indelible marks on societies and cultures. This idea is explored through memory and remembrance. War narratives show that societies collectively remember their experiences of war. This act of remembering by the societies proves to be cathartic as well as painful because individuals and communities confront the horrors of war. These narratives highlight the cultural identities that are constructed and redefined in times of war. They bring to the forefront how communities use the art of storytelling to grapple

with the experiences of war and reimagine their collective identity. They also highlight the voices and perspectives of marginalized communities.

Such war narratives in Palestinian literature bring to the forefront the enduring impacts of war on communities. They highlight the collective memory of a community that is marked by decades of conflict. This study delves into such intricacies and aims to uncover collective and cultural trauma in selected Palestinian short stories. It explores how Palestinian short fiction can act as a powerful medium through which trauma is expressed, and how Palestinian writers offer various perspectives on the complexities of trauma.

1.2 Background of the Study

In the history of Palestine, Nakba is a significant event which refers to the forced displacement of Palestinian Arabs. It caused a major upheaval in Palestine; Palestinian community was split apart, villages were destroyed, and families were displaced from their homes. Ann M. Lesch's review of *All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948* sheds light on the collective pain endured by the people of Palestine during Nakba. Talking of the forced displacement and the destroyed villages, she argues that 390,000 refugees lost 1.5 million acres of their land and all their property (Lesch 111). Nakba ingrained a feeling of injustice among Palestinians because it led to the destruction of Palestinian land. Furthermore, it paved way for the Six-Day War in 1967 which took place amid the ongoing hostilities and unresolved grievances.

The Six-Day War proved to be a turning point in Palestine's sociopolitical setting. Israel's occupation of the Golan Heights, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem had a significant effect on the collective identity of Palestinians. The war was characterized by the uprooting of Palestinians and Israel's occupation of Palestine, leaving behind trauma for the entire community. The social and political upheaval was followed by Palestinian protests. The people of Palestine showed resistance to Israeli occupation. The resistance by the people of Palestine fostered a sense of community in the face of Israeli oppression. The resistance against Israel's oppression mobilized Palestinians not physically but also aesthetically and they started to share their experiences through fiction.

Their stories are characterized by violence and bombings that were experienced during these events. The growing unrest among the people of Palestine was caused by the stalled peace process and a growing sense of frustration. The primary objective of Gaza Disengagement was to heal the collective pain of both sides because the cultural fabric of both sides was significantly altered by the destruction and the relocation of communities. After the Gaza Disengagement, the crisis was further worsened by Operation Cast Lead. Operation Cast Lead was a military offensive by Israel on Gaza which lasted from December 2008 to January 2009. It highlighted the ethical and legal repercussions of a collective punishment inflicted upon the people of Gaza. The existing collective suffering of Palestinians was further intensified as the operation resulted in deaths of civilians and damage to Gazan infrastructure. In an article titled “The scales of occupation: ‘Operation Cast Lead’ and the targeting of the Gaza Strip” (2012), Lori Allen highlights the control of space, and the consequent alienization of the inhabitants of Gaza by the Israeli forces. Shedding light on the geographical aspect of Gaza, she contends that the strip of Gaza has become “increasingly isolated” which allows Israel to inflict “mounting levels of violence” on Gaza and its residents (262). Allen argues that because of the significant physical distance between the strip of Gaza and the rest of Palestine, Israel sees Gaza and the people residing therein to be “especially targetable” (262). This geographical setting turns them into a community that has experienced trauma on a collective level.

These events have been characterized with individual or collective trauma in the selected fiction. The cultural identity of the people of Palestine has been strongly affected due to the destruction of their villages, ancestral lands, culture, values, tradition, and historical ties. This destruction has intensified the trauma that they have been experiencing on a cultural level. For this reason, cultural trauma becomes an important concept to be studied in Palestinian literature. To fight against the atrocities that have engulfed the Palestinian community, it is imperative to bring forward critique related to Palestinian fiction. For this purpose, the literary works selected for this study are ten Palestinian short stories that depict communal trauma of the characters.

The first short story titled “L for Life” (2014) is authored by Hanan Habashi. The story revolves around the protagonist, Mariam, who struggles to fill the void left behind with her father’s death. To make sense of her agony, she reflects over her life. The absence of her father, the cynical attitude of her mother, and the impact of the war on her life shape her life. The story furthers with Mariam trying to search answers about

a boy named Thaer. Mariam's father used to talk about Thaer, who was a brave boy and the stories of his courage about saving Amal fascinated Mariam. Thaer serves as a source for Mariam's relentless search for rebuilding a connection with her father. In doing so, Mariam constantly seeks to reconcile with the pain and trauma of losing her father.

The second short story titled "One War Day" (2014) is written by Mohammed Suliman. This story revolves around the character of Hamza, who finds himself amid a war-torn environment. Hamza constantly seeks solace from the blasts outside by reading books. The surroundings of Hamza are indicative of the on-going war in Gaza. As he engages with his book, a sudden blast rattles the entire surrounding area, causing a sudden panic. The story portrays Hamza's struggles to come to terms with the war-torn reality.

The third short story titled "Spared" (2014) is penned down by Rawan Yaghi. The story centers a protagonist who faces a significant upheaval in his life due to an explosion in his neighborhood. Soon after the explosion, the protagonist desperately seeks to find his friends who were gathered to play football in the street. He sees that his friends have been injured, along with his best friend, Ahmed, who loses his life due to the explosion. The depiction of the devastation, injuries, and death caused by the explosion leaves the protagonist disoriented. In the aftermath of the explosion, the protagonist struggles to achieve a sense of normalcy as he witnesses the lasting impact of the explosion on his life.

The fourth short story titled "The Story of the Land" (2014) by Sarah Ali presents an account of deep connection that the people of her community feel with their land. The protagonist recalls the devastation experienced due to Israeli offensive. The protagonist's family and other families in her community lose their land and olive trees, which proves to be a traumatic event for them collectively. Through the depiction of the protagonist's family, the story hints at the broader Palestinian agony amid the on-going war.

The fifth short story titled "Will I Ever Get Out?" (2014) by Nour Al-Sousi revolves around the protagonist, Said, who depicts his agony of living in war-torn Gaza. Said wished to study abroad but ends up studying in Gaza due to the war. Said's once beautiful life turns into a horrifying reality as his home is shelled killing his father. Consequently, he is pushed into abandoning his studies and becoming the sole bread earner of his family. He takes up the job of tunnel digging to provide for his family. His

life becomes even more horrifying as he finds himself trapped inside the tunnel. The story portrays Said's struggle, ending with his hopes for rescue inside the collapsed tunnel.

The sixth short story titled "Bundles" (2014) by Mohammed Suliman is about the story of Salma who prepares herself to visit her son in an Israeli prison. Her son, Naji, has been in prison for three years. For three years, Salma has yearned for his return. Upon visiting the prison, Salma is faced with humiliating security checks as she is expected to submit herself to a cavity search, only to find out, in the end, that her son has died during the imprisonment.

"Please Shoot to Kill" (2014) by Jehan Alfarra is the seventh short story that centers around the struggles of Laila, a young Gazan woman. The story begins as Laila finds herself frustrated over power outage that gets in the way of printing her assignment. The story revolves around Laila and her family's emotional struggle as they try to keep up with the military offensive; one that injures her father and her sister, Salma. Despite Laila's father's critical condition, Laila clings to the hope of her father rejoining them in daily endeavors of life after his medical treatment. However, due to limited resources of the hospital, her father fails to get medical attention that he needs, ultimately losing his life. Throughout the story, Laila and her family endure physical as well as emotional trauma in war-torn Gaza.

Yousef Aljamal's "Omar X" (2014) is the eighth short story that presents an account of frustration and resentment that the protagonist experiences towards Israeli soldiers. "Omar X" (2014) shares the story of a young boy named Omar who adjusts to the dangers of living in a war-torn zone. The story presents a vivid account of his life during occupation and his decision of becoming a freedom fighter which ends with Omar losing his life to Israeli bullets. Throughout the story, the magnitude of the impact of war is brought to focus through the complex situation of a war hit community.

The ninth short story titled "We Shall Return" (2014) by Mohammed Suliman centers around Nakba event which caused the forced displacement of Palestinians from their homeland. The story revolves around three central characters: Abu Ibrahim, Abu Ahmed, and Abu Naser as they find themselves in a state of uncertainty. The three refugees, along with hundreds of other people, struggle to come to terms with the loss of their homeland. The story paints a vivid picture of the chaotic war situation that the characters face as they continuously fail to sing the songs of harmony. The story is a

testament to the collective trauma that the families of the three central characters and hundreds of other people face during Nakba.

Randa Jarrar's "Barefoot Bridge" (2006) is the tenth short story that centers around a family's journey to their homeland in Palestine for the burial of the protagonist's grandfather. The story sheds light on the collective trauma faced by the family of the protagonist. The narrative centers around the child protagonist's perspective, as the protagonist is faced with multiple hurdles during the journey. The story is a testament to the impact of war on community as the family of the protagonist comes across intrusive inspections on the border.

The selected texts are analyzed through the conceptual lens of Kai T. Erikson and Jeffrey C. Alexander to look for instances of trauma in a community. Kai T. Erikson argues that trauma is not a phenomenon exclusive to individuals, it can also move through communities. He suggests that the concept of trauma can be expanded beyond the individual level to include groups with a shared identity that collectively suffer from a traumatizing event.

Collective trauma precedes cultural trauma as it deals with the immediate and significant effects of traumatic events on a group or a community. When a group or a community experiences a devastating event such as a disaster, a war, or systemic oppression, the social fabric of that group or community is disrupted. This disruption leads to a shared sense of loss, confusion, and vulnerability among the affected population. The affected population comes together to deal with their loss, encourage one another, and heal the shared trauma experience. This initial phase of collective trauma, where the shared memories, emotions, and experiences are established, lays the groundwork for the broader societal processes that follow. In other words, it sets the stage for cultural trauma.

As the affected group starts to process its experience, the suffering community begins to understand the "trauma process" (Alexander 11) and engages with narratives to establish their claims. In this way, cultural trauma paves way for the process of interpretation, narration, and memorialization that shapes a group's future identity. Collective trauma, experienced by the affected group, provides the essential foundation for later uses to construct meaning. In other words, after the affected group experiences collective trauma, the society begins to engage in understanding of the traumatizing event, making sense of it, and possibly sharing the pain of the affected group through their claims (11). This includes the process of the

creation of such narratives that not only represent the collective experience of trauma but also broadcast claims of trauma.

Jeffrey C. Alexander argues that an event is not inherently traumatic, it is the meaning attached to the subsequent representation of that event that gives it the status of trauma (8). The representation of an event through trauma narrative, by identifying the pain, the victims, and perpetrators is articulated by agents of the trauma process. Such narratives are imperative for the integration of the traumatic experiences of the affected group into the broader cultural framework of the society. The raw material of the collective trauma becomes the building block of a larger cultural discourse. The society, through storytelling, memorials, rituals, and media creates a collective memory that acknowledges the pain and suffering of the affected group. It attempts at going beyond the initial impact of the event on the affected group and looks at how the experiences of the group are woven into the collective memory and identity of the community. In view of this, collective trauma becomes a prerequisite for cultural trauma. Without the discussion of collective trauma, the broader societal processes that define cultural trauma would fail to make sense. In this way, cultural trauma becomes a broader concept that encapsulates collective trauma.

Along with the communal suffering that transcends individual experiences, this study aims to explore the “trauma processes” (Alexander 11) involved in establishing cultural trauma. It focuses on how a community suffers through the process of trauma and then interprets, narrates, and memorializes traumatic events. It is important to mention here that the concept of collective trauma functions as part of cultural trauma, therefore it is not included in the title of the dissertation.

This study acknowledges the importance of collective trauma as the initial phase that lays the ground framework for cultural trauma. However, the primary focus of this research is on cultural trauma. By concentrating on cultural trauma, the study aims to analyze how societies process and integrate traumatic experiences into their collective consciousness.

1.3 Thesis Statement

The selected Palestinian short fiction reveals cultural trauma by depicting the shared suffering of community which goes beyond individual pain and affects the whole social structure. These narratives highlight the suffering of a community which

ties them together through collective trauma. These short stories facilitate to establish claims of recognition of the suffering community, reconstruction of its identity and realization of a moral responsibility for the community. The traumatic experiences of the characters have been analysed through the theoretical lens of Kai T. Erikson's concept of collective trauma and Jeffrey C. Alexander's conceptualization of cultural trauma.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What are the different traumatic events in selected Palestinian war narratives that impact the characters and constitute collective trauma?
2. In what ways do the selected short stories reflect the process of cultural trauma?
3. How does the selected short fiction reconstruct the collective identity of the Palestinian community through cultural trauma?

1.5 Delimitation of the Study

This study employs Kai T. Erikson's theory of collective trauma and Jeffrey C. Alexander's theory of cultural trauma to design a theoretical framework. This study focuses on several aspects of cultural trauma theory including disruption of familial and communal bonds and collective identity formation. These aspects are critical to understanding the multifaceted nature of trauma as experienced and represented in the selected texts. The study is delimited to ten short stories about war, including Hanan Habashi's "L for Life," Rawan Yaghi's "Spared," Sarah Ali's "The Story of the Land," Nour Al-Sousi's "Will I Ever Get Out?" Jehan Alfarra's "Please Shoot to Kill," Yousef Aljamal's "Omar X," Randa Jarrar's "Barefoot Bridge," and Mohammed Suliman's "We Shall Return," "One War Day," and "Bundles."

Moreover, the selection of three short stories by the same author, Mohammed Suliman, serves to explore the diverse impact of cultural trauma on different protagonists – a young boy, an elderly lady, and three elderly men within varying contexts. By taking under examination three different narratives by Mohammed

Suliman, this thesis aims to showcase how cultural trauma manifests uniquely through a variety of characters. Each story offers a unique perspective through which the social and cultural dimensions of trauma can be gauged. It also underscores the ability of the author to capture the complex nature of the Palestinian experience with empathy and depth.

Additionally, throughout the development of this thesis, the short stories, originally sourced from blogs, were subsequently validated through published anthologies to meet academic requirements. The omission of sources of the short stories is to emphasize the in-depth exploration and analysis of war narratives as the central focus of this study.

1.6 Significance of the Study

Palestinian literature depicts characters that have either been displaced from their homeland or have been the victims of atrocities of war in the Palestinian land. Their disrupted lives offer an investigation into the atrocities of war through fiction. This study highlights the voices of a marginalized community to provide a better understanding of their suffering. The chosen fictional narratives warrant an examination of trauma that the characters endure because these narratives are depictions of brutality at the hands of oppressors.

Moreover, Palestinian literature illuminates varying aspects of Palestinian cultural trauma which is seldom represented through other mediums. Since cultural trauma is more readily constructed for western world than the non-western world, Palestinian literature proves to be a powerful means of representation of the graphic atrocities of war. The present study attempts to bridge this disparity and aims to encompass the Palestinian voice to give a due consideration.

Moreover, this study is of significance because the literary works under discussion bring to the spotlight various Palestinian writers who are currently writing short fiction to highlight their plight. The diversity in characters in different short stories demonstrates that the chosen narratives cover a range of voices and situations. This paves way for a more comprehensive discussion because the narratives consider the complexities related to male, female and child characters in a collectivity.

1.7 Chapters Division of the Study

The introductory chapter of this research provides an introduction, background of the study, thesis statement, research questions, delimitation, significance of the study, and the division of chapters.

The second chapter of this dissertation examines the existing literature related to the topic of this study. The aim of the chapter is to identify and address gaps in the current literature. The first section of this chapter examines the theoretical landscape surrounding collective trauma and cultural trauma. It aims to pinpoint areas where existing scholarship may be incomplete or where new perspectives are needed. The second part of the chapter shifts its focus to secondary literature on the literary texts chosen for the analysis in this study.

The third chapter of this research presents the theoretical framework and research methodology of this study. It provides a comprehensive examination of the works of Kai T. Erikson and Jeffrey C. Alexander to analyze collective trauma and cultural trauma in the context of Palestinian fiction.

The fourth chapter presents the analysis of selected literary texts. This chapter unfolds the concept of collective trauma and analyzes the plight of characters in the stories in the wake of Israeli aggression. The study examines the collective traumatizing reality of characters as portrayed in the selected short stories. It examines the fictional portrayal of war-hit Palestinian people and provides an analysis of how the writers of the short stories have presented the trauma of community.

The fifth chapter of this research builds upon the preceding chapter and analyzes the representation of collective traumatizing reality in selected Palestinian texts. Moreover, it aims to determine whether the represented traumatizing reality qualifies to be considered as cultural trauma. Additionally, this chapter examines the dissemination of trauma narratives in aesthetic realm to highlight the trauma process and the reconstruction of Palestinian identity.

The sixth and final chapter presents the findings of the analysis of this research study. Based on these findings, this research proposes recommendations for future researchers in this domain.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The primary objective of literature review is to position and contextualize this study within the contemporary scholarship and highlight the existing gaps in the field. By examining the available secondary literature, this chapter seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the current academic debates relevant to this study. In doing so, it not only underscores the importance of this study but also identifies areas that have been overlooked or underexplored in previous researches. This examination is essential for establishing the relevance and necessity of the present study. With these goals in mind, this chapter presents the review of pertinent material in a structured manner. The following sections are organized to address the various aspects of the secondary literature and ensure a coherent analysis that supports the objectives of this chapter.

The review is designed in a two-dimensional examination of the available secondary literature pertinent to this study. The first dimension is theoretical which focuses on the theoretical framework that underpins this research. This aspect of the review aims to present an analysis of existing literature, including dissertations and research papers, where various researchers have employed theoretical concepts that are in some way related to the theoretical framework of this study. The examination not only reinforces the foundation of this research but also advocates for the broader application of these theoretical ideas in the analysis of different literary texts. By doing so, this chapter aims to situate this research project within the existing body of literature and highlights its significant contribution.

The second dimension of this review focuses on the textual aspect. It involves an examination of the secondary literature available on the selected literary texts. Through this analysis, this chapter identifies the gaps that this study aims to address in its examination of these texts.

2.1 Critical Scholarship on Collective Trauma and Cultural Trauma

Maeed Almarhabi's doctoral thesis, "Cultural Trauma and the Formation of Palestinian National Identity in Palestinian American Writing" (2020), provides an exploration of the intricate relationship that Palestinian diaspora maintains with the homeland. The study delves into how, despite the absence of a formally recognized Palestinian state, these communities continue to sustain a profound connection to the memory of their homeland. Almarhabi's thesis posits that the Palestinian narrative is fundamentally a narrative of collective experience and historical continuity. This narrative serves as a crucial mechanism for preserving the cultural and emotional ties between the diaspora and their ancestral homeland.

Central to Almarhabi's argument are the concepts of the right of return and *sumud* (steadfastness), which he identifies as pivotal components of Palestinian national narratives. The right of return symbolizes the collective aspiration of Palestinians to return to their homeland despite the ongoing geopolitical challenges. On the other hand, *Sumud* reflects the resilience and steadfastness of the Palestinian people in the face of adversity and displacement. Almarhabi's work highlights how these themes are interwoven into the cultural fabric of Palestinian communities – both within the diaspora and in their literary expressions. Moreover, the thesis examines the role of literature and other cultural productions in maintaining and reinforcing these narratives. By analyzing the works of Palestinian American writers, Almarhabi sheds light on how these narratives are articulated and preserved in the diaspora. The study emphasizes the importance of storytelling as a means of cultural survival and resistance. It illustrates how literary works function as repositories of collective memory and identity. It also provides a gap for my study to analyze how Palestinian narratives can be crucial in the reconstruction of collective memory and revision of future identity.

Maeed Almarhabi's doctoral thesis provides a significant foundation for understanding the broader cultural and collective traumas within Palestinian narratives. The thesis underscores the importance of collective memory and its role in sustaining a connection to the homeland among the Palestinian diaspora. This emphasis on the collective narrative aligns closely with my thesis's examination of

how a collective narrative of trauma emerges through the selected short fiction but it does not tap into the area of reconstruction of identity in war narratives.

In addition, Almarhabi's focus on the right of return and *sumud* offers thematic parallels that can enrich the exploration of resilience and enduring cultural identity in the face of trauma. While Almarhabi's study effectively addresses the cultural trauma and identity formation among the Palestinian diaspora, it highlights the need to delve into the specificities of collective trauma as experienced within Palestine. My thesis addresses this gap by focusing on how collective trauma is portrayed in short stories by young Palestinian writers who directly engage with the immediate and ongoing impact of trauma within Palestine and broadcast their claims to broader audience. Additionally, my thesis offers an examination of how collective traumas are aestheticized and potentially transformed into cultural traumas within war literature. This approach further marks the difference of my thesis by contributing a new perspective to the discourse on Palestinian identity through cultural trauma.

Another doctoral thesis, "9/11 Fiction and the Construction of Cultural Trauma" (2015), by Tanya Geraldine Schaap explores how fictional works respond to the events of September 11, 2001. The study draws on sociological insights from Jeffrey C. Alexander and Neil J. Smelser and challenges the idea that trauma is only a personal experience. Instead, it argues that collective narratives shape how a society perceives and remembers trauma. Schaap critiques how mainstream media portrayed 9/11 and highlights how cultural trauma theory helps us understand the ongoing processes of assigning meaning. This theoretical foundation forms a sturdy base for Schaap to analyze a range of literary works which includes Ulrich Baer's anthology and novels by Amy Waldman, Mohsin Hamid, Jonathan Safran Foer, and Siri Hustvedt. The texts are not just studied for their themes around 9/11 but also for how they challenge and redefine cultural narratives about the event. Schaap's study aims to show how individual experiences interact with collective memory in the aftermath of trauma.

Moreover, the thesis makes a compelling case for why cultural trauma theory remains relevant to understand the construction of collective memory. By emphasizing that trauma is a dynamic and contested process rather than a fixed historical event, the thesis challenges static views of trauma and shows how it is continually shaped through storytelling and debate. This perspective is exemplified

in the analysis of literary texts that engage with 9/11 by demonstrating how fiction provides an important platform for questioning dominant narratives and offering alternative perspectives on the cultural impacts of traumatic events. Schaap not only highlights the theoretical and methodological contributions of cultural trauma theory to literary studies but also underscores its broader implications for understanding how societies respond to collective trauma in today's media-driven public sphere.

Schaap's theoretical foundation is relevant to my research as it provides a framework for understanding how collective trauma is depicted in literature. Moreover, the thesis's exploration of fiction as a site of contestation and communal grappling with trauma resonates with my aim to analyze how Palestinian narratives portray instances of cultural trauma and reconstruct Palestinian identity. The thesis, while insightful, predominantly focuses on American perspectives on 9/11 and does not sufficiently incorporate cross-cultural variations in the construction of cultural trauma. This gap presents an opportunity for my research to contribute by exploring how cultural trauma is reflected in Palestinian literature and how it shapes and reconstructs identity. By examining short stories from young Palestinian writers, my thesis aims to highlight the unique cultural and socio-political factors that influence the depiction of trauma in a non-Western context. This perspective not only broadens the applicability of cultural trauma theory but also demonstrates how different cultural narratives contribute to a more global and inclusive understanding of trauma. It provides a comprehensive view of how cultural trauma is experienced and articulated across diverse cultures.

In a research article, "Cultural Trauma, Collective Memory and the Vietnam War" (2017), Magnus Ring et al. discuss the enduring impact of the Vietnam War on collective memory and identity. They contrast the experiences of different societal groups affected by the conflict. The study highlights how the war fractured national identity and became a focal point of cultural trauma in the United States during the tumultuous 1960s. Conversely, in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, the conflict was framed as a struggle for national liberation. It fostered a cohesive collective identity despite the trauma that was endured. The study also sheds light on the ongoing generational and cultural ramifications of the war. It focuses on Vietnamese diaspora communities in the United States and within postwar Vietnam.

Magnus Ring et al. argue that while the Vietnam War created enduring collective memories and identities among the Vietnamese communists, Vietnamese Americans, and the United States, the cultural trauma experienced varied significantly among different groups. They effectively demonstrate how, through the voices and representations of veterans and other carrier groups, narratives of trauma were constructed and sustained through various media and cultural practices. The article underscores the importance of these narratives in shaping national consciousness and identity, both in the United States and Vietnam.

Magnus Ring et al.'s article is relevant to my study because it demonstrates how trauma narratives are constructed and sustained through various media and cultural practices. This aligns closely with the current study's analysis of Palestinian short stories. However, it does not tap into how narratives project claims of suffering and trauma. This study aims to fill that gap. Ring et al.'s identification of veterans, policy and administrative officials, and cultural producers as carrier groups echoes this research project's focus on writers who play a crucial role in shaping and disseminating trauma narratives. Furthermore, their examination of how Vietnam War influenced collective memory and identity formation in both the United States and Vietnam provides a parallel to the current study's exploration of how collective trauma in Palestinian short stories shapes collective identity and cultural memory.

However, building upon historiography, the article signifies the need of research based on the analysis of literary texts that offer such issues to interpret. This presents a gap that the current study attempts to fill. By focusing specifically on the literary representation of trauma in Palestinian short stories, the current study offers a perspective that differs from the historical analysis provided by Ring et al. This research project contributes to filling this gap by highlighting how short fiction can effectively convey and mediate cultural trauma.

In his research paper, "Descending the Khazooq: "Working Through" the Trauma of the Nakba in Emile Habibi's Oeuvre" (2016), Assaf Peled provides an examination of how Emile Habibi, a Palestinian-Israeli writer, journalist, and politician, addresses the collective trauma of the Nakba through his literary works. Focusing on the experiences of Palestinian citizens of Israel, Peled explores how Habibi transforms his personal experience into a collective narrative that aids in the community's process of working through trauma. Peled highlights Habibi's unique

contribution to the understanding and articulation of collective trauma among Palestinians who remained in Israel.

The paper delves into Habibi's method of addressing collective trauma by encouraging the acknowledgment of the traumatic events and the new realities they create. This acknowledgment, the paper contends, is crucial for mending the rift in both individual and collective identities. It effectively situates Habibi's work within the broader framework of "Resistance Literature" noting that his writings defied Israeli attempts to erase Palestinian national identity and helped foster a consciousness of armed resistance. By examining the unique conditions faced by Palestinian-Israeli citizens and their responses, the paper underscores the therapeutic endeavors embedded in Habibi's literary works. It also emphasizes the importance of communal interaction in understanding shared traumatic experiences which can serve as a source of solidarity and resistance.

The above reviewed paper relates to important aspects of my thesis. Both Peled's analysis and my research underscore the role of literature in articulating and mediating collective trauma within the Palestinian community. Peled's focus on Habibi's literary method of acknowledging and processing the trauma of the Nakba parallels my approach of identifying instances of collective trauma in the short stories. Furthermore, Peled's emphasis on the therapeutic potential of communal interaction in Habibi's works aligns with my investigation of how young Palestinian writers, to achieve some semblance of collective healing in a context that is marked by oppression, construct and mediate claims of trauma.

However, Peled's critique of Habibi's approach highlights its weaknesses especially in its failure to assign responsibility for the trauma. Habibi's portrayal of the Nakba as a natural catastrophe implies an absence of accountability. It does not shed light on the perpetrators behind the suffering. My thesis seeks to address this gap. It provides a detailed discussion on the short stories by uncovering the pain endured by the characters, identifying the perpetrators of trauma, attributing responsibility for the trauma of the characters, and the ultimate reconstruction of the Palestinian identity.

The above reviewed theory-based dissertations and papers reveal that the gap here lies in the fact that the use of these theoretical ideas have largely been ignored in analyzing short fiction. This research seeks to fill the gap by bringing Palestinian short fiction under analysis based on the above theoretical concepts. Through the analysis of selected texts, this research project sheds a new light on how Palestinian narratives address topics of shaping of collective memory and the reconstruction of collective identity. Pertaining to the second dimension of this literature review, this

study presents the review of critical scholarship available on the selected literary texts below.

2.2 Critical Scholarship on Selected Short Fiction

This section of the chapter considers a selection of sources that examine the selected literary texts under analysis from various perspectives. While numerous researchers have approached these texts from different angles, this section focuses on aspects closely related to topic of the study. It aims to effectively highlight the research gap that this thesis intends to address. By concentrating on subjects closely aligned with this research, this section aims to demonstrate the unique contributions that this research project makes in filling the gaps.

In a research paper titled “Oppressed and Challenged but not Defeated: Families in Gaza Writes Back” (2021), Elham T. Hussein conducts an analysis of *Gaza Writes Back* (2014), focusing on its examination of the traditional patriarchal structures prevalent in Palestinian society. The primary focus of her paper highlights two key aspects: the significance of narration as a central theme in *Gaza Writes Back*, and the impact of societal changes on traditional family structures within Palestinian society. Hussein posits that to challenge the dominant Israeli narrative, the young short story writers from Gaza have commendably prioritized narration as an important component of cultural creation. This emphasis on storytelling serves as a mechanism through which they can assert their distinct identity and actively resist the process of erasure. The narratives presented demonstrate an important level of effectiveness in terms of self-representation as they possess qualities of legitimacy and authenticity.

Moreover, the study focuses on the alteration of traditional patriarchal family structures and the changing role of fathers within Palestinian communities. The author highlights the cohesive nature of Arab families to emphasize the stark contrast between the Western perception of the individual as an independent entity. The interdependence among family members in an Arab house-hold results in a blurred distinction between the individual and the family unit. The merging of the individual and the family unit results in a unified entity in which the outcomes, whether positive or negative, of one member have a direct impact on the collective. The author posits that the primary means of sustenance for Palestinians was land which has been lost, resulting in an absence of livelihood opportunities and a loss of the father figure as a unifying force within the

family. In Palestinian culture, land held significant symbolic value as it represented the father's authority and status within the family unit. The concept of the father figure has traditionally been associated with providing a sense of safety and fostering cohesion within a social unit. The displacement of the ancestral lands has resulted in a decline of the father's typical societal position.

Hussein's paper is pertinent to my study as it underscores the role of narration in cultural creation and the impact of societal changes on traditional family structures in Palestinian society. Hussein highlights the effectiveness of narration as a form of self-representation and resistance which aligns with the current examination of how Palestinian writers depict cultural trauma. Additionally, the paper's discussion of interdependence within Arab families and the alteration of traditional roles due to the displacement complements the current analysis of the collective trauma experienced by families in the selected short stories. Although Hussein's paper establishes a link between narration and cultural creation, its lack of a proper discussion and to provide a structured framework to understand the portrayal of cultural trauma is where the gap resides. This is the gap taken up in the current study. Furthermore, while Hussein's work focuses on broader societal changes, the current study delves into specific instances of collective trauma within short stories and offers a detailed analysis of how these events impact individual characters and their communities. The current study also addresses the transformation of collective trauma into cultural trauma – a transition not explored in Hussein's paper, thus contributing new insights into the process of cultural trauma formation in Palestinian literature.

In her research article titled "Writing for Gaza: Textual (Dis)Embodiment, Creative Resistance and Social Justice in Gaza Writes Back: Short Stories from Young Writers in Gaza, Palestine and Hedava Shamun's "The Taste of Coffee in Gaza" (2020), Mehta examines the concept of creative resistance as portrayed in *Gaza Writes Back* (2014). She emphasizes the significance of employing creative methods as a means of resistance. She argues that the process of writing as a form of resistance is mainly two-fold. Firstly, this written response serves as a de-colonial response to the Western and Zionist narratives surrounding Palestine. Secondly, it serves as a means of reconnecting with the older generation of Palestinians who have long been detached from the aspirations and desires of the younger Palestinian population. The primary objective behind composing these narratives in English language is to achieve self-

representation and subjectivity, while also ensuring that no meaning is lost during the process of translation. The authors claim exclusive ownership over the narratives in this manner. Moreover, Mehta contends that the politicians in Palestine who frequently appear on television lack awareness of the aspirations held by the younger generation. In this manner, they maintain a state of disconnection due to their different takes on the siege which starkly contrast with the viewpoints held by those directly experiencing its intensity.

Mehta's research article is highly relevant to my study as it underscores the concept of creative resistance and highlights how Palestinian writers use fiction as a means of resistance and self-representation. This aligns with my examination of how these narratives depict instances of trauma. The article also discusses writing as a decolonial response to Western and Zionist narratives surrounding Palestine which is relevant to the current study because it shows how storytelling in Palestinian short fiction challenges dominant narratives. However, while Mehta focuses broadly on creative resistance, this research hones in on the specific dynamics of collective and cultural trauma and examines the societal impacts on characters and communities. Therein lies the gap and the present study aims to fill that gap.

Isabelle Hesse, in her research article titled "Sensory Siege: dromocolonisation, slow violence, and poetic realism in the twenty first century short story from Gaza" (2017), effectively examines the role of sensory perceptions in guiding the narratives of two short stories in *Gaza Writes Back* (2014), shedding light on their underlying themes and messages. The focus of her study centers on the sensory experiences that correspond to the rise and fall of the plot in two short stories. The author carries out a formalist analysis of the diction employed in the narratives, specifically focusing on how they contribute to the characters' sensory experience and the overall atmosphere of the stories. The phenomenon of sensory siege is observed in Palestinian households, where the absence of sound is juxtaposed with the audible presence of Israeli helicopters and tanks. The auditory elements in the text involve a comparison between the characters' footsteps and the beat of their hearts, followed by a distinct contrast with the sound of the overhead helicopter. This juxtaposition suggests that the characters possess a keen awareness of the approaching danger hovering above them. It clarifies the sensory encounters in connection with the dromocolonial interventions carried out by the Israeli military, with the aim of providing the reader with an understanding of

the emotional stress experienced by the characters. The noises of different explosive devices are intricately connected to the spreading of shockwaves, while the visual depictions last longer to create a synesthetic encounter for the reader, thus encouraging a heightened awareness of the multifaceted implications associated with acts of bombing. The present scholarship primarily centers on methodologies employed to study synaesthetic encounters following Israel's military's offensive. The sharp sounds of machines are compared to the calm and gloomy atmospheres of the households, concluding that the characters experience a sense of terror about machine interventions.

Hesse's research article is significant in understanding the sensory experiences and emotional stress of characters in Palestinian fiction. Her formalist analysis of diction and sensory encounters aligns with this study's exploration of trauma and provides valuable insights into the characters' experiences of terror and violence which contributes to the broader discussion of how Palestinian fiction represents the realities of war and occupation. While Hesse focuses on sensory experiences, her article highlights the space for further discussion on how these experiences are part of a larger narrative strategy that communicates collective and cultural trauma. This is the gap that this research project aims to address. Additionally, Hesse does not explore how group experiences are integrated into the collective consciousness and cultural memory of Palestinian society. My research addresses this by analyzing how traumatic experiences are memorialized and narrated within the cultural framework. It offers a perspective on how different narratives handle themes of trauma and contribute to the collective and cultural trauma of the Palestinian people.

In conclusion, this chapter positions this study within contemporary scholarship and identifies key gaps that underscore the relevance and necessity of the current research. This chapter, by adopting a two-dimensional approach, provides an examination of both the theoretical frameworks and the secondary literature related to the chosen literary texts. The review is structured to address various aspects of secondary literature.

The theoretical dimension demonstrates the significance of employing established concepts of collective and cultural trauma in the analysis of Palestinian short fiction. By examining existing dissertations and research papers, this review highlights how various researchers have utilized these theoretical perspectives in

diverse contexts. However, there remains a critical need to apply these concepts specifically to the literary works under consideration in this study. This application is not only crucial for validating the theoretical framework but also for enriching the analysis by offering new insights into how young Palestinian writers depict and process trauma. By doing so, this study advocates for a broader application of these theoretical ideas in literary studies.

The textual dimension further emphasizes the gaps in existing scholarship concerning the selected literary texts. Through a detailed review of secondary literature, this chapter identifies the limited exploration of these texts from the perspective of collective and cultural trauma. The review shows that, while many researchers have approached these texts from various angles, there remains a significant gap in addressing how these works articulate the experiences and responses to trauma within the Palestinian context. This examination is essential for situating this research project within the existing body of literature and for highlighting its contribution.

The review lays a solid foundation for the analysis in the subsequent chapters of this study. It not only contextualizes the research within the broader academic discourse but also justifies the need for this specific investigation. By bridging the identified gaps, this study aims to offer a meaningful contribution to both literary and trauma studies.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The literature review chapter has provided the researcher with an understanding of the available scholarships in the field. The chapter paved way towards the selection of research methodology and helped in identifying a relevant research method. 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.

3.1 Theoretical Framework

To establish a link between Kai T. Erikson's concept of collective trauma and Jeffrey C. Alexander's concept of cultural trauma, this chapter aims at bridging the two theories. The focus of this research is to find a common ground between the two theories. By delving deep into the mechanisms of both the theories, it becomes evident that both the concepts address collective trauma.

One way to form a link between the theories of collective trauma and cultural trauma is to underscore the point that both the theories focus on the collective nature of trauma in a community. The concept of collective trauma, as established by Kai T. Erikson, focuses on how traumatic events move through communities. These traumatic events shape the shared experiences of the people who belong to a community. Erikson's theory of collective trauma maintains that trauma is not solely the experience of an individual. It moves beyond the individual experience and damages the social fabric of a society and disrupts the collective life.

Similarly, the concept of cultural trauma by Jeffrey C. Alexander maintains that events that are understood to be traumatic have a significant impact on the collective identity of a group. Alexander's theory foregrounds the symbolic representation of large-scale disruptive events that ensue the struggle over meaning and memory on a cultural level. By the same token, theory of cultural trauma asserts that trauma is not

merely an individual or a psychological phenomenon. It could be extended to encapsulate the social and cultural fabric of a community.

Both Erikson's and Alexander's theories address the collective dimension of trauma. Erikson provides a foundational understanding of how trauma can affect a community's social structures and create a pervasive mood of fear and disruption that goes beyond individual experiences. Alexander extends this understanding by focusing on how communities make sense of these traumatic disruptions through cultural narratives and symbols, ultimately constructing a shared identity around the trauma.

This study positions Erikson's theory as a lens to identify instances of collective trauma in Palestinian fiction. It highlights how traumatic events impact the community's shared experiences and social structures. Concurrently, Alexander's theory is used to analyze how these traumatic events are represented and culturally mediated within the selected short stories. By examining how the Palestinian community interprets and narrates these events, the research identifies how cultural trauma is constructed through literature.

Focusing on Erikson's theory, the present research attempts to look for instances of collective trauma. To do so, it is imperative to gather background knowledge about collective trauma theory. For that purpose, this research carries out a detailed reading of the work of Erikson to provide its ideas to gauge the collective trauma of Palestinian community as presented in the selected short stories. The present research looks for instances of collective trauma, as advocated by Erikson, to see if the selected short stories can be characterized as narratives presenting a community that has been traumatized collectively.

Furthermore, the focus of the present research study points towards cultural trauma theory by Jeffrey C. Alexander. The traumatizing events in Palestine have a detrimental impact on the well-being of the community. These events have significantly disrupted social structures and undermined cultural values, beliefs, ideologies, and identity. The focus of this research study is to point towards the social sufferings and study the way the community mediates its effects. The nature of the initial traumatic experiences, as well as the identities of those who suffered and perpetrated them, are not immediately apparent. They are determined through a complex and disputed process of trauma. This process culminates in the formation of cultural trauma as proposed by Jeffrey C. Alexander. This study examines the process of social construction of cultural trauma in Palestinian literature, and in the context of short

fiction writing, evaluates its effectiveness or lack thereof. This involves examining the collective experience of injuries that induces trauma, and its impact in generating the collective identity and memories of the affected group.

By merging these theories, this research asserts that both collective trauma and cultural trauma contribute to a deeper understanding of how communities experience, interpret, and respond to traumatic events. Erikson's theory provides insight into the immediate and ongoing social disruptions caused by trauma, while Alexander's theory offers a framework for understanding how these disruptions are represented within a cultural context. Together, these theories allow for a comprehensive examination of the Palestinian community's traumatic experiences as portrayed in the selected short stories, encompassing both the immediate social impacts and the processes of cultural meaning-making and identity formation.

3.1.1 Collective Trauma and Cultural Trauma

In trauma studies, understanding the multifaceted nature of trauma is essential to grasp its impact on both individuals and communities. Trauma, in a general sense, refers to an overwhelming event or experience that causes significant psychological and emotional harm. It disrupts the normal functioning of the mind and body and leads to a wide range of responses from anxiety and depression to post-traumatic stress. Trauma can be categorized broadly into two types: individual trauma and collective trauma.

Individual Trauma typically pertains to the psychological and emotional damage suffered by a single person due to a distressing event or experience such as abuse, violence, or a natural disaster. This concept has traditionally been the focus of psychoanalysis and clinical psychology which aim to treat and understand trauma's effects on personal behavior and mental health. The transformation of individual traumas into collective trauma is a complex process that involves multiple social, cultural, and psychological factors. While individual trauma refers to the distressing experiences of single persons, collective trauma emerges when these individual experiences resonate with a larger community and generate a shared sense of suffering, loss, and disruption. This transformation begins when personal traumatic events are communicated, remembered, and interpreted within a social context. In this way, they become part of a collective memory that transcends the boundaries of individual experiences.

Individual traumas often gain collective significance through mechanisms such as storytelling, communal mourning, public rituals, and the media. When individuals share their traumatic experiences, these stories become a part of the community's collective narrative. The repetition and dissemination of these personal accounts can help create a shared understanding and collective memory of the event allowing members of the community to recognize the commonality of their suffering. This process not only validates individual experiences but also enables the community to acknowledge and internalize these traumas as a collective reality.

The collective reality, which can also be understood as collective trauma, extends beyond the individual level to encompass the shared experiences of groups, communities, or entire societies affected by large-scale catastrophic events such as wars, genocides, or natural disasters. Unlike individual trauma, collective trauma involves the disruption of a community's social and cultural fabric. It affects its sense of identity, cohesion, and continuity over time. This concept is crucial for understanding how traumatic events impact groups of people and the processes through which societies collectively remember, interpret, and respond to such events.

Building on these general definitions, specific theories provide frameworks for analyzing and understanding the dynamics of collective trauma and its cultural manifestations. Kai T. Erikson's theory of collective trauma delves deeper into how traumatic events affect entire communities and reshape their social structures and collective consciousness. Erikson emphasizes that collective trauma is not just a sum of individual traumas but rather a broader disruption that alters the social fabric and creates a communal experience of suffering. Erikson advocates that the collective trauma of a community moves one step beyond the psychological trauma of an individual and creates a mood of fear in the community. This mood is different and more than the sum of the private psychological wounds of individuals that make up a community.

Alexander's theory of cultural trauma extends the concept by upholding the notion that cultural trauma does not concern itself with whether an incident is traumatic, it concerns itself with the meaning that the members of a community attach to that incident. The attached meaning gives it the status of a cultural trauma. Alexander explores how traumatic events are represented, interpreted, and integrated into a community's cultural narrative. Alexander's framework focuses on the symbolic dimensions of trauma where certain events are imbued with collective significance.

They shape a group's identity and memory through shared meanings, rituals, and narratives. This theory emphasizes the social processes through which communities define and articulate their traumatic experiences. It involves a struggle over meaning and memory that plays out on a cultural level.

This study provides a foundation for examining how collective and cultural traumas operate and interact in the context of Palestinian short fiction. The subsequent discussion draws on Erikson's and Alexander's theories to investigate how traumatic events in Palestinian literature are portrayed both as collective disruptions and as elements of a broader cultural narrative.

3.2 Kai Erikson's Theory of Collective Trauma

Drawing on Erikson's essay, "Notes on Trauma and Community" (1995), and invoking key concepts from his book, *Everything in Its Path* (1976), the first theory that this study employs is the theory of collective trauma. To understand the notion of collective trauma, Kai T. Erikson's concept is utilized which establishes a link between trauma and community. In his essay titled "Notes on Trauma and Community" (1995), Erikson argues that trauma, usually understood to be purely a concept of the domain of psychology, can also be understood in terms of community. Grounding himself inside the domain of sociology, Erikson argues that sometimes a community can be damaged in the same way as mind and body of a person. Thus, trauma seems to have a social dimension.

Erikson refers to the devastating effects of a flood in a community known as Buffalo Creek. He observed the effects of the destruction on individuals who suffered from the trauma first hand and noticed that some people who were not present at the time of the destruction were also traumatized by it. Tracing the effects of the flood on the community, he argues that the people of the community "were torn loose from their cultural moorings – alone, adrift, floating like particles in a dead electromagnetic field" (Erikson 188). Erikson observed that the residents of the community who were not immediate witnesses to the disaster at the time of its happening were still traumatized by the lack of a community. For Erikson, this proved to be a "telling test case" (Erikson 188) for the notion of collective trauma. The members of the community who were not direct witnesses to the disaster were injured by "the loss of a sustaining community" (Erikson 188).

After his experience with the victims of the flood, Erikson established that the notion of trauma can be extended from individuals to traumatized communities. Consequently, he expanded the concept of trauma from individuals to groups that were connected by a distinct commonality and who were traumatized collectively by an incident. In his seminal book titled *Everything in Its Path* (1976), Erikson expands on collective trauma by stating the following:

By *collective trauma*. . . I mean a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality. The collective trauma works its way slowly and even insidiously into the awareness of those who suffer from it, so it does not have the quality of suddenness normally associated with “trauma.” But it is a form of shock all the same, a gradual realization that the community no longer exists as an effective source of support and that an important part of the self has disappeared. (131)

Erikson's conceptualization of collective trauma encompasses three fundamental elements that must come together for a community to experience collective trauma. They are as follows.

1. A blow to the basic tissues of social life
2. Damaged social bonds
3. An impaired sense of communality

The important thing to note here is that there is a clear shift away from the field of psychology towards the field of sociology. Individual trauma caters to the domain of psychology whereas collective trauma, as evident by Erikson's scholarship, caters to the domain of sociology. Furthering the idea of collective trauma, Erikson contends that a traumatic event can inflict suffering on individuals within a community. These events can produce both traumatized individuals and traumatized communities, but a traumatized community is more than the sum of traumatized individuals within that community. There can be individuals who suffer from psychological trauma and on a collective level as part of a collective group, but individuals suffering from PTSD are not a prerequisite for collective trauma.

If an incident befalls a community and the community disappears, people who do not witness the incident can also be traumatized because they find that they are “empty of feeling, empty of affection, empty of confidence and assurance” (Erikson 163). According to Erikson, community can cushion pain, open doorways to intimacy

by providing a context, and provide a ground for binding traditions. When the community is affected, individuals thus can be affected by the loss of a community without witnessing it.

In investigating the collective trauma of the Palestinian community in the selected short stories, the work of Kai T. Erikson plays a vital role. It helps in understanding the loss of safety that the characters in the short stories experience. Furthermore, it helps in understanding that without a tightly knit community that can serve as a system of security, they become traumatized as members of a social group.

3.3 Jeffrey Alexander's Theory of Cultural Trauma

Following the theoretical insight of Kai Erikson, this study further employs the theory of cultural trauma put forth by Jeffrey Alexander. In his essay "Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma" (2004), Alexander explores the notion of cultural trauma in terms of the representation and the meaning making process that follows a catastrophic event, not the intrinsic traumatic quality of the event itself.

Alexander's approach rests on the belief that cultural traumas are constructed socially through the process of assigning meaning to a large-scale event. Alexander argues that cultural trauma "occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to 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 1). For Alexander, for cultural trauma, there must be a group of people that encounters a horrendous event and the event must be felt by members of the community. The event must be deeply felt as to leave a lasting impression on the consciousness of the group that will continue to influence the memories of the community. The influence that trauma generates on the collective memory will shape the future identity of the group.

According to Alexander, it is through the process of constructing cultural traumas that social groups and entire civilizations not only acknowledge the origins of these traumas but also develop a collective experience of shared suffering. By doing so, individuals broaden the scope of collective identity and assume the moral responsibility of acknowledging and addressing human afflictions. According to Alexander, individuals who fail to acknowledge the hardships experienced by others fail to attain a moral position. Furthermore, it is pertinent to note that Alexander contends that

cultural traumas are not confined by geographical or cultural boundaries (Alexander 27). The notion of cultural trauma can be extended beyond western tragedies that are widely acknowledged, also including non-western societies that have experienced significant suffering. Hence, this study undertakes an examination of cultural trauma in the context of Palestine.

The author posits in his essay titled “Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma” (2004) that trauma is a social construct rather than a naturally occurring phenomenon, stating that trauma is not something naturally existing, it is something constructed by the society. According to Alexander, cultural trauma is not solely a result of disruptive events, rather it stems from the collective meanings attributed to traumatizing events. This process involves a complex understanding by various social agents, ultimately leading to the recognition of traumatizing injuries and their impact on society. This recognition ultimately contributes to the development of cultural trauma. If collective trauma refers to an emotional state in the aftermath of a large-scale event, cultural trauma refers to the meaning making system that follows the event.

Alexander argues that events are not traumatizing in themselves, rather “trauma is a socially mediated attribution” (Alexander 8). The social construction of trauma occurs through the process of mediation which involves representations. The feelings of shock and fear are not solely caused by the events in question, but by the additional layers of meaning that are ascribed to them through various forms of representation. The status of trauma is not attributed to events “because of their actual harmfulness or their objective abruptness, but because these phenomena are believed to have abruptly, and harmfully, affected collective identity” (Alexander 10). The emphasis here is not on the event, but on the belief that the event has damaged a community in terms of meaning of their future identity. The belief that the issue is “not the stability of a collectivity in the material or behavioral sense. . . . What is at stake, rather, is the collectivity’s identity, its stability in terms of meaning, not action” (Alexander 10). The emphasis here is on narratives that establish the nature and extent of suffering, the identities of those affected, and the people responsible, which help in the recognition of any terrible event by both the victims and the global community.

These meanings about social reality are broadcast by mediator groups in a community. The mediator groups or social agents play a vital role in the process of trauma creation. Alexander argues that the agents of a collective group broadcast their claims about the social reality. These agents represent the nature of a social reality as

“members of a social group” (Alexander 11) and make claims about a social injury or a terrifying incident that has disturbed the shape of their social reality. The attribution of traumatic status to an event involves a process in which collective social agents, who are part of the affected group, assign meanings to the original suffering and communicate it to a wider audience. These agents, or “carrier groups” (Alexander 11) are “the collective agents of the trauma process” (Alexander 11). These collective agents can include mainstream media, political authorities, celebrities, artists, authors, poets, talk-show hosts, intellectuals, and most recently, members of the public through the sharing of perspectives on social networking sites.

Alexander believes that the carrier groups collectively represent the shape of a damaged social reality. They function as persuasive agents who attempt to convince members of the affected group that they have, indeed, experienced trauma. According to Alexander, when individuals, who belong to the afflicted community, become certain that they are undergoing a traumatic experience, the scope of the audience expands to include other individuals within the broader societal structure (Alexander 12). To classify their trauma as cultural trauma, the carrier groups need to provide answers to four critical questions.

- The nature of the pain: The agents must state what happened to the collective group that they are a part of.
- The nature of the victim: The agents must point out and establish the group of people that was affected by the pain.
- Relation of the trauma victim to the wider audience: The agents must explain the extent of identity that the members of the audience feel with the victims.
- Attribution of responsibility: The agents must explain and establish the identity of the perpetrator of violence. They need to establish the identity of the antagonist(s) who caused the pain.

Furthermore, Alexander argues that by answering these four critical questions, a new master narrative is created which must be mediated in different institutional arenas to represent the truth about a damaged social reality. These arenas could be religious, aesthetic, legal, scientific, mass media, and state bureaucracy. For the purposes of this study, the focus is specifically narrowed to aesthetic realm. This delimitation allows for a focused analysis of how fiction, as an artistic form, serves as a powerful medium for expressing cultural trauma. The aesthetic realm offers a distinct

approach to trauma mediation that complements but stands apart from the other institutional arenas. By focusing on the mediation of trauma narratives in the aesthetic realm, this study aims to uncover how literary works effectively convey the complexities of trauma and resonate with readers on an emotional and intellectual level, thus contributing to a deeper understanding of the trauma experience within the framework of literature.

Alexander's scholarship on cultural trauma is relevant here because not only do the characters undergo an extensive range of detrimental effects of collective trauma, they also remember, represent, and make claims about the sustainability of the incident as extremely damaging to the collectivity that they are a part of.

3.4 The Method of Analysis

To analyze the selected short stories in order 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 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 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.

In this context, character analysis plays a pivotal role in the textual analysis of the selected short stories. Characters serve as essential vehicles through which trauma is articulated and explored within the narratives. By closely examining their development, interactions, and psychological responses to traumatic events, this study reveals how individual experiences of trauma are represented and how these experiences contribute to broader themes of collective and cultural trauma.

Through character analysis, this research investigates how the personal trauma experienced by characters reflects and contributes to the collective trauma of the Palestinian community. The examination of characters' responses, their emotional struggles, and their relationships with others provides insight into the larger narrative of trauma portrayed in the texts. This method allows for a deeper understanding of how

trauma is not only an individual experience but also a shared and culturally mediated phenomenon.

By integrating character analysis into textual analysis, this study aims to uncover the ways in which personal stories of suffering are woven into the fabric of collective memory and identity. This approach helps elucidate how literature portrays and processes trauma. Moreover, it offers a nuanced perspective on how individual experiences contribute to and shape collective narratives of suffering and resilience.

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 the researcher to look for instances in the text to support the arguments of this study. It also enables the researcher 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 to classify their trauma as cultural trauma.

In conclusion, this chapter presents the research methodology that is used in this study for the analysis of the selected short stories. It combines two concepts: Kai T. Erikson's concept of collective trauma and Jeffrey C. Alexander's concept of cultural trauma. Through the integration of these two theories, this research attempts to provide an in-depth analysis of collective trauma and the cultural process in the aftermath of a traumatizing event. The research methodology helps in finding answers to posed research questions.

CHAPTER 4

TRAUMA AND COLLECTIVE SUFFERING: AN EXPLORATION OF COLLECTIVE TRAUMA IN SELECTED SHORT STORIES

This chapter provides the analysis of selected short fiction in the light of Kai T. Erikson's collective trauma theory. The devastating events that occur in the war-torn region of Palestine, as presented in selected short stories, share a tale of trauma that pertains to the entire Palestinian community. These devastating events, according to Erikson, damage the tissues of the social life of suffering community, fracture the shared communal bonds, and impair all sense of communality.

4.1 Collective Trauma in Selected Fictional Narratives

As per Kai T. Erikson's conceptualization of collective trauma, three fundamental components need to come together for a community to experience collective trauma. There must be a "a blow to the basic tissues of social life" that must "damage the bonds that attach people together" and "impair the prevailing sense of communality" (Erikson, *Everything* 131). The chapter traces these three foundational elements of collective trauma in the selected short fiction.

4.1.1 A Blow to the Basic Tissues of Social Life

According to Erikson, ". . . trauma damages the texture of community" ("Notes" 187). Palestinian fiction highlights an extensive range of blows to the basic tissues of Palestinian social life. Hanan Habashi, in "L for Life," shows the protagonist, Mariam, who experiences a terrible blow to her familial structure due to the death of her father at the hands of an Israeli soldier. Sitting in her room, Mariam deeply feels the absence of her father and looks at the "tiny mark of the gunshot and the ugly crack it left there" (26). Mariam expresses her loss and addresses her father by trying to recall the moment when the "huge creature grabbed you out of my bed" (26). The death of Mariam's father at the hands of a "faceless monster" (26) proves to be a terrible blow that makes her social life stagnant. To derive a sense of support from a fractured family, Mariam keeps

addressing her dead father. The blow to the tissues of Mariam's social life becomes vividly evident when Mariam addresses her father in a letter asking him that what kind of a human would take pleasure in knowing that I must experience the agony of living without a father? (26). In an article titled "Have Palestinian Children Forfeited Their Rights?" (2004), Siraj Sait argues that the children of Palestine find themselves on the support of a "flimsy thread" (213). They derive their sense of support and protection from fractured families. The fracture in Mariam's familial structure due to the death of her father indicates a significant void in her life. The void damages the fundamental bond between a parent and a child leaving the child longing for his presence.

A similar blow is experienced by Hamza, the protagonist of "One War Day." The story begins with a depiction of a vivid scene in which Hamza's surrounding is indicative of the ongoing war. The wall against which Hamza leans is "smudged" and "crevices" of "various lengths" can be seen (34). This imagery signifies the physical damage caused by the war, in which Hamza and his family find themselves. Hamza tries to fight off the thoughts that nudge him every now and then but he fails. The narrator states that Hamza's thoughts seemed as if they "conspired with the intermittent blasts to preoccupy his mind" (34) whenever Hamza attempted to carry on with his reading. As the story progresses, Hamza's thoughts are interrupted by a "deafening blast" that strikes the area and turns the "once never-ending, prevailing silence into an ear-shattering thunder" (34). As the plot progresses, it alludes to an explosion that hits Hamza's home and destroys it. The explosion severely injures Hamza as he lies in a surgery room struggling with the pain that "swelled through his chest and the back of his head" (38). Before submitting to the pain, Hamza tries to recall the last moments before he found himself in a surgery room. The narrator states that Hamza sees the little body and the burned hand of his younger brother, Jihad, lying lifeless in the ruins of their home (39). Through the examination of the character of Hamza, it becomes evident how the war proves to be a blow to the tissues of Hamza's social life as the explosion kills his younger brother and many other in his neighborhood. What seems to be a never-ending war in case of Hamza targets his entire family and others in his community too.

Siraj Sait, in his article titled "Have Palestinian Children Forfeited Their Rights?" aptly states that the children of Palestine, caught in an inescapable political situation, intensely seek familial, societal, and religious approval (211). His article documents the labeling of Palestinian children as "irregular child combatants" (212) who find

themselves in the middle of the conflict. Sait contends that the complexities of these “little vulnerable lives” (212) are failed to be understood by those who argue that they have “forfeited their rights as children” (212) merely by participation in the war with stones in their hands.

The protagonist of “Spared” experiences a similar situation as mentioned in the earlier story. The story depicts a vibrant neighborhood that is blown to pieces due to an explosion. In the story, the protagonist is eager to join his friends for a football match which indicates social interaction of the people of the neighborhood. Amid the eagerness, a sudden blast disrupts the life of the entire neighborhood. The devastating explosion results in physical injuries of many and death of his best friend, Ahmed, as the protagonist states the sight of his “friends lying on the ground” (41). The description of death and injuries of protagonist’s friends indicate a significant impact that the blast has on their social life and communal ties. The blast stands as a symbol of the blow to the social life of protagonist and people of his neighborhood.

Moreover, we observe the same in “The Story of the Land.” Sarah Ali presents the community’s deep connection to its land in the story. She discusses the blow that the society receives by Israeli soldiers as they uproot trees that causes a significant rupture therein. In the story, 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” (47). The protagonist’s father, to check up on his land after the offensive, sees that they are “ruined lands filled with bulldozed, dead trees” (48). The father, upon witnessing the state of his lands, starts “crying as he saw people crying” (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 which inflicts a blow to the basic tissues of social and communal life of characters present in the story.

Moreover, another character that experiences trauma in the form of the death of his father is Said, the protagonist of “Will I Ever Get Out?” His home was shelled and one room was completely destroyed. Said states that his “father happened to be inside that room” (57). The shelling of Said’s home and the subsequent death of his father act as the blows to Said’s social life. For his community, the instance of shelling indicates an atmosphere of war causing several difficulties such as “regular power failures, the food price crisis, the continuing closure of the borders. . . the transportation crisis, and

the desperate struggle for a living” (57). The story shows how Said and his family exercise limited control “over the circumstances of their own lives” (Erikson, “Notes” 194). All these instances in the story point towards a disturbed life that Said leads. The death of Said’s father, and the unfavorable circumstances in Gaza point toward a significant rupture in Said’s social life as he struggles to navigate his daily life.

The experiences of another protagonist, Salma, in “Bundles” highlight Israel’s intimidation. Salma’s son, Naji, has remained in an Israeli prison for three years. Naji attempted to flee the country and was caught while crossing the border illegally. Consequently, he ended up in an Israeli prison. Naji’s imprisonment in Israeli prison proves to be the blow, resulting in an estranged life of Salma. At an opportunity to meet her son, Salma visits the prison. As Salma entered the prison, she “found herself in a row of elderly women waiting to hand in their papers” (66). At this instance, Salma represents the emotional grief that is experienced by the mothers and the families of the community. The other women in the prison waiting to hand in their papers are indicative of the fact that it is not only Salma, but many mothers and grandmothers caught amid separation.

Similar to Salma is Laila’s fate; the protagonist in “Please Shoot to Kill.” Laila suffers a terrible blow due to her father’s death. The death of her father makes her “wonder if she should drop her medical degree altogether” (72). The story moves back in time and depicts that Laila’s family desperately tried to escape the gruesome reality of the occupation. Laila and her family find themselves caught in the middle of the war, dangers of which grip them completely. Erikson contends that “Once persons who have been visited by trauma begin to look around them, evidence that the world is a place of unremitting danger seems to appear everywhere” (“Notes” 195). In the story, the thought that “Apaches flying over their house non-stop, or one of those blood thirsty, monster-like Merkava tanks outside” (73) might aim at Laila’s home indicates extreme danger. Laila’s family and the neighboring houses ingrain a deep sense of horror in this situation. Laila and her family experience an immense blow to their social lives due to Israeli offensive. Laila’s father falls victim to the offensive and suffers injuries. Due to limited resources of the hospital, Laila’s father fails to receive proper medical attention. Moreover, the hospital fails to afford sending him outside Gaza for the treatment. Ultimately, he dies. As Laila recalls the memory of her suffering, she addresses the Apache helicopter overhead and says, “Next time, finish your job. When you bomb, bomb to end. And when you shoot, please shoot to kill” (80). As Erikson notes, “To be

treated thus bewilders people at first, but when time passes and nothing happens, it can infuriate them. . .” (Erikson “Notes” 193). Laila’s contempt and infuriation can be seen in this instance. Her anger is not “a healing anger” because it has made her feel “demeaned, diminished, devalued” (Erikson “Notes” 193). The suffering that her family experiences due to the prolonged agony of her father’s failed medical treatment highlights the significant turmoil that the families in Palestine have endured. The blow to the tissues of Palestinian life is represented through a severe fracture in Laila’s social life. The evident loss of father leads to a void in the structure of the family and her community at large.

Jean-Pierre Filiu, in his article titled “The Twelve Wars on Gaza” (2014), documents the number of Palestinians killed in Operation Cast Lead; Israel’s tenth war on Gaza in December 2008. He contends that during the operation, the number of Palestinian people who lost their lives to the war was 1,417, which included 236 fighters (Filiu 57). Yousef Aljamal describes such situation in his short story “Omar X” through the protagonist, Omar. Omar is a young boy who abandons his studies to pick up arms against Israel. Omar, from a very early age, bears witness to the violence and oppression at the hands of Israeli soldiers. The narrators says that Omar “got into his khaki uniform hastily, grabbed his gun, and rubbing its dusty barrel, stormed out of the house” (81) to fight Israeli soldiers. Ultimately, Omar loses his life as he is hit by bullets. Omar’s experience of violence and oppression represents the collective traumatizing experiences of the entire community and a blow to the basic tissues of their social life caused by the occupation.

According to Erikson, people who experience disasters feel separated from the rest of the world and “gather into groups with others of like mind” (194). They share perspective due to the “sense of being apart” (194). A similar situation can be examined through the characters of Abu Ibrahim, Abu Ahmed, and Abu Naser in “We Shall Return.” The biggest blow to the social tissues of a community is shown by Mohammed Suliman in the story. Abu Ibrahim, Abu Ahmed, and Abu Naser highlight the struggle of their people displaced during the Nakba. During the displacement, Abu Ibrahim is seen carrying, not only his weight, but the weight of his family’s belongings. This instance symbolizes the displacement faced by the community at large and the burden that the people had to carry physically and emotionally. Another refugee, Abu Ahmed, acknowledges the uncertainty that his community faces and is skeptical of their future. The narrator tells the reader that the only thing that the characters knew was “that it was

a black day, for someone had come and made them leave their homes, farms, and olive trees, and as they said ‘no’, a gun was pointed at their faces to make them leave” (85). The forced displacement of the people in this story becomes a major blow to the basic tissues of the Palestinian collective during the event of Nakba.

Similar to the displacement of Mohammed Suliman’s characters, Randa Jarrar’s child protagonist in “Barefoot Bridge” lives in Egypt. On trying to visit her homeland in Palestine for the funeral rites of her grandfather, the female child protagonist experiences a blow when she experiences a humiliating inspection at the hands of soldiers on the border. The protagonist, faced with a challenging situation of inspection by soldiers, narrates that “The driver stops the bus. . . The soldier inspects all our passports with a cigarette dangling out of his mouth” (21). As the family gets off the bus, the protagonist depicts the scene of “many soldiers, boy ones *and* girl ones” (21) present at the border. The protagonist’s father, Baba, is separated from his family during the inspection. As the head of the family, it is the father’s job to protect his family in times of distress. However, his separation at the time of inspection indicates a significant hurdle to serve as a protective figure for the family. The protagonist further states that there are many other people who go through the same inspection as her family, indicating a blow to the basic tissues of social life of the entire community. Among the travelers, one of the girls loses her shoes. Angrily, she exclaims at a soldier, “First my land, now my Guccis! God damn it” (23). All these instances come together and point at the devastating events that damage the social fabric of the entire community in the stories.

4.1.2 Disruption of Social Bonds

The traumatic events that inflict damaging blows to the tissues of a vibrant life indicate a severe breach in the social bonds that attach people together. In “L for Life,” Mariam is engulfed in a state of grief and loss. She constantly laments the death of her father. Mariam’s act of addressing her late father and expressing her longing for him indicate that her sense of communal bonds is damaged. The social bond that attached Mariam to her father has been significantly affected due to the sudden death of her father. In an attempt to address her late father, and to achieve a sense of connection, Mariam states that “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. . .” (27). Throughout the story, Mariam attempts to find out about Thaer, a young boy that her father used to talk about at every instance. In a desperate attempt, she asks her mother about Thaer but finds no luck. She asks her grandfather about Thaer, only to connect with her father’s story that remains incomplete. She visits Auntie Karama and knocks on her door to ask her about Thaer. Despite all the attempts, Thaer’s story remains incomplete. Thaer’s story becomes symbolic of Mariam’s connection with her late father. In the end, she finds no luck which indicates the disruption of the bond that held Mariam and her father together. Erikson argues that trauma not only means a “loss of confidence in the self, but a loss of confidence in the surrounding tissue of family. . .” (198). Due to the void in Mariam’s life, she experiences a sense of isolation and a loss of confidence. The pain that Mariam endures, due to the death of her father, represents the loss experienced by many in her community. Furthermore, the protagonist’s mother, Mama, also exhibits signs of grief and loss. The death of her husband has made her cynical and she shows deep emotional withdrawal. Mariam, upon observing a change in her mother’s behavior, addresses her father and states that “I know, Baba, you don’t know this new woman; I don’t either. . . Mom has become cynical. . .” (28). The damage to the relationship of Mariam with her mother also indicates the impact of trauma on Mariam’s family.

Like Mariam’s story, the protagonist of “Spared” experiences a damage to the social bonds when his friend dies in a blast. The protagonist’s best friend, Ahmed, is killed in a devastating explosion during a football match. The protagonist, describing the state of the neighborhood in the aftermath of explosion, sees his friends “lying on the ground” (41). The protagonist’s best friend “Ahmed was thrown on top of his cousin. His head was torn open” (41). The death of protagonist’s best friend highlights a significant damage to the protagonist’s social bonds. Towards the end of the story, the friends of the protagonist who survive the explosion show an emotional withdrawal. The protagonist’s friends develop an unusual behavior toward the protagonist as he says that “my friends grew up in one second. They no longer looked at me the same way they used to before that awful day” (42). His friends no longer come out to play, and they have a “distant look. . . like I did something wrong” (42). The rupture in the social fabric of his society deems it difficult for the protagonist to achieve a sense of connection that he previously shared with his friends.

Irus Braverman, in her research article titled “Uprooting Identities: The Regulation of Olive Trees in the Occupied West Bank” (2009), emphasizes the pivotal

role that olive trees play in Palestinian culture. Braverman's scholarship exemplifies the resistance of Palestinian people in the form of planting olive trees. Solidifying the identification between the olive tree and the people of Palestine, Braverman contends that "the Palestinian tree is the olive" (237). Focusing on the olive tree, she explains that olive tree represents the economic, cultural, and historical significance in the lives of Palestinian people. Israeli settlers' acts of uprooting the olive trees, Braverman argues, is "direct and indirect sabotaging and denying the Palestinians access to the olive tree, the State of Israel and the settlers have vested the olive with enormous power" (238). The olive tree, according to Braverman's scholarship, has become a symbol of the "Palestinian nationhood" symbolizing the "Palestinian resistance to Israel's occupation" (238).

The protagonist of "The Story of the Land" finds similar attachment to these trees. The story revolves around the theme of connection of the people toward their land. The protagonist's father has a deep-rooted love for his land and his olive trees. The father experiences immense pain when he hears about Israeli bulldozers uprooting his 189 olive trees. The story presents father's bond with his land and olive trees as unbreakable. The protagonist's father shares a deep-rooted bond with his land. The direct attack from Israeli soldiers damages the bond that attaches people to their land. The Israeli soldiers' act of bulldozing olive trees and damaging the land of the Gazan people becomes evident when the protagonist tells the readers that "Our trees were gone" (49). Moreover, the protagonist exhibits signs of anger and frustration towards Israeli soldiers. The frustration and anger are felt due to the total disregard of the soldiers towards their attachment to the trees. For the people of Gaza, their land is their heritage and it brings to them a sense of belonging. The destruction of the land and olive trees by Israeli soldiers damages the connection of Palestinians with their land. It further adds to a sense of injustice that the people of the community feel indicating a sense of alienation.

Not only do the characters experience alienation, but also a prolonged mental agony, as presented in "Please Shoot to Kill" (2014). Alfarra shares the story of a family affected by violence in Gaza. The protagonist, Laila, and her family suffer from the brutality of Israeli soldiers who raid their home and terrorize the entire family. The story depicts fifteen horrendous nights that Laila's family experiences.

Her father, numbed by the intimidation of bullets that had caused more than a few holes in their house and frozen by his inability to ensure the safety of his

beloved wife and children, was leaning against the wall of their living room. . . He looked at his wife, who was fearfully reclining next to them, desperately trying to comfort her little one with a bedtime story, not being able, just like him, to do anything to stop those soldiers from harassing them anytime they felt like it. (76)

The above instance highlights the repression of the Israeli forces and its consequences on Laila's family. According to Erikson, traumatic experiences have a deep effect on a community. These experiences shape the prevailing mood and temper of the community and "govern the way its members relate to one another" (190). Similar to Erikson's scholarship, Laila's parents struggle to extend a helping hand toward one another and fail to provide emotional support. The ongoing offensive by the military forces renders an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty rupturing emotional bonds among families.

The divide in a family is further presented in "Omar X" (2014). The presence of Israeli soldiers and a lingering threat of violence on Omar since his birth compels him to resist Israeli occupation and fight against them. Depicting the scene when Omar prepares to fight Israeli soldiers, the narrator says that Omar's "eyes wandered left and right, and finally met the eyes of his friend, who was murdered three months ago and is now immortalized in posters" (81). The death of Omar's friend highlights the significant damage to the protagonist's social bonds. Moreover, the divide in Omar's family is portrayed in the story as Omar tells his mother that he wants to buy an AK-47 (83). Omar's mother wants her son to study hard and have a bright future but "despite her love . . . Omar's mother could do nothing to stop him" (83). The story builds on a picture of a divided family due to occupation, highlighting a significant damage to bonds that the members of the family share.

A similar story of a damaged social fabric is described in Mohammed Suliman's "We Shall Return" (2014). Suliman writes about the predicament of Palestinian people during Nakba event. The three central characters: Abu Ibrahim, Abu Ahmed, and Abu Naser are forced to leave their homes along with their families. Due to the displacement, Abu Ibrahim, in order to boost the morale of the people in this time of distress, attempts at maintaining a semblance of hope by singing a hymn of return. Abu Ahmed and Abu Naser occasionally join in but their failure to coordinate their voices symbolizes the rupture in their social bond. Abu Ibrahim, mentions the narrator, "was indignantly rebuking his two neighbors for failing again to sing in harmony" (88). They struggle to

maintain unity in their voices; the struggle hints at a broader picture of their inability to find a unified strength among themselves during displacement from their homeland. The narrator, through the failure of singing the hymn, highlights the disconnection of the neighbors from one another indicating at their struggle to maintain a cohesive engagement because of trauma. The struggle of the neighbors to maintain connection exemplifies the damage to their social bond due to the traumatic experiences they face in their lives.

4.1.3 An Impaired Sense of Communalinity

Erikson believes that when a devastating event occurs that profoundly affects a community, the community can be damaged as social organism, like organ in a body. Explicating further in his research on the destruction of Buffalo Creek, Erikson argues that the residents of Buffalo Creek continued to share memory, and they had a meagre sense of contact with one another, but for the most part, the cultural bond that brought the people together was cut loose. While not specifically referring to impaired communalinity, “L for Life” (2014) alludes to such a situation. Addressing her late father, Mariam says that “Gaza is frustrating these days—well, these years. . . breathing some good air has become a luxury we cannot always afford.” (26). Mariam’s exclamation of such words hints at the trauma that the character and her community has faced while living in Gaza. She keeps referring to her “uncompleted story” (26) that highlights the lack of a unifying strength in Mariam’s life, further delineating the void in her life. Similarly, Mariam’s grandfather’s “life is entirely devoted to the grief over a lemon tree and a dear son” (29). Mariam exclaims that her grandfather is no longer the person that she used to talk to for hours (29), which shows that Mariam and her grandfather no longer share the spirit of cooperation that they once had. These characters from the story come together and paint a vivid picture of the strained connections and disrupted relationships in the family.

Trauma was once thought to be exclusively an individual issue. However, based on his insights gathered from his research endeavor, Erikson expanded the concept of trauma to community. Erikson shares that traumatized communities are distinct from gatherings of traumatized people (Erikson “Notes” 185). Erikson's contribution broadened the idea of trauma beyond the individual level to include communities that have a shared identity and are affected by a traumatic experience collectively as we

observe in these stories. Erikson's scholarship can be traced in "Spared" as Yaghi writes about a devastating blast that renders a vibrant neighborhood lifeless. The strong sense of communality is shattered in the span of a few seconds as the blast leaves the neighborhood in pieces; killing some people and leaving others injured. Highlighting the loss of connection and belonging to the community, the protagonist says that "Ahmed was gone. The others haunted me with their blaming looks every day I went to school" (42). This instance shows that the protagonist, who was eager to join the football match before the blast, is no longer wanted by friends. The blast leaves the protagonist's friends with "Amputated limbs. Scarred faces. Limping gaits." (42), highlighting that the trauma of the devastating blast tainted the shared identity among the friends. They no longer want to be with the protagonist.

Erikson, in his research on the loss of a sustained community, claims that there can be people who exhibit signs of trauma without being present at the time of a traumatizing event. People who are not readily and immediately affected by deaths and destruction can still be affected by trauma. These people may be separated from a traumatizing event in both time and space. Even if they are not directly affected by a devastating event, they can experience trauma through the loss of a sustaining community. The loss of shared cultural values in a community can be gauged in "The Story of the Land." Sarah Ali writes about the deep-rooted love that the people have for their land. The land in Gaza and the trees hold a symbolic value of representing their identity. The father of the protagonist is away from the traumatizing event of the destruction of his land in both time and space. Yet, the protagonist tells the reader that after Israel's offensive on their land, father "put his faith in his olives being an exception" (48). Later, in an attempt to check up on his land, the protagonist's father puts his faith in God, and goes there and finds "ruined lands filled with bulldozed, dead trees" (48). On this, the protagonist mentions, "Dad started crying as he saw other people crying . . . They saw more toppled trees, feeble and defeated" (48). The protagonist's father and the people of the community, upon witnessing the destruction of their land, find that they are "empty of affection, empty of confidence and assurance" (Erikson, "Notes" 188). This instance substantiates Erikson's idea of the loss of a community. The community's loss depicted in the story due to destruction of the land and trees shatters the prevailing sense of communality. The olive trees are symbolic of the community's identity. When the trees are destroyed, the community is traumatized.

Another traumatizing experience of community of the war-torn region of Gaza is depicted in “Will I Ever Get Out.” The prevailing sense of communality within the Gazan community is impaired as the protagonist, Said, mentions that “All that had complicated our lives and made them intolerable was nothing other than those regular power failures, the food price crisis, the continuing closure of the borders. . . and the desperate struggle for a living” (57). Furthermore, the death of Said’s father pushes him into trauma and he is forced to abandon medical school and become provider for his family (57). Said is forced to work in a dangerous tunnel where he joins other workers. Said’s working in the tunnel is indicative of the large number of people of Gaza who work in unfavorable circumstances to provide for their families. Moreover, the dangerous nature of the work in a tunnel emphasizes the protagonist’s isolation from the world. Said and his fellow workers experience collective trauma which adds to the impaired sense of communality within their community.

Erikson argues that because the collective trauma creeps up on those who are affected, it lacks the suddenness that is typically associated with trauma. In Said’s case, the realization gradually dawns on him that, after the death of his father and his broken family, he can no longer rely on a source of support. Dropping his medical school and working in a tunnel make him realize that a significant aspect of his identity has vanished. He discovers that he is alone, completely dependent upon his only self. Even though, he has other people working alongside him in the tunnel, they remain far away and difficult to relate to. Said exists, and so does his fellow workers, but they no longer remain as a paired entity deriving their sense of support from the cultural connection that they once shared.

Similar to Said is Salma’s life in “Bundles.” Salma’s son, Naji, is in an Israeli prison due to his attempt of sneaking beyond the border to provide for his family. Upon reaching the prison, Salma is faced with a difficult set of circumstances. In order to clear the security inside the prison, Salma has to go through several inspections and an embarrassing cavity search. The narrator tells the reader that Salma “realized that she would be inspected again” (66). Furthermore, an old woman in the prison tells Salma that she “still has to pass the last inspection . . .it feels embarrassing” (67). Salma, upon inquiring what the old lady means by embarrassing, is confronted with the fact that she must “submit herself to a cavity search in case she was hiding explosives” (68). The inspections and the cavity search highlight the humiliation that Salma faces to meet her son. The narrator states that Salma’s “heart was beating fast” (68) indicating her

helplessness due to the lack of support to assure her of her safety. Salma and the old woman represent the women of the community who must submit to the foreign agency of the prison's administration without being able to derive a sense of support from the cultural bond they shared, marking an impaired sense of communality.

In a book titled *Stolen Youth: The Politics of Israel's Detention of Palestinian Children* (2004) by Cook et al., the Military Order No. 898 is explained and the writers mention that the army of Israel can arrest any Palestinian without a warrant. Furthering on the idea of Israel's atrocities, Cook et al. mention that the soldiers of Israel's army barge into the homes of Palestinian people and harass them. They search their homes and damage their property. Furthermore, the physical and verbal violence of the soldiers towards families and little children is evident in the accounts of children presented in the book. A similar story of Israel's brutality inflicted upon a Gazan family is presented by Laila, the protagonist of "Please Shoot to Kill." The story tells the narrative of a family tortured by Israeli repression in Gaza. Israeli forces invade Laila's home and terrorize the entire family. An Israeli soldier shoots Laila's father before turning around. To save her father, Laila moves forward but is thrown away by a blast that hits the nearby area and is rendered unconscious (75). Upon waking up in a hospital, the narrator mentions that "Laila opened her blurry eyes to find herself in a jam-packed room of five beds, where others were lying, surrounded by their families and a few doctors rushing about" (75). These instances highlight the full impact of the war waged by Israel, leaving the people helpless. People struggle to find a helpful hand and fail to offer emotional support to one another. The relentless attacks of Israel's military forces create an atmosphere of dread and uncertainty that shatters the emotional ties between families, impairing the prevailing sense of communality that the people once had.

The afore-mentioned fictional accounts of war-torn communities bring together the foundational elements of Erikson's collective trauma theory. The short stories chosen for the purpose of analysis depict vivid scenes of interplay between trauma and community and present devastating events that damage the bonds attaching people. The events also shatter the prevailing sense of communality. The fictional portrayal of the war-hit community, in the words of Erikson, indicates signs of trauma in Palestinian short fiction.

Some of the characters in the short stories exhibit signs of trauma without being present at the time of the calamity. The characters are separated from the calamity in a spatiotemporal sequence, failing to have an immediate encounter with the fatalities and

devastation but they find themselves traumatized by the attack as being part of the community. They feel a lack of shared identity and a reliable source of support in times of distress. The trauma of these characters is in line with Erikson's idea of loss of a sustaining community. The characters portrayed in the short stories and the subsequent collective trauma that they endure exemplifies the blows to the fundamental fabric of the society. Their trauma emphasizes and accentuates on their community and their collective identity. The collective trauma of the characters, as presented in the selected short stories, signals a threat to the identity of the community. The violence and oppression in Palestinian setting is deemed as a significant threat to the people's commonalities and connection.

Furthermore, the individual traumatic wounds of characters in the stories result in the subsequent formation of a distinct mood that prevails in their community. This mood, or group culture, as Erikson calls it, surpasses the collective impact of the individual wounds, as evident in the chosen fictional narratives. The characters experience a gradual impact of the collective trauma that they endure. After the heinous acts perpetrated by oppressor, the lingering trauma slowly infiltrates the consciousness of the characters, reminding them of the loss of a sustained community. It can, therefore, be deduced that the depiction of traumatic events and their impact on the war-torn Palestinian community is presented in the chosen narratives as it meets the fundamental elements outlined by Erikson in his conceptualization of collective trauma.

CHAPTER 5

AN EXPLORATION OF CULTURAL TRAUMA IN SELECTED FICTIONAL NARRATIVES

This chapter examines cultural trauma in the selected short stories that picture a war-hit community. As expounded upon in the chapter of literature review, cultural trauma is generated through collective trauma, but not every collective trauma attains the status of cultural trauma. Cultural traumas are collective traumas, but for collective trauma to attain the status of cultural trauma, a necessary condition of experiencing the process of trauma must be met. Building upon the preceding chapter's analysis of collective trauma, this chapter examines the "trauma process" of social sufferings of a community as presented in the fictional narratives. The chapter aims to see whether the collective trauma of Palestinian community succeeds in attaining the status of cultural trauma.

Moreover, this chapter examines selected fictional narratives authored by different Palestinian writers to analyze the experiences of characters in the stories. The selected Palestinian fictional narratives serve as symbolic representations of the intense pain experienced by the people of Palestinian community. Palestinian writers show the suffering of collectivity and perform the role of, what Alexander calls, social agents or carrier groups. The writers, assuming the role of carrier groups by symbolically representing their pain, broadcast the distressing reality of the community that they are a part of. The distressing reality is broadcasted by constructing claims about it. After the initial analysis of the texts in the light of cultural trauma theory, the subsequent sections of this chapter examine the claim-making process by Palestinian writers. In this regard, four foundational questions are focused upon: the nature of the pain, the nature of the victim, relation of the trauma victim to the wider audience, and attribution of responsibility. The answers to these questions provide a basic foundation for what Alexander believes to be a new master narrative of cultural classification and is discussed in the second part of the chapter. The new master narrative is then disseminated in cultural and institutional structures, depending on the restrictions and opportunities provided by the structures.

The last part of the chapter focuses on the mediation of the trauma narrative in the aesthetic realm. By concentrating on the artistic and literary dimensions of trauma,

the analysis aims to explore how fictional narratives uniquely capture and communicate the emotional depth of trauma. The aesthetic approach, with its emphasis on evocative storytelling and symbolism, helps generate trauma claims through these narratives. This focused examination seeks to illuminate how literature portrays the process of cultural trauma.

5.1 Cultural Trauma in Selected Fictional Narratives

According to Jeffrey C. Alexander's conceptualization of cultural trauma, five fundamental components need to come together for a community to experience cultural trauma. There must be a "horrendous event" experienced by "members of a collectivity" (Alexander 1). The horrendous event must leave a lasting impression on the "group consciousness," forever "mark memories," and change the "future identity" of the collectivity in irreversible ways (1). This section of the chapter traces the aforementioned five foundational elements of cultural trauma in the selected Palestinian short fiction. The aim of this section is to determine whether the situation in Palestine meets the criteria of cultural trauma.

5.1.1 Horrendous Events and their Impact on Group Consciousness

On the subject of identity, Jeffrey C. Alexander contends that it involves a cultural reference. Alexander maintains that a traumatic status is attributed to an event not because the event is harmful in nature, but only because the event is believed to have damaged the collective identity of a group. According to Alexander, individual identity is rooted in the broader frameworks of emotional and cultural norms. The shared cultural norms and values provide a sense of safety and identity to individuals. The sense of safety, in turn, is derived from the resilience of the collectivity to which individuals belong. Social groups and collectivities have a consciousness, similar to the consciousness of an individual. The consciousness of a social group or a collectivity is based on the symbolical patterns, shared values, beliefs, and cultural norms that the members of the group share. In the case of Palestinian fictional narratives, the writers frame the group consciousness of Palestinian community as fragmented. The growing terror and the subsequent instances of violence and oppression damage shared values, shared beliefs, and cultural practices within the community. The social bonds among members of the family, and among families and neighbors, are damaged and the

prevailing sense of communality is shattered. The characters in the stories undergo an extensive range of emotions ranging from confusion to anger and then to frustration. Amid the chaotic situation that prevails in the community, the characters find it difficult to balance between extending a helping hand to others and finding a helping hand for oneself.

In “Please Shoot to Kill,” Laila, finds herself recovering from a bomb blast. At the same time, she realizes that her younger sister will “probably never walk again” (76). Amid her own recovery and the pain of her younger sister’s suffering, she also witnesses her father’s health deteriorate day by day. Laila endures three months of mental torture and agonizing pain at the end of which her father passes away. Laila and her family’s suffering highlight the suffering of the entire community. Their community feels a tightened grip around it in the form of Israeli intimidation. The protagonist, Hamza, of “One War Day,” experiences a similar event in his life. Hamza struggles to compose his thoughts and reads his book which gets interrupted by a blast (34). The horrendous event in the form of a sudden blast makes Hamza’s life motionless. The examination of Hamza’s character opens a window into the damaged private lives of Palestinian people. The terrorizing events severely damage the group consciousness of the community.

The biggest impact on identity, cultural heritage, shared values, social bonds, and a strong sense of belonging occurred during the event of Nakba. An article titled “Damage to Palestinian People and Property during Operation Cast Lead” (2009), published by University of California Press, gives an estimate of the total destruction caused during Israel’s military offensive called Operation Cast Lead. The total number of homes completely destroyed rounded up to 6,400, the number of people from Gaza who were left homeless came up to 100,000, and the number of children who found themselves orphaned in the aftermath of the operation was 2,000–2,200 (210). Among many other accounts of the damage inflicted by Israel on the residents of Gaza, these numbers stand out the most. The damage caused in a span of twenty-three days rounded up to the afore-mentioned regrettable numbers. When one thinks about the damage caused by Israel since the displacement of Palestinians during Nakba, in the words of Cook et al., it can aptly be described as “out of the imagination” (Cook et al. 26). In the same vein, “We Shall Return” details the trauma of displacement. During the displacement, Abu Ibrahim, Abu Ahmed, and Abu Naser acknowledge the uncertainty of their future. After experiencing a terrifying displacement, the dialogue between the

characters highlights that their shared cultural norms and values which provided a sense of safety to them, no longer remain effective.

The victims of Israeli intimidation watch their lives come to a turbulent point as they witness the deaths of their family members and friends. The helplessness that they feel in the wake of atrocities lead to destroyed communal bonds. The society, that they were a part of, is bombed and shelled. The situation leaves people to derive a sense of security from their own damaged individual resources instead of their cultural repository. The people of Palestine experience a severe breach in the shared beliefs and cultural norms that they once upheld. The writers of the selected stories represent the people of Palestine through their fictional narratives. These narratives share the suffering of individuals, their families, friends, and neighbors who live in their own trauma with a shattered social bond. The devastating pain and immense suffering that shatter the connecting bonds between the people indicate that these people no longer exist as a collective group. They no longer remain connected in their cultural norms and shared beliefs and cannot derive their sense of safety from the collectivity that they were once a part of.

5.1.2 Memories of Horrendous Events

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 of their future. Even after a year of his father's death, Said, in "Will I Ever Get Out?" stays away from his father's room. Said's father who had fallen victim to shelling, lost his life. The smell of his father's burned flesh still keeps him away from the shelled room as he shares that his pain was so insurmountable that mere shedding of tears did not relieve him of it (57). He exclaims that even tears bring him no comfort and do not relieve him from traumatic memories.

Similarly, Mariam in "L for Life" remembers her father in retrospect. The memories of her father are etched deep even after eleven years of his death. Mariam, in an attempt to address her father long after his death, 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" (26). Through an examination of Mariam's character, it becomes evident that the memories that are left behind by

devastating events never completely go away. Mariam's memories are forever marked, haunting her years after her father's death.

Similarly, Salma in "Bundles" loses all sense of reality as she hears the news of her son's death in an Israeli prison. The narrator, explaining the state of Salma, states that after three years of her son's death, Salma stretches on her bed and "strives to picture the vague vision of her son . . ." (68). Shawls lay scattered on the bed as Salma attempts at remembering her son's vision before he left (68). Salma's unmade bed and the image of scattered shawls is indicative of Salma's immense suffering. The death of her son marks her memories as she struggles to grapple with her traumatic reality.

Horrendous events marking the memories of characters are also evident in "The Story of the Land" with a vivid account of the suffering of the protagonist. 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" (49). With the memory of his 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 characters' minds, only to resurface at the slightest of a poke.

5.1.3 Horrendous Events and Future Identity

The fictional narratives portray that as a result of the terror unleashed, the characters live their lives from one moment to another. Their memories are marked with distressing events in unimaginable ways and the characters find it difficult to find relief even years after the horrendous event, resulting in a tainted identity of their communities. The oppressors regard the people as "*Arab mekhabel!*—Arab terrorist!" (Alfarra, "Please" 74). The members of the community are continually repressed by Israel's tanks and gunship helicopters, targeting innocent civilians; children, men, and women. In addition to that, the people of the community feel like strangers in their own homeland. The feeling arises from the continual house raids and the harassment that follow. The place that the people believed to be their homeland, no longer remains the place that once brought them solace in times of need. The loss of the homeland to

oppressors further adds to the discomfort of the people in the form of their shattered collective identity. The characters, gripped by a wide array of horrendous events, narrate the effects of these events on their collective identity.

“Barefoot Bridge” presents another picture of the discrimination that the protagonist experiences while travelling to her homeland, Palestine. The protagonist mentions to the reader that the inspection that she and her family underwent, particularly her mother, was embarrassing. To put the inspection to words, the protagonist mentions that her mother takes off her skirt and blouse. She is left in a tight underwear and a see-through bra; she is almost naked. The soldier comes and runs a machine over her mother’s body. In that moment, the protagonist exclaims that “I feel embarrassed for her, who’s naked in front of this rough-handed stranger” (22). Her mother is treated roughly by the soldier due to her identity as a Palestinian woman.

These instances solidify the disparity that the characters face due to their identity. The oppressors with a significant prejudice against the characters continue to oppress them. The characters witness the violence inflicted upon them with little hopes of justice being served. To cover up the oppression inflicted upon the people of Palestine, the dominant powers of Israel propagate biased narratives which potentially favor their agenda. Muhammad Ali Khalidi, in his article titled “The Most Moral Army in the World: The New “Ethical Code” of the Israeli Military and The War on Gaza” (2010) explains Israel’s ethical code designed for its military. The ethical code states strict rules of engagement against civilian populations and children. Khalidi questions the legitimacy of Israel’s ethical code and argues that, against the people of Palestine, there have been deliberate acts of violence and oppression by Israel’s military forces. He sees it fit to call deliberate acts of violence by Israel as immoral. Khalidi calls Israel’s war on the civilian population of Palestine as a “crime against humanity” (19).

Another biased agenda that Israel propagates is against the children of Palestine. M. Siraj Sait, in his research article titled “Have Palestinian Children Forfeited Their Rights?” (2004), elucidates on the discrimination that the Palestinian children face in comparison to their Israeli counterparts. The children of Israel are seen as “innocent victims of terrorism” (215). On the contrary, Sait states that the children of Palestine are labelled as “dangerous groups of irresponsible parents” (215). Sait further debunks the prevailing argument of Israel and quotes the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Palestine which states that the claims made by Israel defense forces are baseless. The Palestinian children, whom Israel labels as militants and subsequently kills, do not

partake in confrontational activities (215). They are innocent children whose lives are cut short because of Israel's tanks and gunship helicopters (215). These articles exemplify the phenomenon of truth distortion and the control that Israel exercises over narratives and discourses.

As a result of their identity, the characters experience significant disparity. Jeffrey C. Alexander contends that the experience of trauma is a sociological process that depends on providing four foundational answers; the nature of the pain, the nature of the victim, relation of the trauma victim to the wider audience, and attribution of responsibility. If a trauma is experienced in such a way, and successfully represented afterwards, the collective identity of a social group will be revised and possibly redeemed. In the case of selected fictional narratives, the revision of the collective identity will take place only if the collective trauma of the characters attains the status of cultural trauma. The analysis, in the light of Jeffrey C. Alexander's theory of cultural trauma, focuses on the depiction of traumatic events and their impact on the war-torn community and, as such, meets all the foundational components outlined in Alexander's conceptualization of cultural trauma.

5.2 A New Master Narrative of Cultural Classification

According to Jeffrey C. Alexander's conceptualization, events, in themselves, are not traumatic. Rather, trauma is a socially mediated attribution. For an event to attain the status of cultural trauma, it must be represented as such. Collective actors, social agents, or carrier groups decide to construct claims about a distressing reality. The social agents or carrier groups belong to the suffering collectivity and by assuming the role of agents of the trauma process, they symbolically represent their pain and broadcast it to a wider audience. As per Alexander's view, constructing a new master narrative of cultural classification is necessary for the representation of trauma. For the construction of a new master narrative of cultural classification, four critical representations are required; the nature of the pain, the nature of the victim, relation of the trauma victim to the wider audience, and attribution of responsibility. This section of the chapter focuses on the trauma process through the creation of a new master narrative.

5.2.1 The Nature of the Pain

The process of meaning making in connection with the nature of the pain can be understood in terms of questions such as what kind of pain does the victim experience? Is it physical, emotional, or both? In the selected fiction, the nature of the pain can be analyzed through the examination of the terrible injuries that the writers portray in their fictional narratives.

The fictional narratives of Palestinian authors bring together portrayals of traumatizing events that the characters experience. They portray the devastating events experienced by community in the form of violence, oppression, occupation, and death. The writers, assuming the role of carrier groups, represent their traumatizing pain due to the challenging circumstances created for them by oppressors. The oppressors violate the rights of people in the form of house raids, physical and mental abuse, shooting of the people, shelling on homes, and missile attacks.

The horrendous events grip all members of the community; children, men, and women. They undergo physical injuries, as well as emotional and mental abuse at the hands of oppressors. In “L for Life,” the protagonist’s father loses his life to an Israeli bullet (26). In “One War Day,” Hamza’s younger brother, Jihad, dies in an explosion (39). In “Spared,” the protagonist’s best friend, Ahmed, is killed in a blast (41). In “Will I Ever Get Out?” Said loses his father to shelling (57). Salma’s son, Naji, passes away in an Israeli prison in “Bundles.” In “Please Shoot to Kill,” Laila’s father dies because an Israeli soldier suspects him of being a terrorist and shoots him (79). In “Omar X,” the protagonist, Omar, along with his friend, Sa’ad, are killed by Israeli soldiers (84).

Furthermore, what accompanies the physical pain of characters is the emotional turmoil that they experience. The emotional turmoil is represented by Mariam in “L for Life” when she longs for her father after his death (26); emotional pain, as represented by Mohammed Suliman in “One War Day” in which the protagonist, Hamza, struggles to make sense of the continual bombing of his vicinity (34); emotional pain also represented by Rawan Yaghi in “Spared” wherein the protagonist cannot comprehend his friends’ unusual behavior following a devastating bomb blast (42). The representation of emotional turmoil by Sarah Ali in “The Story of the Land” is reflected when the protagonist’s father struggles to make sense of the destruction of his 189 olive trees (50). Emotional suffering is represented by Nour Al-Sousi in “Will I Ever Get Out” wherein the protagonist, Said, still struggles to come to terms with his father’s death a

year after his death (57). The emotional pain of Salma is represented by Mohammed Suliman in “Bundles” as she struggles with the voice that bore her the news of her son’s death. The emotional agony of Laila is shown in “Please Shoot to Kill” where Laila’s pain due to her father’s failed medical treatment leading to his death, turns into hatred for Israel (80). The representation of emotional pain by Yousef Aljamal in “Omar X” is marked with Omar’s realization that every aspect of his life is controlled by Israeli soldiers (83). The emotional turmoil of the central characters is also represented by Mohammed Suliman in “We Shall Return” during the displacement of the Palestinian people from their homeland (85). The emotional suffering that accompanies Randa Jarrar’s child protagonist in “Barefoot Bridge” as she and her family struggle to maintain a sense of normalcy during their inspection on the border (22) is also reflected in the story.

The war-tormented characters come together in the stories to paint a vivid picture of the brutalities that they suffer in these events. The writers portray the atrocities induced upon the community and represent their pain through fictional narratives. The sheer lack of disregard, by oppressors, of the torment of the people further adds to the resentment of the people. An air of fear and uncertainty grips the community as it attempts to manage a sense of normalcy, amid the deaths of their loved ones. All these instances come together and exemplify a wide array of distressing events endured by the members of the collectivity.

5.2.2 The Nature of the Victim

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 and what is his ethnicity? What is the victim’s social status? Does the victim belong to a specific gender? These questions, in connection to the process of meaning making, can influence how the victim perceives pain. The nature of the victim can be analyzed through the examination of the fictional accounts of war that the writers, as carrier groups, portray in these war narratives. These fictional narratives foreground victims from a wide range of age bracket. The writers, as carrier groups, portray children and adults as marginalized in their own homeland. Furthermore, the portrayal of the victims, men and women, elucidates the question of the nature of the victim. In selected short stories, the question of the nature of the victim encompasses innocent civilians, who are labelled as Arab

terrorists and then fired upon by Israeli soldiers, and young boys who abandon their studies to become freedom fighters.

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. Similarly, the victims in “One War Day,” Hamza and his younger brother, and his extended family of little nephews, nieces, and cousins struggle through the traumatizing reality of the continuous bombing of their neighborhood (34). The continuous bomb blasts victimize Hamza and his family who struggle to maintain cohesion amid the ongoing blasts. Along with Hamza and his extended family, the victims are school going children in “Spared.” The happy neighborhood that houses them, suddenly turns into a battlefield as they fall victim to a bomb attack (42). The attack on a civilian population victimizes the residents of the neighborhood. Similar to school going children are Gazan fathers who fall victim to the destruction of their land and the uprooting of their trees, as represented by Sarah Ali in “The Story of the Land.” The destruction of the land is not the only horrendous event that grips the characters and their community, it is, again, death as represented by Nour Al-Sousi in “Will I Ever Get Out?” Said states that a year ago, their home was shelled and the room that his father rested in was completely destroyed, killing his father (57). Moreover, Said falls victim to the vicious circumstances that push him into abandoning his medical studies and working in a tunnel (58).

Similar to Said’s anguish at the death of his father, Laila endures the suffering of her father’s death, as represented by Jehan Alfarra in “Please Shoot to Kill.” Not only does Laila’s father lose his life to Israel’s aggression, the entire family of Laila is victimized as they suffer from emotional agony due to the lack of medical attention that Laila’s father needs (78-79). Another victim that suffers is Salma in “Bundles.” Not only does Salma’s son lose his life in an Israeli prison, Salma herself is at an emotionally turbulent point as she struggles to maintain her sanity after hearing the news of her son’s death (68). In line with the death of Salma’s son is Omar’s death who decides to fight Israeli soldiers against his mother’s wish (83), in “Omar X.” Additionally, the displacement of the people from their homeland further victimizes an entire community, as is the case in Mohammed Suliman’s “We Shall Return.” The three central characters; Abu Ibrahim, Abu Ahmed, and Abu Naser along with their families face a devastating blow to their shared social bonds and their cultural identity (85). The

displacement of the people caused by the oppressor further aggravates the suffering of the family of the child protagonist in “Barefoot Bridge.” The protagonist finds herself completely baffled at entering her homeland (19). She, along with her father, mother, and brother, experiences the humiliating nature of inspection by soldiers (22). All these instances exemplify that it is the people of the community; children and adults, men and women, innocent and the freedom fighters, young and old who fall victim to the brutalities of the oppressor.

5.2.3 Relation of the Trauma Victim to the Wider Audience

Subsequent to the identification of victims and the pain that they experience, it is imperative to establish the relation of the victimized group to a wider audience. The process of meaning making in connection with the trauma victim and the wider audience can be understood in terms of questions such as how is the victim related to the wider audience? Do the audience belong to the same community as that of the victimized group? Or do they belong to a different group?

The writers of Palestinian fiction play a vital role in the construction of narratives that emphasize the significance of the distressing events that they portray. The authors do so to captivate the public's imagination by emphasizing the events' relevance to them. As such, the relevance of the events may persuade the wider audience to share the pain of the suffering collectivity and assume a moral responsibility for it. The authors address themes of suffering, struggle, and survival; themes that are universal in nature. They portray the experienced reality of a war-torn, occupied Palestine engulfed in blood, tears, sorrow, and death. They portray fictional accounts of the direct experiences of living in a war-hit region. The lives of the people of in the community come to a halt as the military forces of Israel engulf the characters in violence and oppression. In the wake of such an aggression, people struggle to come to terms with house raids, shooting, shelling, and death. The people experience a wide range of emotions such as immense sorrow, fear, terror, uncertainty, frustration, resentment, and hatred. The writers portray their distressing reality in a vivid way; the portrayal of the suffering that the people endure is so captivating that they carry a universal appeal, subsequently gripping the audience. The portrayal of the atrocities committed against the people can be pinned down as an effort by Palestinian writers to gain attention and cultivate a culture of awareness among the wider audience of readers.

People who engage in the act of reading the fictional narratives from Palestinian writers stand testimonial to the brutalities in occupied Palestine. They can share the pain of war-torn characters of these fictional narratives.

Additionally, the fictional narratives point toward the trespassing of oppressor on the rights of the characters. The distressing reality of the characters elicits an emotional response in readers. The depiction of violence, oppression, and occupation by Palestinian writers attests to the suppression of the rights of the people. The characters find themselves in half destroyed homes, half destroyed hospitals, or working in dark tunnels. The soldiers of Israel pose a constant threat to the collective safety of the people. The fictional narratives, with portrayals of a traumatic reality, serve the readers with a constant reminder of the threat that the characters face. The narratives explore themes of suffering, anguish, and psychological and communal distress. The writers of the fictional narratives, as carrier groups, effectively establish a connection of trauma victims to the wider audience and shape their discourse unheard on other forums.

5.2.4 Attribution of Responsibility

The process of meaning making in connection with responsibility can be understood in terms of questions such as who is responsible for the trauma? Is it an individual, or a group?

The Palestinian authors play a vital role in the construction of narratives that attribute the responsibility of trauma to Israeli forces. The writers highlight a traumatizing reality due to their oppression on them. They portray collective suffering of their people and their homeland and identify Israeli forces as perpetrator. The characters undergo physical injuries and face emotional abuse at the hands of Israeli soldiers. Mariam's father in "L for Life" loses his life to an Israeli bullet (26). In "Bundles," Salma's son, Naji, dies in an Israeli prison (68). In "Please Shoot to Kill," Laila's father dies because an Israeli soldier suspects him of being a terrorist and shoots him (79). In "Omar X," the protagonist, Omar, along with his friend, Sa'ad, are killed by an Israeli attack (84).

In accordance with Jeffrey C. Alexander's conceptualization, the writers of the selected Palestinian short stories belong to the suffering collectivity and act as carrier groups. They construct and put forth claims about their traumatizing reality by

identifying the victims and the perpetrators of the violence. The accounts of trauma that they portray in their fictional accounts help in examining the trauma of the community. The fictional accounts of war, encompassing incidents of violence and brutality, engulf the community and provide an insight into the collective trauma of the people. The above discussion elucidates that the authors of the selected short stories successfully construct a master narrative that is essential to the trauma process.

5.3 Mediation of Trauma Narrative in the Aesthetic Realm

According to Alexander, a new master narrative of cultural classification foregrounds the traumatizing reality of a social setting by pointing out the victims and the perpetrators of the violence. Through the construction of the trauma narrative, the carrier groups aim at compelling the world at large to acknowledge their pain. But even after the successful creation of a trauma narrative, a necessary condition of mediating these narratives must be met for them to reach a wider audience outside the social setting of the suffering group. It is through the successful mediation of trauma narrative in institutional arenas that the world at large recognizes the pain of the suffering collectivity, participates in their pain, and extends sympathies toward them. By doing so, a cultural trauma for the suffering group is established. This section of the chapter delves into the examination of trauma narrative in the aesthetic realm.

As per Alexander's conceptualization, when a new master narrative of cultural classification enters the aesthetic realm, it is channeled through specific genres and narratives that aim to produce imaginative identification and emotional catharsis (Alexander, "Toward" 15).

The selected fictional narratives from Palestinian authors weave characters around plots of suffering and violence. The authors produce narratives that depict interplay of trauma and community. As per Alexander's theory, the selected fictional narratives move beyond the traditional storytelling and become transformative agents. The authors of these stories reimagine the suffering and represent it through their fictional accounts. The authors articulate the trauma of their community through characters and themes in these fictional accounts. The artistic expression of Palestinian writers engages with narratives of trauma creating an understanding of their cultural trauma.

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" (28), allows readers to empathize with the protagonist's grief and sense of 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" (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" (26) and reflects on it as a physical reminder of the violence that has impacted her life. 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 Thaeer serves as a potent symbol of resilience and hope. When Mariam finally sees the tree, she realizes, "Thaeer's seeds grew up. Nothing else was left but the tree was enough for me" (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" (37), highlights its significance as a cherished artifact passed down from her father. Its "worn out to a glorious gray" (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 even in his absence. Traditionally, kufiya is a symbol of Palestinian identity and resistance against colonial and oppressive forces. Its presence in the story serves as a tangible connection to the Palestinian legacy and struggle. By wearing the kufiya, Mariam not only honors her father's memory but also 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" (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

residents and immerses the reader in the harsh realities of the protagonist's environment. 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" (31) highlights the enduring impact of trauma and the difficulty of reconciling personal loss with broader social realities.

Similarly, "The Story of the Land" by Sarah Ali 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. For example, the protagonist's father's devastation upon seeing the ruined olive trees is depicted with strong visual and emotional imagery. The narrator says, "All they saw as they walked was ruined lands filled with bulldozed, dead trees" (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" (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 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" (50). The specific mention of the number of trees lost, "189 olive trees" (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.

Another similar story, Jehan Alfarra's "Please Shoot to Kill," conveys the trauma experienced by Laila and her family during the conflict. The story reflects the pervasive sense of helplessness and despair amidst the relentless violence. Laila's internal struggle with her medical studies and her father's suffering epitomizes the broader collective trauma faced by many Palestinians. Alfarra depicts oppression through the mention of Apache helicopter which stands as a symbol of military aggression and might, revealing the power disparity and the fear it instills in Palestinian civilians. Moreover, the story depicts the tragic irony of Laila's father's medical

treatment being delayed and ultimately denied due to the prioritization of a baby's case. Laila's final thoughts about wishing the bombings to be more effective reflect a deep-seated frustration and anger at the violence she has endured. Her desire for a more decisive form of aggression mirrors the desperation of those who have witnessed and survived continuous trauma. These moments in the story underscore the stark reality of limited resources for the Palestinian people and the harsh choices forced upon them in conflict zones.

Alfarra frames the short story in a way that readers connect with it on a deeply emotional and human level through its raw depiction of trauma and resilience. The narrative immerses readers in Laila's personal struggles and the broader suffering of her family. It paints a vivid picture of their pain, loss, and the daily fight for survival in a war-torn Palestinian community. By portraying Laila's anguish, from the immediate impact of violence to the long-term effects on her family and her own inner turmoil, the story creates a powerful connection with readers. The vivid imagery and the exploration of universal themes like hope, despair, and the quest for justice allows readers to relate to Laila's plight.

Mohammed Suliman's "We Shall Return" similarly immerses the reader in the harsh realities of displacement. For example, the imagery of "the thick dust that rose from the shuffling feet" and the "chaotic sounds of the shoes scraping the rough, rocky sands" evokes the physical discomfort and disarray experienced by the characters (85). This portrayal of the environment helps readers visualize the difficult journey and empathize with the characters' suffering. The sensory details, such as the "dreadful sound of silence" and the "crackling fire" at night enhance the emotional impact of the narrative (86). The title of the story and the repeated refrain, "We shall return," is a powerful metaphor for the characters' hope and longing. For instance, the story reveals the characters' enduring connection to their homeland when they sing "We shall return, oh, Homeland" (88). This collective chant not only represents their personal desire to return but also reflects a broader cultural aspiration. The song's failure to achieve harmony mirrors the fragmentation and difficulty of achieving unity amidst trauma (88).

The story underscores the communal nature of the trauma through the portrayal of multiple families, such as Abu Ibrahim's, Abu Ahmed's, and Abu Naser's, all of whom are fleeing together. The structure of the story reflects the fragmented nature of trauma in the Palestinian community. The repeated attempts to harmonize their song

and the eventual exhaustion of the characters who "fell asleep" (89) around the dead fire mirror the disjointed and often futile efforts to achieve coherence and resolution amidst their suffering. The pacing of the narrative, the sudden shifts between moments of intense struggle, and the brief periods of respite all capture the emotional highs and lows of Palestinian trauma.

All these stories come together to form a powerful trauma narrative. These short stories collectively offer an exploration of the human condition in the face of suffering. They weave together individual experiences into a cohesive narrative and create a multifaceted portrayal of trauma that reflects cultural dimension. The selected fictional narratives serve not only as representations of trauma but also as a means of engaging with and processing these experiences. As such, the mediation of trauma through the aesthetic realm of literature becomes a critical tool for facilitating healing and understanding. Through literary techniques such as symbolism and narrative structure, these stories provide a space where readers can encounter and reflect on the cultural impacts of trauma.

The act of publishing these stories itself constitutes a significant form of mediation. When narratives of trauma are published, they transcend the boundaries of their immediate context and reach a broader audience. This dissemination allows the experiences of the traumatized individuals to be shared beyond their community. It makes their stories accessible to readers from different backgrounds and regions. The process of publication transforms these collective experiences into public texts and amplifies their impact. It ensures that they are recognized as part of a larger discourse. By bringing these stories into the public sphere, the act of publishing plays a pivotal role in validating and acknowledging the trauma experienced by the suffering community.

These narratives are crafted to evoke an emotional response from readers. They enable readers to engage deeply with the pain and suffering of characters. The aesthetic elements of the stories such as imagery, narration, and the portrayal of intimate moments are designed to resonate with readers on an emotional level. This emotional engagement is crucial for garnering empathy and understanding. By immersing readers in the experiences of the characters, these texts allow the audience to connect with the trauma on a personal level and facilitate a recognition of the suffering that might otherwise remain distant.

The stories aim to awaken the empathy of readers by vividly presenting the trauma of the characters. Through detailed depictions of their struggles, fears, and hopes, the narratives invite readers to witness and reflect on the suffering endured by the characters. This engagement is essential for bridging the gap between the reader's own experiences and the experiences of the traumatized individuals. By establishing this connection, the stories encourage readers to consider the broader implications of trauma and its effects on communities.

In this manner, the writers of the selected Palestinian short fiction effectively mediate a new master narrative of cultural classification through the aesthetic realm. By presenting their cultural trauma within the framework of literature, they create a narrative that not only documents their experiences but also redefines and reframes them within a broader cultural and historical context. This new master narrative offers a way to understand and interpret the trauma. It contributes to the creation of a shared cultural memory and identity. Through their artistic expression, these writers assert their place within the larger narrative of cultural and historical discourse and ensure that their stories are recognized and remembered.

The above discussion on the symbolic representation of collective trauma in Palestinian fiction shows that the carrier groups successfully create a trauma narrative of cultural classification. They identify the pain, the victim, the perpetrator, and create a relation of the trauma victim to a wider audience. Furthermore, they successfully mediate the narrative of trauma in the aesthetic arena, allowing the narratives to reach a wider audience to recognize their pain.

Alexander posits that a successful process of trauma enables a wider audience outside the suffering group to experience the trauma. This external recognition is crucial for transforming collective trauma into cultural trauma. It ultimately revises the collective identity of the affected group (Alexander "Toward" 22). This study reveals that the aesthetic realm serves as a vital institutional arena. It facilitates the projection of trauma claims and enables the collective experience of trauma to be acknowledged and internalized by a global audience.

Furthermore, the analysis underscores the power of fiction as a medium for trauma narratives. The writers not only articulate the specific suffering of the Palestinian community but also universalize their experiences. They make their experiences accessible and relatable to people beyond their immediate context. This

process of narrative dissemination and emotional resonance effectively establishes cultural trauma because the stories reach and impact diverse audiences.

By disseminating their trauma claims through compelling fictional narratives, the carrier groups project their voices and assert their experiences in the global cultural consciousness. This narrative mediation not only brings attention to their suffering but also challenges and reshapes collective memories and identities. Ultimately, the study highlights the transformative potential of literature in facilitating the recognition and understanding of trauma. It contributes to the broader discourse on cultural trauma and its implications for collective identity.

CONCLUSION

This study provides an account of collective trauma and cultural trauma in selected Palestinian short fiction. The study highlights the relevance of these theories to the traumatizing social reality of a collectivity depicted through war narratives. The chapters of analysis provide an explication to the research questions posed in the introductory chapter of this research. Kai T. Erikson contends that the first component of collective trauma is a blow to the tissues of social life. The blow damages the social bonds that help create a sense of attachment in people of a community and causes a significant damage to the prevailing sense of communality. Erikson's scholarship expands the concept of trauma beyond the individual level to encompass groups that share a common identity and are collectively impacted by a traumatic event. According to Erikson, unlike psychological trauma, collective trauma has a gradual impact. It gradually enters the consciousness of those who are affected; a gradual realization of the community in pieces, unable to provide effective support in times of distress.

By the same token, the literary works chosen for this study highlight that the characters experience traumatizing events that damage their social bonds and erode the prevailing sense of communality. This study explicates that the characters occupying the world of the literary texts experience significant blows to their social lives by being oppressed. Furthermore, the realization gradually dawns on them that the community that they were once a part of no longer remains intact. The characters realize that they must derive strength from their individual self rather than deriving a sense of support from the cultural repository that they once shared with others. The examination of the texts in chapter four concludes that the characters depicted in the literary texts undergo an extensive range of blows to their lives, leaving them alone. They fail to extract a sense of security from the bonds that they once shared with other characters. The analysis highlights that the fictional narratives chosen for this study depict that the social fabric of the community that the characters find themselves in is in pieces. This meets the foundational components of Erikson's collective trauma theory. In this way, the analysis in chapter four answers the research question posed in the introductory chapter of this study.

Jeffrey C. Alexander argues that after the initial conceptualization of cultural trauma theory, the social agents of the trauma process must construct claims about their traumatizing reality. These claims should be constructed by answering four foundational questions: the pain, the victim, the connection of victim to a wider audience, and the perpetrator. When social agents succeed in answering the four questions, they successfully construct a claim of trauma necessary for cultural trauma. By doing so, the social agents or carrier groups can potentially allow members of the wider audience to participate in their suffering, extend sympathy towards them, and possibly create a space which allows possible revision of their identity.

The literary texts chosen for this study depict the traumatizing social reality of the characters and underscores their sufferings. The selected texts act as symbolic representations of the people of the Palestinian community. The horrendous events produce a traumatizing reality which significantly damages their group consciousness, marks their memories, and changes their identities. The analysis of the literary texts in chapter five highlights that the authors, as members of the suffering collectivity, act as social agents or carrier groups and successfully articulate their claims of trauma by answering the four foundational questions for the construction of the narrative of trauma. By doing so, they fulfil the basic components of Alexander's conceptualization of cultural trauma and successfully construct a new master narrative of cultural classification. Hence, the analysis provides answer to the second research question posed in the introductory chapter of this research.

Moreover, Alexander believes that the narratives of trauma, if successfully mediated and disseminated to the world at large, may allow for social, political, and legal reforms for such communities. The subsequent sections of chapter five show that the trauma process in selected texts is facilitated by the institutional structure of aesthetic realm. The carrier groups successfully unfold the trauma narrative in the aesthetic realm by publishing these stories. The voices of these writers, or carrier groups, come together and put forward their communal trauma in front of the audience outside the suffering collectivity. This plays a pivotal role in engaging the readers on an emotional level. Through the detailed character development and symbolic representation of traumatic events, the selected texts allow reader to transcend their own experiences and connect with the pain and suffering of others. By evoking empathy, these narratives make the concept of cultural trauma relatable. They facilitate a deeper understanding of the Palestinian plight. The symbolic connection is not a byproduct of

the narrative but a deliberate strategy employed by the authors to establish a sense of solidarity and awareness among readers.

The study demonstrates how symbolic element in literature can serve as a powerful tool to broadcast the pain of a collectivity and to reinforce their claims. By eliciting strong emotional responses through these symbols, the short stories encourage readers to reflect on their own moral and ethical standing. This reflection can lead to a comprehension of the cultural contexts that shape the experiences of the people of Palestine. The study highlights the potential of empathy as a catalyst for social change. When readers are emotionally moved by the narratives, they are more likely to advocate for justice and support initiatives that aim to address the causes of the trauma depicted. This finding aligns with Alexander's assertion that cultural trauma narratives have the power to mobilize collective action by creating a shared sense of urgency and moral responsibility. By that token, the analysis in the chapter five shows that the institutional arena of aesthetic realm facilitates the trauma process and successfully mediates the claims of trauma to a wider audience, resulting in the facilitation of recognition of suffering and the reconstruction of identity for the Palestinian community. Hence, the discussion in chapter five answers the third research question posed in the introductory chapter of this research.

6.1 Findings of the Study

The selected Palestinian short stories function as constructs of collective memory. They shape and preserve the identity of the Palestinian community. Through recurring symbols, these narratives not only document cultural experiences but also weave them into collective consciousness of a community. In "The Story of the Land" by Sarah Ali, the land is a powerful symbol of Palestinian identity and resistance. In the story, the protagonist's father's deep connection to his land is evident when he refers to it as "the Land of al-zait al-muqaddas—the holy oil" (46). Despite the destruction brought by the Israeli offensive, the land remains a source of identity and pride. The father's refusal to accept financial compensation and his preference for a program that helps farmers stand on their own illustrates the Palestinians' resilience and determination to maintain their connection to the land (45). The land is not merely a physical space but a crucial part of their cultural identity.

Moreover, olive trees hold significant cultural and symbolic value in Palestinian society. They represent continuity, heritage, and the deep roots of the Palestinian people in their land. The story vividly describes the father's anguish over the uprooted olive trees. He emphasizes their importance by saying "189 olive trees. 160 lemon trees. 14 guava trees" (48). Olive trees are not just agricultural assets but living symbols of Palestine's history and heritage. The father's meticulous counting of the trees signifies their irreplaceable value. In addition, the act of replanting these trees, despite the risks and uncertainties, showcases the community's resilience and their commitment to preserving their heritage.

Similarly, in "L for Life," the olive tree appears towards the end of the story. It symbolizes both the survival of Thær's legacy and resilient spirit of the Palestinian people. After a journey filled with personal and collective revelations, Mariam encounters the olive tree standing amidst the ruins of the orphanage. This image of the olive tree thriving in a devastated area represents the enduring spirit of resistance and hope. Mariam exclaims, "I smiled. I laughed. I cried. I kept on sighing at the sight of the olive tree standing alive at the very end of the burned house, of the orphanage" (33). The survival of the olive tree against the backdrop of destruction signifies that despite the physical and emotional scars of war, some aspects of life continue to flourish. The olive tree thus becomes a powerful symbol of hope and resilience. It represents the Mariam's realization that even amid loss and destruction, there is something that survives and thrives, connecting her to her father's legacy and paving way for identity construction; one that is marked by hope.

Moreover, kufiya is a symbol of Palestinian resilience, solidarity, and resistance. Mariam's interaction with kufiya illustrates its deep personal and cultural significance. The kufiya, once worn by Mariam's father, becomes a symbol of his legacy and a source of strength for Mariam. She mentions, "I put your glorious kufiya around my neck, and I unwaveringly went out. I trusted life that day" (31). The kufiya is described as having a "rich black" (28) that has worn to a "glorious gray" (28), symbolizing the passage of time and the enduring nature of the Palestinian spirit. This process of narrative construction helps to solidify a sense of shared identity among Palestinians to reinforce their cultural heritage and historical continuity despite ongoing adversities. It shows that the collective experiences of suffering and survival, as depicted in the selected texts, create a common bond among members of the

Palestinian community. This bond is essential for the formation of a collective identity for the Palestinian people. By analyzing these narratives through the framework of cultural trauma, this study sheds light on the dynamic process of identity construction in the face of trauma.

The selected texts not only portray trauma but also emphasize themes of resistance and resilience. This dual focus contributes to the formation of a collective identity that is not solely defined by victimhood but also by strength and resilience. By presenting characters who actively resist oppression and strive to rebuild their lives, these narratives inspire resilience within the Palestinian community. This study underscores the crucial point of how, through cultural trauma, the identity of the Palestinian community is reshaped and reconstructed. Despite the overwhelming trauma that the characters face, these narratives consistently highlight themes of endurance and resilience. The characters' determination to survive and maintain their cultural heritage amidst adversity forms a crucial part of the Palestinian identity. This construction of identity is not just a reflection of their past and present struggles but a testament to their ability to overcome and persist even in the most challenging circumstances. Characters often find solace and meaning in cultural practices, familial bonds, and the natural landscape of their homeland. The repeated emphasis on returning to their roots and reclaiming their homeland underscores the formation of a resilient identity that is intrinsically tied to their cultural origins. By focusing on such acts of resistance, the writers highlight the agency of their characters. The study finds that cultural trauma, while a source of suffering, also serves as a crucible for the reconstruction of identity for the Palestinians. The collective experience of trauma becomes a defining feature of the Palestinian people which unites them in the face of adversity. This transformation of trauma into a source of strength and unity is a key finding of this study.

Additionally, the analysis of the short stories underscores the potential of storytelling for cultural claim. It highlights how the act of narrating traumatic experiences can serve as a form of responsibility for the authors and their communities. By articulating their pain and suffering, writers of the selected Palestinian short stories transform their trauma into a communicable form which can then be shared and understood by others. It shows that by creating and consuming narratives that reflect their experiences, entire communities can find support. These narratives provide a

space for communal reflection where collective strategies for healing, and emotional and social change can be developed and reinforced. This process of externalization of trauma by the writers proves to be an important step in the healing journey of the Palestinian community.

Moreover, the findings of this study underscore the dire need for reparations for the Palestinian community. The study highlights the enduring impacts of displacement, loss, and violence, and underscores that healing extends beyond individual recovery. It requires collective actions that acknowledge historical injustices inflicted upon the Palestinian community, as evident through the examination of the selected texts. The depiction of ongoing struggles in these stories highlights the urgent need for social change. This study calls attention to the structural and systemic factors that perpetuate the suffering of the Palestinian community. By exposing these realities, this study advocates for changes in policies and practices that perpetuate injustice and inequality against the Palestinian community. It urges the global community to take concrete actions to dismantle these structures and support the Palestinian people's right to justice. Moreover, the study advocates for reparations not only as a means of compensating for past wrongs but also as a path to justice and reconciliation. The study suggests that reparations should encompass the rebuilding of Palestinian cultural and social institutions. These measures are seen as vital for creating conditions where the Palestinian community can thrive and rebuild their lives.

The dissertation concludes by stating that Palestinian short stories are instrumental in creating a new master narrative of cultural trauma. This narrative not only reflects the historical and ongoing struggles of the Palestinian people but also redefines their cultural identity in terms of resilience and resistance. By mediating trauma through the aesthetic realm, these narratives challenge dominant discourses and offer an alternative perspective on Palestinian identity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

An understanding of a topic from multiple perspectives is important in any research endeavor. Due to the limitations of time, this study is delimited to a particular aspect. It is recommended for future researchers to study the selected fictional narratives through other theoretical lenses. For instance, prospective researchers can undertake the study of these short stories from the point of view of psychological trauma. The characters in the short stories undergo an extensive range of detrimental effects of psychological trauma as the stories deal with themes of death and loss. In this way, the short stories selected for this study can make for a well-rounded study on psychological trauma. Another possibility for future researchers in the study of selected short stories is feminist analysis. The short stories deal with female characters as they navigate the daily life of a war-torn community. The roles of women, their portrayal, and the treatment by the writers could prove to be a significant area of research for prospective researchers.

The importance of fiction dealing with the trauma of a community cannot be overlooked. In the light of this statement, it is recommended for future researchers to employ theories of collective and cultural trauma to analyze other works of literature, portraying war-hit communities. Literature produced in countries that does not get much attention as opposed to literature produced in the west can also be analyzed for the trauma that it portrays. Furthermore, fiction is a rich source of narratives that highlight the impact of natural or technological disasters on communities. Prospective researchers can carry out an analysis of fiction that depicts destruction caused by natural disasters such as floods, and man-made disasters such as war.

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