

RESONANCES OF TRAUMA, MEMORY, AND RESILIENCE IN 'AS LONG AS THE LEMON TREES GROW' BY ZOULFA KATOUH

Maria Najam

Lecturer, Higher Education Department, Punjab

Email: mariya.najam@yahoo.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7506-7213>

Saman Gul

M.phil scholar, University of Sargodha, Sargodha

Email: gul213610@gmail.com

Abstract

*This paper is an exploration of how trauma, memory, and resilience are depicted in a young adult novel 'As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow' (2022) by Zoulfa Katouh, which unfolds during the Syrian civil war. Employing close reading and thematic analysis, the paper shows how the authors employ narrative techniques of hallucination, fragmentation of time, intrusive memories, and guilt of the survivor as a way of portraying trauma. Following a hybrid theoretical approach consisting of both the classical trauma theory (Caruth, 1996; Herman, 1992) and the postcolonial trauma approaches (Craps, 2013; Visser, 2015, 2018), the reading explores the connections between individual mental suffering and trauma of the collective: that of war, displacement, and historical violence. The paper also points out that the process of resilience is reflected in memory, narrative, and personal relationships, which enables the main character to get through her experience and restore agency. Situated within the larger body of young adult trauma literature, alongside text like *The Kite Runner*, *Salt to the Sea* and *The Island of Missing Trees*, Katouh's novel demonstrates the potential of young adult books to act as a witness of a conflict and catalyst of empathy. The study adds to the perspective of trauma research, postcolonial critical theory, and the dynamic debate of non-Western experiences in the current writing of young adult literature.*

1. Introduction

War and political violence have had a long-lasting impact not only on geopolitical landscape but also on the psychology and lives of individuals engulfed in their aftermath. Over the recent decades, humanities and social sciences have become immersed in a series of studies on the cultural and emotional repercussions of war, especially the traumatic impacts on civilians (Edkins, 2003; Alexander, 2004). Beyond the battlefield injuries, in a much deeper way, war tears families apart, displaces communities, causes psychological trauma, particularly in children and the young adult generation (Macksoud & Aber, 1996; Betancourt et al., 2010). Such effects are not restricted to physical damage; they occur in the form of memory imbalances, emotional imbalances, and feelings of identity and belonging.

Trauma has become a significant concept to make sense of such reactions to violence. Trauma was initially theorized in psychoanalysis and clinical psychology but has also been theorized in cultural studies and in literary work. According to Cathy Caruth (1996), "trauma is the wound, a trope that fails to communicate its own necessity and is therefore never immediately and exhaustively represented directly, but only belatedly and indirectly; through trauma, a wound that remains recurrent, an intrusion that is never exhausted, and whose site can, ferociously, be identified only belatedly, as the symptom of another, more primary wound, an identification that is itself necessarily secondary." Judith Herman (1992) extends its consequences in relation to deforming the relationalities, autobiographical narration, and recollections and turns into that which fractures the trust of not only an individual but also a community. Trauma theory has evolved, and over time, the theory has been widened to cover

the experience outside individual pathology. Stef Craps (2013) decries the Eurocentric rooted nature of classical trauma theory and advocates for a de/post-colonial viewing of trauma to include structural and historical violence. Likewise, Irene Visser (2015) claims that non-Western trauma occurs in collective, structural, and chronically layered forms, and the forces shaping it are wars, occupation, and forced migrations.

Young people from areas that are embroiled in wars are particularly at risk. Research reveals that young people who are subjected to a long conflict are disproportionately affected by post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, and depression (Barber, 2008; Khamis, 2015). Not to be overlooked, are observations around resilience psychological research, also observing the ability to survive, adapt, and establish meaning in the face of adversity (Masten, 2001; Ungar, 2008). Such complexity finds critical reflection in the literature. It empowers young writers and readers to experience trauma and express resilience with the help of narrative presentation, symbolism, and characters.

In this wider discourse, the young adult (YA) literature has acquired academic recognition through its ability to represent trauma in a way that is easy to relate to emotionally, but with complex ethical thinking. As speculated by Nikolajeva (2010), YA fiction frequently employs the common theme of psychological maturation in the face of hardship, so even narratives of trauma involving the loss of a loved one, political violence, or displacement can be deployed within the genre. Kokkola (2003) stresses that such literature has a pedagogical and therapeutic effect, making the reader overcome feelings of fear, alienation, and moral indecision. The representation of the psychological backgrounds of young protagonists in YA novels that address their trauma is most frequently based on narrative fragmentation, the use of objects to symbolize the trauma, and the inner monologue.

This tendency is embodied by several modern YA works. Khaled Hosseini (2003) addresses the issue of survivor guilt and silence under the looming of politics of betrayal against the backdrop of Afghanistan in his novel *The Kite Runner*. Salt to the Sea (2016) by Ruta Sepetys follows the multiple-vocalic account of WWII refugees and brings to light the collective trauma. Even though *The Island of Missing Trees* by Elif Shafak (2021) is not strictly YA but still it uses botanical and ecological metaphors to talk about intergenerational trauma of conflicts in Cyprus. In all these readings, trauma is not just a personal psychological scar, but an indication of a larger disruption on the historical and sociopolitical scale.

In the context of the civil war in Syria, trauma mutates into an especially urgent and complex condition. Syria is facing one of the worst humanitarian crises of modern history since 2011 which is characterized by population displacement, sieges, and government violence. UNHCR (2024) reported that more than 14 million Syrians have been displaced, and the conflict has been disproportionately affecting the common people (civilians), particularly children. The deaths of family members, separation, torture, or siege warfare have become notably widespread, causing long-term emotional and psychological trauma in many (Panter-Brick et al., 2018). Youth have been disrupted in their schooling, been thrust into adult roles or experienced recurrent exposures to violence.

To these types of traumas, literature of Syrian and Diasporic authors has emerged as a form of cultural testimony and witness response. Among them, the novel *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* by Zoulfa Katouh (2022) is a heart-wrenching story that describes the emotional and ethics burden of war through the perspectives of Salama, a Syrian teenager who became a war medic in Homs. Symbolic imagery, hallucination, and interior monologue help the novel depict how trauma diminishes perception, memory, and identity as broken up. Although the novel never conveniently offers its readers catharsis, it also sets themes of resistance, longing and how hope can still exist among the destruction in a landscape.

Katouh is one such voice represented in the YA literature, allowing voices to be heard to give an account of the psychic and cultural costs of war. It gives the younger characters- and readers a chance to deal with grief, guilt, and survival, in very deeply destabilizing situations. Such narratives are both a testimony to trauma and an act of memory and an ability to envisage some prospect of healing.

2. Literature Review

Trauma theory offers a conceptual framework for this study. According to Cathy Caruth (1996), trauma is the inexplicable injury, a moment that is too shocking and goes beyond the ability of victims to endure it as it happens; trauma is described as a wound that can only be addressed late, using uncontrolled, flashback memories, these narratives full of broken forms. Caruth described trauma as an imposing encounter of sudden or cataclysmic experiences that have the effect of causing excessively chaotic outbreaks of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena. Similarly, in her seminal book *Trauma and Recovery*, Judith Herman (1992) notes that the experience of trauma continues regardless of whether the actual danger is over, or not, with the trauma victims continuing to live through the traumatic experience as though it was still ongoing in the here and now. Both theorists focus on the role of trauma in disrupting memory and identity: it cannot be simply narrated but is brought about through flashbacks, repetition, and dissociation. When combined, their models, by Herman clinical-psychological, and by Caruth literary-narrative establish that to manifest much trauma in literature is often expressed in broken way, untrustworthy narration, and deferred disclosure (Caruth, 1996; Herman, 1992).

At the interdisciplinary level, trauma has a substantial connection to psychology, anthropology, sociology, history, politics, and literature (Heidarizadeh, 2015). Political violence does not merely terrorize or scare by causing personal injury or fear but also traumatizes by leaving the memory of violence printed in the bodies of its subjects (Humphrey, 2000). Hutchison (2010) investigates politics of emotions, and Magruder et al. (2017) address trauma as a health issue in the population. Shah et al. (2023) use literary research to review the traumatized psychological behavior of characters in *The Shadow of the Crescent Moon* and *The Runaways* by Fatima Bhutto. Vernon (2012) probes at trauma and recovery in *Solar Storms*. There is a limited amount of research in young adult (YA) fiction such as the work by Gyurisn (2004) which studies the process of recovery of trauma in *Brothers Grimm Little Red Cap* and *Snow White*. In another study, a systematic review and meta-analysis by Ahmed et al. (2024), it is recapitulated that the people in the armed conflict areas are susceptible to a high incidence of PTSD and depression a finding that is seconded by the statistics published in the *Journal of Affective Disorders*. In an article by El-Khoury et al. (2024) published in *The Lancet Global Health*, mental health is discussed as a human right that has continuously been ignored in war-torn areas, and response systems should be designed to curb such negligence.

Contemporary theorists of postcolonial trauma criticize the universalizing bent of classical Western models of trauma. Stef Craps (2013) claims that Eurocentric paradigms tend to marginalize non-Western experiences and do not focus on colonization and displacement traumas as well as systemic violence. He establishes a "decolonized" understanding of trauma, which would be sensitive to collective and distributive trauma. Irene Visser (2015, 2018) criticizes dominant Western conceptions of temporality in thinking about trauma, particularly the focus on singular, belated experiences, intra-psychic in nature, and re-focuses on non-linearity, ritual, and culture-specific responses. Visser rallies an ethics of openness to the way memory and silence operate in historically silenced situations.

Applying such frameworks to the literature of the Global South, these frameworks can create a view on how collective trauma, colonial pasts and political oppression influence

memory and identity. It makes it possible to have a more encompassing interpretation of trauma that is culturally and geopolitically specific.

Due to its position between adolescence and developing morality, young adult literature can be characterized by highly psychological and emotional subjects. Maria Nikolajeva (2010) notes that many YA texts are characterized by repressed or split traumatic memories. These novels depend on the first-person narrator to present voice and agency in the context of the emotional impairment of the characters. Trauma in YA literature, thus, serves not only as a filter in becoming someone with an identity, but also in drawing the readers to empathy.

Larissa Wodtke (2017) proposes another term related to YA literature, called difficult knowledge, which can be introduced as the dilemma that authors must maintain between revealing painful truths and sustaining hope. She observes that YA fiction can use love, fantasy, or symbolism to negotiate ugly realities, appealing to the reader in an ethical way but not condescending trauma. As their subject, these books tend to emphasize memory loss, survivor guilt or moral complexity and enables young readers to experience war, abuse, and genocide through a controlled frame of narrative.

As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow (2022) is a debut novel by Zoulfa Katouh that has attracted growing prominence due to its sensitive treatment of the subject of trauma in the context of a young adult novel. It revolves around Salama, an 18-years old pharmacy student, who wades through the atrocities of the Syrian uprising, at a time when she is interning at a hospital and experiencing hallucinations, grief, and guilt. Despite limited peer-reviewed scholarly research, its themes have already been addressed and discussed in various projects and other academic sources that represent an early scholarly analysis. Nopriyanto (2024) employs the theory of trauma introduced by Caruth to discuss the hallucinations and panic attacks of the character, Marantika (2024) utilizes PTSD frameworks to develop the discussion of psychological elements of the character. Latumeten (2024) gives an ecocritical interpretation of positioning the lemon trees as the symbol of survival in the war-damaged ecosystem.

Regardless of these explorative studies, there exist critical research gaps. To begin with, the internal damage, such as hallucinations, impaired memory, and survivor guilt, has not been analyzed in the case of Salama with a complete synthesis of both models of trauma advanced by Caruth and Herman. Second, despite the focus of the novel on the conflict in Syria, little theoretical work occurs to apply the postcolonial theory of trauma; political, collective, and intergenerational trauma as developed by Craps and Visser. Third, there is little comparative study of the extent to which the narrative techniques and cultural signifiers deployed by Katouh match or contradict other trauma narratives in YA literature in a variety of geopolitical contexts. These gaps relate to the study's research questions.

Katouh's novel is a new entrant in the expanding universe of YA literature about living under war, surviving trauma. In *The Kite Runner* (2003) by Khaled Hosseini, Amir experiences guilt and delayed process of facing the past, in close relation to the concepts of belated witnessing, as suggested by Caruth. *Salt to the Sea* (2016) by Ruta Sepetys deploys several genres to investigate the issue of collective trauma in WWII; meanwhile, *The Island of Missing Trees* (2021) by Elif Shafak also features multiple perspectives, such as magical realism and nonhuman narrator, to symbolize the problem of intergenerational trauma based in a historical conflict. There are some shared techniques in such novels, e.g., fragmented narrative, symbolism, and moral complexity, and it is because of these connections and the elements used that the novels are a useful comparison.

The academic discourse about *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* remains at its developmental stage. Current literature has discussed trauma within a psychological or a symbolic context, rarely combining classical trauma theory and a postcolonial Reading. There

are still insufficient comparative studies that put the novel and the rest of the world's YA trauma narratives in conversation. This limits a greater appreciation of the nature of trauma, resilience, and cultural memory in various literary traditions.

In this review, the limitations have been addressed by suggesting a unified theoretical framework, which combines both foundational and postcolonial trauma theories. It also locates the novel by Katouh in broader fields of YA war literature with regards to evaluating how the novel contributes in unique ways to the youth, trauma and survival discourse within the greater global narratives.

3. Theoretical Framework: trauma Theory, postcolonial Critique and YA Fiction

3.1. Orientation of the Theory

The work uses the hybrid theoretical approach based on the combination of the classical theory of trauma and postcolonial trauma critique. Through this dual vision, this lens realizes trauma as an individual, psychological phenomenon and the phenomenon with historical and political embeddedness. This framework can be used to appreciate the understanding of trauma as broken memory within the self and as historical violence forced externally on the individual by using the example of *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* (2022) by Zoulfa Katouh.

3.2. Classical Trauma Theory: Caruth and Herman

The classical trauma theory, a product of psychoanalytic and literary studies of the 1990s, looks at the ways that trauma interferes with memory, time, and narration. According to Cathy Caruth (1996), trauma is an experience that does not get fully encoded when it takes place and later comes back in late, repetitive manners in nightmares, flashbacks, and dissociative episodes. She suggests that trauma, "is not primarily transferred into language—i.e. contained in a clarifying and coherent narrative [...] but precisely not known in the first instance" (Caruth, 1996, p. 4).

Judith Herman (1992) describes a three-part model of how people respond to a trauma including hyperarousal, intrusion, and constriction. Herman accentuates the ways the traumatic experience has devastating effects overturning the normal adaptations to life (Herman, 1992, p. 33) and destabilizing individual sense of safety, trust, and continuity of life narrative. Her model brings forth the significance of the restoration of the community and a sense of narrative wholeness as a major part of the healing process.

Caruth and Herman, in conjunction, offer conceptual tools that can be applied and understood to interpret the hallucinations, disruption of memory, and emotional fragmentation in Salama, protagonist in the novel by Katouh. Their conceptualizations include the internal fissure of memory and perception brought about by traumatic experiences of violence. Nevertheless, they reproduce throughout their work the idea of trauma as a singular psychic injury at the expense of considering how historical and geopolitical circumstances determine its configuration.

3.3. Critique on the Postcolonial Trauma: Craps and Visser

To alleviate this shortcoming, this paper applies to the postcolonial trauma theory, which criticizes the Western, individualistic and event centered premises of classical trauma theory. Stef Craps (2013) argues that the conventional trauma theory relegates trauma experience due to colonial oppression, systemic violence, and long-term conflict. He promotes a decolonization of trauma studies by adding the examples of the world, where the narratives beyond the Euro-American modes of thinking are structured around flashback and event-based models that do not always resonate with global trauma families (Craps, 2013).

Irene Visser (2015, 2018) expands this further by provocatively stating that non-Western trauma is typically multidirectional with the origin of trauma being communal, as trauma occurs through structural disempowerment, or political erasure, and intergenerational

break. In this, she points to numerous such traumas, which are not discrete events but on-going processes, which are frequently bound up with the legacy of colonialism, war, or ecological devastation. Notably, Visser offers the idea that traditional methods of therapy and narrative closure frequently become substituted with cultural memory, oral storytelling, and symbolism in such contexts.

Such perceptions can be particularly applied to *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow*. Salama suffers not only an individual trauma; hers is being interwoven with the general trauma of war, displacement, and dictatorship. The inclusion of real historical incidents (such as the siege of Homs, the murder of protest singer Ibrahim Qashoush) and symbolic footholds (such as the lemon trees) in the novel reinforces a standpoint Visser develops, to the effect that trauma in postcolonial texts has a habit of being entrenched in common cultural and environmental images.

3.4. Merging of framework: A Justification and Relevance

The choice to merge the classical and postcolonial theories of trauma has its foundation in the duality of the trauma in the narrative that is presented by Katouh. On the one hand, the symptoms that Salama experienced, her hallucinations (Khawf), her broken memory, and her nightmares (we constantly see her in the time of her nightmares), closely resemble the models suggested by Caruth (1996) and Herman (1992). With the help of these frameworks, the psychological cost of trauma comes into light as it reveals how war disorients the sense of personal identity and deliberation.

Conversely, it is not entirely possible to adequately explain the trauma experienced by Salama without referring to the greater political and cultural backdrop of the civil war in Syria. Her trauma is not the product of singular instances of violence, but systematic injustice, structural violence, and group silence in historical circumstances going back a long way - more fully covered by the theory of postcolonial trauma. The siege, lack of medical supplies, displacement and cross-generational promises featured in the novel can all be encompassed by what Craps (2013) refers to as a trauma out of bounds: experiences that cannot be explained through a classical model.

Such a hybrid framework would then be capable of making a layered reading of *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* in such a way that the trauma is not only symptomatic but is also located, intimate and historical, individual, and collective. Additionally, it conforms to the recent changes in trauma research that tend to be intersectional, transnational, and ecocritical, welcoming stories that appear in unfamiliar parts of the world and are told by voices who are otherwise underrepresented.

Through combining classical and postcolonial trauma theories, this research provides a critical reading paradigm which allows the intricate trauma terrain in *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* to be analyzed. Caruth and Herman provide critical information on psychological disintegration and survivor recollection, and Craps and Visser place more focus on the international politics of suffering and sustainability. Under this integrated model, a more holistic interpretation of the novel can be developed in terms of how trauma is configured in the consciousness of the mind and the history, the body and the nation, the memory and landscape.

This framework will be used in the analysis to provide a closer textual reading of the journey of Salama, particularly through the lens of postcolonial trauma literature and in relation to trauma symptoms; disruption of memory; survivor guilt; and, postwar resilience, all the time putting her trajectory in the larger context of a transcendental discourse of postcolonial trauma literature and young adult war fiction.

4. Research Questions

The paper aims to answer:

- i. In what ways does *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* capture the psychological aspects of hallucination, memory interference, survivor guilt, etc. related to trauma in the context of the trauma theories of Caruth and Herman through narrative features?
- ii. How does the novel contextualize the individual trauma of Salama in relation to the exterior geography of collective, political, and intergenerational trauma envisaged in the theory of Craps and Visser on postcolonial trauma?
- iii. What does the representation of trauma and resilience in *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow*, by Katouh adds, or alternatively, resists to the representation of trauma in other YA literature like *The Kite Runner*, *Salt to the Sea*, and *The Island of Missing Trees*, in both form and voice and cultural specificity?

5. Methodology

The qualitative, interpretive literary analysis, applied in this study, draws on close reading, and critical theory in the form of the representation of trauma, memory, and resilience in the novel *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* (2022) written by Zoulfa Katouh. This study is concerned with the effects that trauma has on the experience of the narrative process and the way in which the effects are formulated through narrative tropes like hallucination (Khawf), time out of joint, and the curse as the survivor of the massacre in a culturally and politically specific place. The study is guided by a mixed theoretical approach that is informed by a classical theory of trauma namely the belated and fragmented experience of Cathy Caruth (1996) and Judith Herman (1992) definition of PTSD and moral injury as a clinical model of trauma and a postcolonial approach to trauma theory in the work of Stef Craps (2013) and Irene Visser (2015, 2018): structural, collective, and long-established trauma in non-Western environments are critical. The novel was chosen because of a specific approach to the topic of trauma and how it is shown based on the experience of a young Muslim female protagonist who lived and experienced terrible shifts in the war-torn Syria. Within the realm of the trauma theory, thematic analysis links and interprets the main motives of hallucination, resistance, memory loss, guilt, and hope. *The Kite Runner* (Hosseini, 2003), *Salt to the Sea* (Sepetys, 2016), and *The Island of Missing Trees* (Shafak, 2021) have been referenced comparatively to contextualize this novel by Katouh in relation to existing tendencies in trauma literature in YA books. The study is done with ethical sensitivity when depictions of actual suffering and political violence are involved.

6. Analysis

6.1. Syrian Civil War Historical and Geopolitical Context

Trauma theory that examines the deep psychological and emotional effects of overwhelming events, offers a critical lens of interpretation of Zoulfa Katouh as *Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* (2022). The novel is a young adult fiction focusing on the family / personal life of Salama Kassab, a Syrian teenager whose life turned upside down because of the Syrian civil war, a complicated and longstanding conflict that started in 2011 and that organizes popular rebels struggling to have a democratic system. The course of the war changed Syria into a conflict zone between various external forces, which led to devastating rates of losses, displacement, and post-traumatic stress disorders in civilians (USA for UNHCR, 2025; Holliday, 2012).

Homs, Salama's home city and the symbolic "birthplace of the Syrian Revolution," became synonymous with suffering. The siege in Homs between 2011 and 2014 resulted in the destruction of the city, with infrastructure ruptured. Citizens locked up between starvation and

violence (Human RightsWatch, 2014). Katouh has also rooted her story in this geopolitical conflict and also has linked the personal loss with the destruction of the nation. Through Salama's perspective, readers witness "bombed-out neighborhoods" and a "graveyard masquerading as a neighborhood" (Katouh, 2022, p. 32), immersing them in the tangible horrors of siege warfare.

Salama's reflections—such as comparing the city's ruins to "black-and-white pictures my history textbooks showed of Germany and London after World War II" (Katouh, 2022, p. 33)—position her trauma within global histories of wartime urban destruction. Such layering of narratives highlights the interrelation of individual and social trauma and the implications of trauma as a historical construction that these postcolonial theorists such as Stef Craps (2013) and Irene Visser (2018) stress on historicizing the trauma in the discourses of global violence and power structures in its neocolonialist nature. The fact that the Syrian conflict is interspersed with the interests of foreign powers (Russia, Iran, and Western states, in particular) adds to the postcolonial paradigm, showing the ways through which trauma is simultaneously local and geographically specific.

6.2. Trauma Theory and Symptoms in Salama's Experience

The example of Salama described by Katouh perfectly falls under the definition of a traumatic event as suggested by Cathy Caruth (1996), in which the event that one experienced and witnessed defies the comprehension capacity at the time of its occurrence but later on is indicated in abrupt memories in irregular flashbacks. Much to the same effect, Judith Herman (1992) defines trauma as the feeling of a discontinuous breakdown that causes the normal functioning of the mind (p. 33). Salama's dissociative state experiences, compulsive aggregation, and intrusive sensory memories represent these abstract principles.

For instance, Salama's fixation on the phrase "Daisies. Daisies. Daisies. Sweet-smelling daisies" (Katouh, 2022, p. 19) becomes infected as her conditioned application—a hammered synonymous mantram that turns up for her for a moment sidesteps consciousness. This is in line with the concept of the traumatic compulsive repetition that Caruth depicts as a kind of memory that is never properly integrated into the narrative and remains beyond conscious management. Her hypervigilance—"The sound of bombs is louder than my heartbeat" (Katouh, 2022, p. 18)—echoes PTSD symptoms where survivors remain caught in heightened states of alert.

The metaphorical depth of Salama's trauma is striking: "No matter how many times I wash my hands, our martyrs' blood seeps beneath my skin, into my cells" (Katouh, 2022, p. 57). This description gives a striking account of the somatic fatigue left by trauma, which Herman (1992) argues is lodged in memory and physically within the body and thus becomes central to the embodiment of the survivor. Similarly, the auditory hallucination of "the sound of the operating-room saw... stuck in my mind on a loop" (Katouh, 2022, p. 58) reflects the idea of intrusive remembrances of Herman, which are memories that forcefully relive and could not be successfully repressed.

Salama's existential dislocation is crystallized in her anguished statement: "This wasn't supposed to be my life" (Katouh, 2022, p. 36). This presents the fragmentation of identity and temporal continuity which defines the core of the works of Caruth and Herman in regard to trauma. Trauma disorients the survivor, destroying his/her sense of coherent self and future that is predictable, where s/he remains suspended between the shattered future of hopes of the past and the present constrained by violence and loss.

6.3. Personification of fear and Hallucination: Khawf

Katouh creatively externalizes Salama's inner psychological conflict through the figure of Khawf—Arabic for "fear"—a hallucination manifesting anxiety and survivor's guilt.

Khawf's description as a sharply dressed man with "icy blue eyes" (Katouh, 2022, p. 55) anthropomorphizes the obtrusive and incorrigible occurrence of trauma, thus acquiring the conjecture of Caruth (1996) that trauma has an irresistible ramification over mindfulness. Khawf's repeated threats—"Get Layla out, or I'll tear your world apart"—exemplify how traumatic memories and guilt aggressively disrupt survivors' attempts at psychological stability.

Salama's grounding responses, including reciting botanical remedies like "Feverfew. It appears to be daisies. Treats fevers and arthritis" (Katouh, 2022, p. 59) represent conscious efforts to reclaim agency. This invocation is very ritualistic and exhibits the phases of trauma recovery as postulated by Herman (1992), where the survivors regain control of their lives by repetitive but symbolic activities that create a fragmented sense of self (p. 61).

6.4. Nostalgia, Memory, and Loss

The story of Salama is characterized by the latency of trauma and the contradiction between nostalgic memory and the current suffering. According to Caruth (1996), trauma deals with memories, which have not been processed and breaks out unexpectedly. Salama's brief, joyful reminiscences of childhood—"When my brother and I would rush into this supermarket after school" (Katouh, 2022, p. 20)—are immediately self-silenced: "I shake my head. Stop" (p. 21). This struggle between keeping and letting go of the past is a manifestation of the psychological effort that survivors go through.

The fact that Layla, who is introduced as the sister-in-law of Salama and the best confidant, is a hallucination that comes out as the key revelation of the story that illustrates just how psychologically the protagonist was shattered. This idea of melancholia by Freud (1917), in which the grieving individual integrates loved one into the self, can inform the denial described by Salama, in that the narrator does not want to lose the presence of Layla. Her confession—"If I let go of Layla, then I'm letting go of Homs, of Mama, of Hamza, of everything" (Katouh, 2022, p. 145)—reveals the intricate linkage between personal loss and collective identity.

Survivor's guilt, a common trauma response, emerges powerfully in Salama's vow to protect Layla's unborn child, aligning with Herman's (1992) "survivor's mission," wherein traumatized individuals seek meaning by safeguarding others (p. 56). This dedication is an experience of purpose and psychological survival in that destruction.

6.5. Communal Traumatization and Postcolonial Condition

Katouh shares individual trauma and sets out the scene of Salama's experience in the context of the collective and postcolonial framework. Some of the critics of trauma theory like Craps (2013) and Visser (2018) criticize the individualistic aspects of trauma theory by insisting that historical and systemic violence be included in trauma studies. The experience of Syria in itself, though not strictly colony-like, bears the traces of long-lasting neocolonial relations and the authoritarian rule that constitutes the context of Salama and his trauma as the part of the postcolonial oppressive and resisting system.

The lemon tree in Katouh's narrative symbolizes this intertwining of personal and collective resilience: "And we will come back... God willing we shall be going back home. New lemon trees will be planted. We will be free" (Katouh, 2022, p. 245). Lemon trees in Middle Eastern writing stand as signs of rootedness, cultural memory and resilience against occupation and displacement, as is depicted in Sahar Khalifeh (2005) *The Inheritance*. Elgamal (2024) goes further and expands this symbolism to that of a requisite ecocriticism/trauma-ecocriticism by formulating how ecological personifications such as the lemon tree can serve as critical mediators between personal healing and collective memory and cultural continuation (p. 12).

This symbol therefore represents an optimistic rebirth, repossession of an ancestral land and self under and beyond the instances of trauma--a ritual of remembrance, as well as testament to an existence that will persist.

6.6. Trauma narrative in young adult literature: A comparative study

Katouh's 'As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow' fits into a mounting body of literature in the young adult genre that confronts the issues of trauma, displacement, and identity during conflict. Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* (2003) similarly explores guilt and paralysis through Amir's story: "I opened my mouth, almost said something... No, I did not. I only watched. Paralyzed" (p. 59). Like Salama, Amir struggles with a disjointed identity and morality problems, conveyed through the implications of trauma as a narrative upheaval introduced by Caruth (1996).

Salt to the Sea (2016) by Ruta Sepetys voices marginal WWII survivors such as Emilia, who is raped and expectant, and whispers tales to her unborn child something that can be echoed with the protective dedication that Salama had. *The Island of Missing Trees* (2021) by Elif Shafak also uses a fig tree as a symbolic representation of intergenerational trauma and environmental continuity, similarly to lemon trees as the symbolism of continuity made by Katouh (Elgamal, 2024, p. 10).

Half of a Yellow Sun (2006) by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie focuses on the mark of the Biafran war on both national and individual identity levels, elaborating the interconnection between conflict and trauma on both national and personal levels.

These accounts as a whole point out to the power of the stories to provide not only agency but to place pain and suffering in the context of histories of injustice and to empathize.

7. Conclusion

As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow by Zoulfa Katouh potently applies the trauma theory and the postcolonial critique to expose the individual and social consequences of the Syrian civil war. Katouh narrows the gap between personal experience and larger historical and cultural context by combining the psychological theories of Cathy Caruth (1996) and Judith Herman (1992) with the socio-political models of Stef Craps (2013) and Irene Visser (2018). The fragmentation of Salama Kassab, dissociation, and hallucinations (as perpetuated by the character of Khawf) is one of the most striking examples of how pervasive trauma is, and how it creates psychological fragmentation brought forth by internal conflict. Her experiences relay the theoretical understanding of how trauma breaks memories, identity, and narrative coherence, leaving the survivor stranded between the fragments of past and present.

Further, the novel contextualizes the trauma of the character of Salama as part of the geopolitical composition of postcolonial power and hegemony existing in Syria to an extent where individual painfulness is tied to the mass realms of pain of the past in the form of systematic violence and neocolonialism. This alignment with postcolonial trauma theory emphasizes that Salama's experiences are not isolated but are deeply rooted in Syria's socio-political landscape of oppression and resistance. The lemon tree itself comes out as a strong symbol of survival, cultural perpetuation, and the desire to revive during ruin. Following the theme of its Middle Eastern literature counterparts, the lemon tree in the story by Katouh represents cultural and ecological icon of hope, survival, and identity reclamation.

The story told by Katouh would also resonate with other young adult literature that addresses topics of trauma, war, and displacement including articles by Hosseini (*The Kite Runner*), Sepetys (*Salt to the Sea*), Shafak (*The Island of Missing Trees*), and Adichie (*Half of a Yellow Sun*). Such pieces of comparative text weigh the transformative power of storytelling in the recovery of trauma with the focus on the ways in which such stories can restore agency, create empathy, and maintain a cultural memory.

Ultimately, *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* demonstrates the ability of literature to testify to trauma not as the narration of suffering but as an ongoing project of reconceptualization, as collective stages of psychic sturdiness, and as communal recovery. Combining personal stories with the awareness of history and use of symbolic imagery, Katouh works out the narrative that challenges the silences of trauma and cultivates the image of hope and continuity. The novel therefore adds value to the discussion on trauma and postcolonial studies reinforcing the importance of storytelling on personal healing and identity recovering of a person struggling to retain its cultural identity in the lingering conflicts.

References

- Adichie, C. N. (2006). *Half of a yellow sun*. Fourth Estate.
- Ahmed, S., Zakai, A., Zahid, M., Youshay, M. J., Fu, R., & Chaiton, M. (2024). Prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder and depressive symptoms among civilians residing in armed conflict-affected regions: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *General Psychiatry*, 37(3), e101438. <https://doi.org/10.1136/gpsych-2023-101438>
- Alexander, J. C. (2004). *Cultural trauma and collective identity*. University of California Press.
- Barber, B. K. (2008). *Adolescents and war: How youth deal with political violence*. Oxford University Press.
- Betancourt, T. S., Agnew-Blais, J., Gilman, S. E., Williams, D. R., & Ellis, B. H. (2010). Past horrors, present struggles: The role of stigma in the association between war experiences and psychosocial adjustment among former child soldiers in Sierra Leone. *Social Science & Medicine*, 70(1), 17–26. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2009.09.038>
- Caruth, C. (1996). *Unclaimed experience: Trauma, narrative, and history*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Craps, S. (2013). *Postcolonial witnessing: Trauma out of bounds*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Edkins, J. (2003). *Trauma and the memory of politics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Elgamal, A. M. A. (2024). Branching paths of pain: Trauma and ecocriticism in Elif Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees*. *Egyptian Journal of English Language and Literature Studies*, 13(1), 37–60. <https://doi.org/10.21608/ejels.2024.413598>
- El-Khoury, J., McMahon, A., Kazem, F., Atoui, M., Castaldelli-Maia, J. M., Corrêa de Magalhães Narvaez, J., El Koussa, M., Ghuloum, S., Jollant, F., Jouanjus, E., Kaur, J., Morley, K., Palaniyappan, L., Sabuncu, M., Schimmelman, B. G., & Persaud, A. (2024). Equipping the next generation of clinicians for addressing conflict mental health: A role for geopsychiatry. *PLOS Mental Health*, 1(3), e0000094. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmen.0000094>
- Freud, S. (1917). Mourning and melancholia. In *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud* (Vol. 14, pp. 243–258). Hogarth Press.
- Gyurisín, J. L. (2004). Tales of heroes and villains: Trauma recovery in young adult literature. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Gender Studies*, 9(2), 41–60. <https://hdl.handle.net/1959.13/1049838>
- Heidarizadeh, N. (2015). The significant role of trauma in literature and psychoanalysis. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 192, 788–795. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.06.093>
- Herman, J. L. (1992). *Trauma and recovery: The aftermath of violence—from domestic abuse to political terror*. Basic Books.
- Holliday, J. (2012, June). *Syria's maturing insurgency* [Report]. Institute for the Study of War. <https://www.understandingwar.org/report/syrias-maturing-insurgency>
- Hosseini, K. (2003). *The kite runner*. Riverhead Books.

- Human Rights Watch. (2014, January 27). *Syria: Humanitarian crisis in Homs*. Human Rights Watch. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/01/27/syria-humanitarian-crisis-homs>
- Humphrey, M. (2000). *The politics of trauma: The impact of violence on society*. Routledge.
- Hutchison, E. (2010). Trauma and the politics of emotions: Constituting identity, security and community after the Bali bombing. *International Relations*, 24(1), 65–86. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047117809348712>
- Katouh, Z. (2022). *As long as the lemon trees grow*. Little, Brown Books for Young Readers.
- Khamis, V. (2015). Exposure to war trauma and PTSD among adolescents in the Gaza Strip. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 56(9), 994–1002. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.12417>
- Kokkola, L. (2003). *Representing the Holocaust in children's literature*. Routledge.
- Latumeten, A. A. T., & Nofansyah. (2024). The lemon trees and the Syrian homeland: An ecocritical reading of Zoulfa Katouh's *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow*. *Prologue: Journal on Language and Literature*, 10(2), 355–370. <https://doi.org/10.36277/jurnalprologue.v10i2.212>
- Macksoud, M. S., & Aber, J. L. (1996). The war experiences and psychosocial development of children in Lebanon. *Child Development*, 67(1), 70–88. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.1996.tb01720.x>
- Magruder, K. M., McLaughlin, K. A., & Elmore Borbon, D. L. (2017). Trauma is a public health issue. *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*, 8(1), 1375338. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20008198.2017.1375338>
- Marantika, G. J. (2024). *Salama's post-traumatic stress disorder in Zoulfa Katouh's As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* (Bachelor's thesis, Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya). Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya Repository. Retrieved from <https://repository.untag-sby.ac.id/35693/1/ABSTRACT%20.pdf>.
- Masten, A. S. (2001). Ordinary magic: Resilience processes in development. *American Psychologist*, 56(3), 227–238. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.56.3.227>
- Nikolajeva, M. (2010). *Power, voice and subjectivity in literature for young readers*. Routledge.
- Nopriyanto, R., & Nafisah, N. (2024). The portrayal of the main character's trauma in *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow*. *Passage*, 12(2), 116–123. <https://ejournal.upi.edu/index.php/psg/article/view/76113/pdf>
- Panther-Brick, C., Hadfield, K., Dajani, R., Eggerman, M., Ager, A., & Ungar, M. (2018). Resilience in context: A brief and culturally grounded measure for Syrian refugee and Jordanian host-community adolescents. *Child Development*, 90(5), e700–e715. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12868>
- Sepetys, R. (2016). *Salt to the sea*. Philomel Books.
- Shafak, E. (2021). *The island of missing trees*. Viking.
- Shah, A., Riaz, H., Sajjad, U., & Ahmad, S. (2023). “Irreversible damage to psyche’: Representation of trauma in Fatima Bhutto's narratives.” *Elementary Education Online*, 20(4), 1358–1365. Retrieved from <https://ilkogretim-online.org/index.php/pub/article/view/5009>
- Ungar, M. (2008). Resilience across cultures. *British Journal of Social Work*, 38(2), 218–235. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcl343>
- UNHCR. (2024). *Syria emergency*. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. <https://www.unhcr.org/syria-emergency.html>
- USA for UNHCR. (2025). *Syria emergency*. Retrieved from <https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/syria/>

- Vernon, I. S. (2012). "We were those who walked out of bullets and hunger": Representation of trauma and healing in Solar Storms. *American Indian Quarterly*, 36(1), 34–49. <https://doi.org/10.1353/aiq.2012.a464478>
- Visser, I. (2015). Decolonizing trauma theory: Retrospect and prospects. *Humanities*, 4(2), 250–265. <https://doi.org/10.3390/h4020250> [MDPI Groningen Research Portal](#)
- Visser, I. (2018). Entangled trauma and the postcolonial novel: Rewriting the past, reframing the future. *Studies in the Novel*, 50(1), 83–102. <https://doi.org/10.1353/sdn.2018.0004>
- Visser, I. (2015). Decolonizing trauma theory: Retrospect and prospects. *Humanities*, 4(2), 250–265. <https://doi.org/10.3390/h4020250>
- Wodtke, L. (2017). Traumatic realism and ethical engagement in young adult literature. *International Research in Children's Literature*, 10(1), 56–70. <https://doi.org/10.3366/ircl.2017.0210>