

The Trauma Discourse in Ibrahim Nasrallah's *Gaza Weddings*

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Abstract—This paper explores the discourse of trauma in Ibrahim Nasrallah's *Gaza Weddings*, situating the novel within the field of trauma studies and the broader context of contemporary war literature. The analysis examines how Nasrallah represents trauma as both a personal and collective condition shaped by protracted violence, displacement, and occupation in Gaza. Through the intersecting stories of Amna, Randa, Lamis, and Saleh, the novel portrays the psychological effects of continuous siege and the ways characters cope with grief, memory, and loss. The study highlights narrative strategies such as fragmented timelines, inner monologues, and disrupted chronology to reflect the recursive and disorienting nature of trauma. Moreover, it emphasizes the role of place in shaping traumatic experience, focusing on Gaza's homes, hospitals, and cemeteries as symbolic spaces of suffering and resilience. The paper argues that *Gaza Weddings* not only documents the human cost of conflict but also affirms the power of storytelling, caregiving, and communal rituals as acts of resistance and survival. By foregrounding the agency of its female characters and embedding trauma in the fabric of everyday life, the novel challenges dominant narratives of victimhood and offers a literary space for witness, memory, and healing. Ultimately, Nasrallah's work enriches both Palestinian literature and global trauma discourse, illustrating how fiction can bear witness to the seemingly unspeakable and affirm dignity amid devastation.

Index Terms—trauma theory, Palestinian literature, war and conflict narratives, collective memory, Ibrahim Nasrallah

I. INTRODUCTION

Trauma has become a pivotal concept in literary studies, offering a framework to explore how literature represents extreme suffering and its aftermath. In psychological terms, trauma (from the Greek for "wound") refers to a shocking or catastrophic event that overwhelms the mind's normal coping mechanisms. As literary theorist Caruth (1996) observes, the term signifies "a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind," an injury that leaves behind lasting psychic scars (p. 3). What distinguishes trauma is not only the intensity of the original event but the way it resists integration into memory and narrative. In Caruth's influential formulation, a traumatic experience is not fully assimilated as it occurs; instead, it returns later in intrusive recollections, nightmares, or flashbacks – haunting the survivor in belated and fragmentary forms (pp. 17, 92). In other words, trauma is "not locatable in the simple violent or original event" itself but in the way it is repeatedly re-lived and "returns to haunt the survivor later on" (p. 4). This delayed and recursive quality means that traumatic memories disrupt linear time and conventional storytelling. The survivor often experiences a paradoxical gap between knowing and not knowing: the traumatic event is vividly felt yet not fully grasped or articulable at the moment of occurrence (p. 4). Such insights have given rise to trauma theory in literature, a field that examines how narrative form, language, and silence grapple with overwhelming violence and loss.

Scholars of trauma and literature provide a range of theoretical frameworks for understanding this disruption of narrative and memory. Caruth and others in the 1990s (often termed the first wave of trauma theory) drew on psychoanalysis to argue that extreme experiences shatter ordinary understanding and language (Mambrol, 2018). For example, Caruth (1996) highlights trauma's inherent latency: a period of delayed response in which the mind dissociates the event, rendering it unavailable to conscious recall but liable to resurface involuntarily (pp. 160, 163).

LaCapra (2001) distinguishes between acting out and working through traumatic history. When one is "acting out," the traumatic event is compulsively repeated or relived, as if the person were trapped in the past; in contrast, "working through" involves consciously engaging with the traumatic memory, contextualizing it, and assimilating it into a broader

life story (LaCapra, 2001). LaCapra contends that literature and historiography can facilitate this working-through by providing narratives that acknowledge pain without simply re-inscribing it. Across these theories – whether in Caruth’s notion of belated memory or LaCapra’s model of working-through – a common thread is the idea that trauma poses unique challenges to representation. It troubles the boundaries between past and present, self and other, memory and oblivion, often leaving survivors with fragmented narratives or “speechless terror” that defies easy description. Therefore, literary texts that take trauma as their subject frequently experiment with form and voice, seeking new ways to express the seemingly inexpressible (Whitehead, 2004; Herman, 1992).

One of the central arenas in which trauma has been examined is war literature. Armed conflicts and collective violence have sadly provided many of the paradigmatic cases of trauma in the modern era, from the trench warfare of World War I to the genocides and terror of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Indeed, much of early trauma studies in literature focused on war narratives and survivor testimonies – for example, the witness accounts of the Holocaust that Felman and Laub (1992) analyze, or the shell-shock stories of World War I soldiers that inspired Freud’s explorations of traumatic neurosis (Freud, 1920). War-related fiction and memoir frequently depict characters who are overpowered by violence on a massive scale, resulting in nightmares, flashbacks, dissociated identities, or psychosomatic symptoms that mirror clinical post-traumatic stress (Luckhurst, 2008). A hallmark of such literature is the use of narrative strategies to convey traumatized consciousness: disjointed timelines, repetition of horrific images, unreliable narration, and sudden gaps or silences in the story all signal the difficulty of making sense of war’s chaos. As Whitehead (2004) observes, contemporary novelists often employ fragmented or non-linear narratives as an analog to traumatic memory, which itself is experienced in fragments rather than as a coherent whole. Furthermore, war literature frequently addresses not only individual psychological trauma but also collective trauma – the suffering of communities and cultures.

The devastation of war tends to produce communal memories of loss (of homes, homelands, family members) that are passed down through generations. Cultural theorists have noted that traumatic history can be transmitted, in fragmented form, to those who did not directly live through the original event, creating what Hirsch (2008) calls “postmemory” in second-generation survivors. In the context of war and displacement, the trauma is often twofold: the direct violence of combat or persecution, and the trauma of displacement or exile from one’s home. Said (2000), reflecting on the condition of exile, famously described it as “the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place” – a condition of irreversible loss and longing (p. 173). This insight resonates strongly in literature of refugees and the displaced, where characters must grapple with both the memory of violence and the ongoing trauma of homelessness. Taken together, war writings from various conflicts suggest that trauma in such works is multifaceted: it encompasses bodily harm and psychological wound, individual nightmares and collective mourning, immediate terror and long-term exile.

Fictional narratives of war thus serve a dual role. On one hand, they bear witness to atrocities, keeping cultural memory alive (for example, novels and memoirs about the Holocaust, Vietnam, or Afghanistan have created enduring records of those traumas). On the other hand, they provide a space to symbolically work through trauma – to impose narrative order, find meaning or catharsis, or at least share the burden of memory with readers. The tension between the unspeakability of extreme violence and the necessity of speaking about it is a defining feature of war trauma literature (Caruth, 1996). Writers must often strike a balance between conveying the silences of trauma (what cannot be directly expressed) and forging a language that communicates suffering to an audience, fostering empathy and understanding. In this way, war literature contributes to trauma studies by illustrating how storytelling itself becomes a form of survival and resistance in the face of violence.

Within this broader landscape of trauma and war literature, Ibrahim Nasrallah’s novel *Gaza Weddings* stands as a powerful contemporary example. Nasrallah is a prominent Palestinian writer known for blending personal and collective history in his work. Born to Palestinian parents in a Jordanian refugee camp in 1954, Nasrallah grew up amid a community of exiles (Nasrallah, 2017). His life and career have been profoundly shaped by the Palestinian experience of displacement, and he has become one of the leading literary voices narrating that ongoing trauma. *Gaza Weddings*, originally published in Arabic in 2004 (translated into English in 2017), is part of Nasrallah’s acclaimed Palestinian Comedy series – an expansive cycle of novels that chronicle Palestinian life across different eras of history (Qualey, 2017). The title of the series is darkly ironic: while invoking “comedy” in reference to Balzac’s *Comédie Humaine*, Nasrallah actually explores tragic and tumultuous events, using satire and irony to underscore the absurdities of life under oppression (Noonan, 2018).

Gaza Weddings is set in the besieged Gaza Strip under Israeli occupation, a locale synonymous with protracted conflict and humanitarian crisis. The novel’s narrative centers on two women who persevere amid pervasive violence: Randa, an aspiring journalist who documents the devastation around her, and her friend Amna, a hospital trauma worker who privately converses with the ghosts of loved ones she has lost. The plot unfolds around the preparation for a wedding that, as the title hints, will be marked by tragedy. With most of the men in their community absent – killed, imprisoned, or in hiding – the female characters carry the weight of memory and survival, trying to “construct a new reality for themselves” even as their world is torn apart (Noonan, 2018). In tone and structure, *Gaza Weddings* reflects many of the trauma narratives discussed above. The story is told through a sequence of monologues and alternating perspectives, blurring the boundaries between past and present, reality and memory (Qualey, 2017). Randa and Amna’s narration sometimes mixes up people, places, deaths and times, suggesting how trauma confuses temporal order and personal identities. Amna’s habit of holding one-sided conversations with her martyred brother and husband exemplifies the persistence of traumatic loss

– the dead remain psychologically present, and dialogue with them replaces a “normal” life that has been irreparably shattered. Meanwhile, Randa’s journalistic impulse to record stories (such as the darkly comic episode of multiple grieving “widows” visiting a grave until the real wife is revealed) shows an attempt to impose narrative understanding on chaotic events and to affirm communal bonds in the face of grief. Throughout the novel, everyday scenes of humor and warmth are interwoven with sudden eruptions of violence (“random carnage” and bomb blasts), mirroring the way civilians in a war zone oscillate between ordinary life and extreme threat. The result is a poignant portrayal of life under siege, where trauma is not a single event but a continuous condition that shapes every facet of existence.

By introducing *Gaza Weddings* in the context of trauma and war literature, we can see how Nasrallah’s work resonates with the theoretical issues raised by scholars like Caruth, Laub, and LaCapra. The novel offers a case study of how fiction can engage trauma: it depicts characters who carry unhealed wounds of violence and loss, and it formally embodies their fractured experience through narrative fragmentation, irony, and multiple voices. At the same time, *Gaza Weddings* situates individual psychological trauma within a collective narrative of a besieged community, underscoring Caruth’s point that “history, like trauma, is never simply one’s own” but shared in its effects (Caruth, 1996, p. 24). Nasrallah’s characters are not only private individuals but also witnesses for their people’s suffering – their personal traumas reflect the broader historical trauma of Palestinians in Gaza. In this way, the novel bridges private memory and public history, illustrating what literature can contribute to our understanding of war and its human cost. By drawing on trauma theory to read *Gaza Weddings*, we gain insight into how Nasrallah narrates the ostensibly un-narratable: the enduring anguish of war, the pain of displacement, and the fragile hope of preserving dignity and humanity amid relentless violence. This introduction, therefore, establishes the scholarly groundwork for a deeper analysis of *Gaza Weddings* in the chapters that follow. The discussion above has outlined key concepts from trauma studies and situated war and displacement as crucial contexts for interpreting the novel. In the ensuing analysis, these theoretical perspectives will be brought to bear on Nasrallah’s text, demonstrating how *Gaza Weddings* both exemplifies and enriches the literature of trauma in the context of contemporary conflict. The aim is to show that Nasrallah’s portrayal of trauma is not only a testament to Palestinian experiences of war but also a valuable contribution to the global narrative of how literature confronts and processes traumatic history.

II. TRAUMA IN CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

Nasrallah’s *Gaza Weddings* presents a cast of characters whose lives have been deeply shaped by the traumatic reality of siege and violence in Gaza. The novel alternates between the perspectives of two women – Amna (Amina) and Randa – allowing an intimate look at how each navigates personal and collective trauma (Yusuff, 2024). Through their stories (and those of Lamis and Saleh), Nasrallah illustrates the psychological impact of living under occupation, as well as the strategies of coping and resilience that emerge. Contemporary trauma studies emphasize that traumatic experiences are not merely background events in such narratives; rather, they inform character development at every turn (Vickroy, 2002). In trauma fiction, protagonists often symbolize both individual suffering and a broader collective experience (Balaev, 2014). This is very much the case in *Gaza Weddings*, where each character embodies a facet of Gazan society’s enduring trauma and perseverance.

Amna, a middle-aged woman who works as a supervisor at a children’s trauma rehabilitation center, exemplifies trauma’s lingering presence in daily life. She has lost close family members to violence – her husband and brother are both “martyred” (Nasrallah, 2017) – and her private grief surfaces in poignant ways. She frequently engages in one-sided conversations with her deceased brother and spouse, as if they were still by her side. This behavior reflects the intrusive re-living of loss; trauma specialists note that survivors often experience “intrusion” symptoms such as flashbacks or imagined dialogues, indicating that the past is not truly past (Herman, 1997). Amna’s conversations with the dead signal how her psyche is caught in a loop of unresolved mourning. At the same time, Amna channels her trauma into care for others: organizing the wedding of her son Saleh to Lamis, and tending to wounded children at Al-Shifa Hospital. Her nurturing response aligns with what psychologists describe as an adaptive coping mechanism – finding purpose through helping – even as she herself quietly bears the wounds of bereavement. Amna’s calm, steadfast exterior sometimes verges on emotional numbness, suggesting the “constriction” or blunted affect that can follow repeated trauma (Herman, 1997). Yet beneath that veneer, her persistent planning of a celebratory wedding in a war zone is a form of resistance and hope. In Amna, Nasrallah thus depicts a survivor who refuses to succumb to despair: she “works through” trauma by memorializing lost loved ones in daily conversation and insisting on life-affirming rituals, even as the threat of violence looms. This complex portrayal resonates with Laurie Vickroy’s observation that trauma narratives internalize the “silences, dissociations, and repetitions” of traumatic experience while still striving for meaning (Vickroy, 2002, p. 3). Amna’s character encapsulates that duality – haunted by silence and loss, yet actively creating meaning through caregiving and remembrance.

Randa, a young aspiring journalist (and twin sister to Lamis), offers another perspective on trauma and agency. Growing up amid “random carnage” in besieged Gaza (Yusuff, 2024), Randa witnesses scenes of devastation that no teenager should see. She photographs martyred children and avidly records the stories of those around her, determined to document the reality of life under occupation. By choosing the role of a storyteller, Randa illustrates the idea that bearing witness is a crucial response to trauma. Trauma scholars emphasize the ethical imperative of testimony – giving voice to suffering as a way to affirm truth and reclaim agency (Craps, 2013). Randa explicitly seeks permission to write down

everyone's stories, showing her belief that unrecorded stories "become the enemy's property", as she says at one point (Nasrallah, 2017; as cited in Yusuff, 2024). This sentiment echoes the broader Palestinian experience of narrative erasure and the fight to preserve memory (Visser, 2011). Randa's writing is a form of resistance against the forced silence trauma can impose. It also represents an attempt to heal: by transforming painful experiences into words and images, she is, in a sense, processing the trauma around her. Literary analyst Balaev (2014) argues that when trauma is contextualized and narrated, its meaning becomes more "locatable" and less likely to overwhelm in absolute silence. Randa exemplifies this approach – her love of literature (she holds up Ghassan Kanafani's books defiantly at overhead attack helicopters) and her own journaling suggest that narrative can counteract the disorientation of trauma. Through Randa, *Gaza Weddings* highlights the role of the witness figure: she endures psychological distress (the text hints at her nightmares and constant alertness), yet converts it into action by chronicling events. This process aligns with what Dori Laub described (in the context of Holocaust testimony) as the drive to testify so that trauma is not perpetuated by silence. Randa's character development, from a girl enduring violence to a young woman insisting on telling the truth of that violence, underscores how trauma can forge a powerful voice. In doing so, her arc reinforces Vickroy's notion that trauma narratives engage readers ethically – Randa stands in for Nasrallah himself in some ways, drawing the audience into an empathetic confrontation with Gaza's reality.

Lamis, Randa's identical twin, provides a somewhat different angle on trauma, one centered on personal love and deferred dreams. Lamis is deeply entwined with Randa (even their mother struggles to tell the twins apart), symbolizing how close relationships can compound the impact of trauma. The twins have grown up sharing everything – including the ambient fear of military incursions and the grief of losing neighbors and friends. Lamis's character is defined by her anticipation of a joyful event: her wedding to Saleh (Amna's son). Throughout the story, Lamis and her family prepare diligently for this marriage, clinging to it as a beacon of normalcy and hope. Her youthful excitement – choosing a dress, dreaming of a future – stands in poignant contrast to the violent uncertainty around her. In a war-free world, a wedding would be a simple source of happiness; in Gaza, it becomes a defiant act of faith in tomorrow. However, the very title *Gaza Weddings* is laced with irony, and indeed Lamis's hopes are cruelly undermined by the conflict. The wedding, as the narrative foreshadows early on, "will never happen" (Nasrallah, 2017). While the novel avoids a graphic depiction of the exact incident in its early chapters, it seeds enough anxiety that the reader anticipates tragedy – a classic use of foreshadowing to create what trauma psychologist Judith Herman calls "anticipatory dread" (Herman, 1997). When violence ultimately prevents Lamis's marriage (whether through the loss of her fiancé or an outbreak of fighting that cancels the ceremony), her character is thrust into profound trauma. The shattering of her personal dream exemplifies how political violence inflicts intimate wounds. Lamis must confront not only external loss but also the internal collapse of her imagined future. Trauma theorists note that one hallmark of psychological trauma is the death of future – survivors struggle to envision a tomorrow beyond the trauma (Visser, 2011). Lamis's arc powerfully illustrates this: the time she had projected herself into (a married life, perhaps children, a semblance of normalcy) is abruptly erased, leaving her in a state of suspended grief. In the aftermath, her bond with Randa becomes even more critical. The twins rely on each other to withstand the pain, reflecting the idea that social support is crucial in trauma recovery (Herman, 1997). Nasrallah portrays their sisterly connection with great tenderness, suggesting that even as trauma divides Lamis from her beloved, it entwines the sisters more tightly in a shared fate. Lamis does not have her own narration in the novel, but through Randa's eyes we see Lamis's quiet strength and vulnerability. In literary terms, Lamis functions as both a character and a symbol – she represents the stolen youth of Gaza, an ordinary young woman forced to grow up too fast in the face of war's caprice. Her development (or tragic lack of fulfillment) reinforces the novel's argument that under protracted siege, every aspect of personal life – even the most joyous – becomes infused with trauma.

Saleh, Amna's son and Lamis's intended groom, is one of the few prominent male figures in *Gaza Weddings*. Tellingly, the men in this story mostly appear in memory or marginal roles – as the New Arab reviewer succinctly put it, they "exist as martyrs", while women remain to endure and resist (Yusuff, 2024). Saleh is a young man alive in the present narrative, yet his fate is overshadowed by the same threat that haunts all Gaza's youth. Through Saleh, Nasrallah explores the male experience of trauma in a place where manhood often equates to martyrdom or imprisonment. Saleh's character is seen largely through the eyes of his mother and his fiancée, underscoring how community and family shape identity in trauma contexts. He is portrayed as hopeful and dutiful – agreeing to his mother's elaborate wedding plans, dreaming of a new household with Lamis – but also as realistically cautious. In Gaza, a groom's preparations are not just about venue and vows; they involve survival calculations, like whether relatives can safely travel or if a ceasefire will hold long enough for the ceremony. The novel hints that Saleh carries his own childhood scars: growing up fatherless (Amna's husband Jamal was killed by occupation forces) means Saleh was raised amid grief. Children in war zones often suffer intergenerational trauma, where a parent's unhealed wounds and the continual stress of conflict imprint on their psyche (Visser, 2011). Saleh's gentle demeanor and protectiveness toward his mother suggest he has been shaped by this legacy of loss. As the wedding day approaches, Saleh must confront a reality that many young Palestinian men face: the possibility that any outing could be fatal. In one striking recollection, Amna describes how her late husband (Saleh's father) was bayoneted by a soldier while trying to cross a checkpoint disguised in a coffin, simply to reach his own wedding (Nasrallah, 2017). This family history hangs over Saleh's nuptials like a dark cloud, foreshadowing that his path to marriage is also littered with danger. Indeed, when the wedding is thwarted, Saleh is thrust into the same category as so many Gazan men – a victim of violence, another potential martyr. Whether Saleh survives physically or not, the

psychological toll on him is severe: the collapse of his wedding signifies the destruction of his personal agency by forces beyond his control. In trauma literature, male characters often struggle with feelings of helplessness or emasculation when they cannot protect their loved ones from harm (Balaev, 2014). Saleh's inability to ensure a safe, happy life for Lamis and his mother can be read in that light. Yet Nasrallah does not present him as broken or vengeful; instead, Saleh's character (though less voiced in the text) is remembered by the others for his kindness and the hope he embodied. In this way, Saleh becomes part of the collective memory that sustains the survivors. Amna and Randa hold onto his story, integrating it into their resolve to continue living. Saleh's development, abruptly cut short by trauma, reinforces the novel's portrayal of Gaza's youth: a generation that dares to hope and love, even as war continually writes tragic endings. By including Saleh's perspective indirectly, the novel acknowledges the trauma of young Palestinian men while foregrounding the women who carry their stories forward.

Overall, the characters in *Gaza Weddings* demonstrate what trauma theorists have called the intertwining of personal and collective trauma (Craps, 2013; Visser, 2011). Each individual's pain is amplified by the shared nature of suffering in Gaza's close-knit community. Amna's grief is not hers alone; Randa and the neighborhood revere Amna's martyred relatives as communal heroes. Randa's distress at witnessing death is mirrored by her twin's anxiety and her neighbors' sorrows. This mutual resonance shows how, in a conflict zone, trauma radiates outward, affecting families and networks rather than just isolated individuals. Yet the characters also exhibit resilience – a concept gaining attention in trauma studies as a counterpoint to victimhood. Despite relentless trauma, Amna, Randa, Lamis, and even Saleh (for as long as he can) actively seek connection, purpose, and moments of joy. The women in particular take center stage in sustaining traditions (wedding customs, storytelling) under siege (Yusuff, 2024). Through rich characterization, Nasrallah thus affirms a dual truth: trauma devastates lives, but the response to trauma can include strength, creativity, and solidarity. This nuanced depiction aligns with newer scholarly approaches that urge recognizing survivors not only as passive victims of an unspeakable past, but also as agents who confront and give meaning to their experiences (Balaev, 2014; Vickroy, 2002). In *Gaza Weddings*, character development is essentially the development of trauma's story – how it breaks people, how they endure, and how they might transcend or at least defy it through acts of love and memory.

III. TRAUMA AND PLACE: THE LANDSCAPES OF SIEGE

The setting of *Gaza Weddings* is not a mere backdrop but an active force that shapes and reflects the characters' trauma. Nasrallah situates the novel in a Gaza neighborhood under occupation and blockade, depicting physical locations – the streets, the hospital, the cemetery, even the sky – as laden with traumatic significance. This aligns with critical observations that trauma in literature is often spatialized: the environment bears the imprint of violence and, in turn, influences how trauma is experienced (Balaev, 2014). In Gaza's case, the entire landscape is a trauma-scape. The novel vividly portrays a place where everyday sights and spaces are incessantly associated with danger, loss, and survival. By examining key settings in the novel, we see how Nasrallah uses place to externalize psychological states and to underscore the pervasiveness of trauma in occupied life.

Gaza as a besieged landscape emerges in *Gaza Weddings* as a central motif. The author paints the neighborhood as one might describe a character: unpredictable, scarred, and weary yet resilient. The twins Randa and Lamis grow up “surrounded by the random carnage that characterizes life under occupation” (Nasrallah, 2017; as summarized in Yusuff, 2024). Bombed-out buildings, military checkpoints, and the ever-present rubble of previous assaults form the backdrop of their childhood memories. Such a setting means that trauma is literally in the air they breathe. The narrative frequently alludes to curfews, sudden gunfire, or the thunder of distant explosions, creating a constant atmosphere of threat. This environmental hypervigilance corresponds to the clinical concept of “hyperarousal” in trauma (Herman, 1997) – except here it is not just an individual's symptom but a condition of the entire city. For Gaza's residents, the usual boundaries between safe and unsafe spaces have collapsed: a walk to the market or a moment by the window can be lethal (as the twins' mother grimly notes, even being at home in bed is no guarantee of safety when “a rocket might fall on your head”, Nasrallah, 2017). The result is a collective spatial trauma, wherein places that should provide solace (homes, schools, public squares) have become potential sites of horror. Nasrallah powerfully illustrates this when he shows how even joyous or mundane locations are tinged with fear. For example, an open field that might host a celebratory gathering also serves as a possible landing zone for missiles; a schoolyard echoes with children's laughter by day and becomes an emergency shelter by night. By weaving these details into the story, the novel affirms what postcolonial trauma scholars argue: that trauma in colonized or war-torn settings is chronic and ambient, not a single event but a “trauma of the everyday” embedded in place (Craps, 2013). The geography of Gaza – hemmed in by walls and barbed wire, its borders tightly controlled – reinforces the characters' psychological feeling of entrapment. There is no easy escape from the locus of their trauma; the setting continually retraumatizes. At the same time, Nasrallah shows the community's attachment to their land. Despite its dangers, Gaza is home, with beloved landmarks and memories of better times. This attachment adds a poignant layer: the very soil that sustains identity also soaks up blood and tears. In trauma theory terms, Gaza becomes a paradoxical space of belonging and pain, illustrating the idea that places can be both sources of trauma and anchors of identity (Visser, 2011). The novel's attention to the tactile details of Gaza's streets – the sounds, smells, and sights – grounds the abstract notion of trauma in a visceral reality. Readers come to understand that in this narrative, place is trauma and trauma is inescapably tied to place.

Among specific sites, the hospital (Al-Shifa Hospital's trauma ward) stands out as a focal point of suffering and solidarity. Much of Amna's storyline occurs in or around the hospital where she works with injured children. Hospitals in war literature often symbolize the intersection of destruction and healing, and that is true here as well. On one hand, the hospital is inundated with the physical remnants of violence: bleeding bodies, crying families, the frantic energy of doctors and nurses trying to stave off death. Amna's daily routine in the children's ward exposes her to some of the most harrowing consequences of conflict – wounded and shell-shocked young ones. This constant exposure contributes to what psychology calls secondary trauma or compassion fatigue, where caregivers themselves absorb the trauma of those they help (Herman, 1997). Nasrallah hints at Amna's exhaustion and emotional burden as she leaves the hospital late at night or retreats into her conversations with her dead relatives to cope with what she has seen. On the other hand, the hospital is also a place of community resilience. Neighbors gather there in crises; doctors and volunteers (perhaps including Randa as a journalist) work collectively, reinforcing bonds. In one striking episode drawn in the novel, a bombed building yields an unidentified corpse, and "twenty women, including Amna, turn up at al-Shifa hospital to claim the dead body", each convinced the deceased might be her missing husband or son (Nasrallah, 2017; as described in Yusuff, 2024). This scene encapsulates both extreme trauma and communal compassion: it is a "unique state of grief" where every woman hopes the body is not her loved one, yet none will leave until the truth is known. The hospital thus transforms into a space of collective mourning, with a tragic camaraderie forged among the women. Such portrayals underscore that in Gaza, trauma is not suffered in isolation – it is a shared ordeal, played out in public spaces like hospitals. Furthermore, Nasrallah injects a touch of absurd, dark humor into the hospital setting: initially, multiple bereaved women claim the same body, but over days of returning to the morgue, all but one gradually find their husbands alive, leaving the actual widow to finally grieve properly (World Literature Today, 2018). This morbid anecdote highlights how commonplace death has become that even mistaken identity of corpses can occur, yet it also shows a profound solidarity (the other women didn't want the one widow to feel alone in her loss). Such resilience amid grotesque tragedy speaks to the indomitable spirit of the community. In trauma theory, this might be seen as a form of communal coping, where shared rituals and gallows humor help people survive psychologically (Alexander et al., 2004). The hospital, in sum, is a microcosm of Gaza's trauma: it is where pain is confronted head-on, but also where empathy and humaneness persist in the face of barbarism. Nasrallah's meticulous rendering of this setting reinforces the narrative's emotional impact – the reader not only hears about trauma but feels the claustrophobia of crowded wards and the tension of emergency sirens, making the spatial trauma palpable.

Another potent setting in the novel is the cemetery, specifically the Martyrs' Cemetery that Amna visits. Cemeteries are traditionally sites of closure and remembrance, but in *Gaza Weddings* even the act of burial offers no respite from violence. Amna's private dialogue with her martyred brother often occurs at his graveside, a ritual that gives her solace and a sense of continued connection. Yet, the cemetery in Gaza is under threat just like every other place. Amna notes with bitter irony that the Martyrs' Cemetery is routinely bombed, forcing gravediggers to inter bodies extra deep in hopes they won't be disinterred by the next blast (Nasrallah, 2017). This chilling detail – that even the dead are not safe from the war – emphasizes a theme of unending trauma. Normally, burial signifies an end to suffering for the deceased and a chance for the living to start mourning and healing. Here, however, trauma violates even that boundary: the dead may literally be torn from their graves by more bombs, and the living are denied the peace of a secure resting place for their loved ones. The cemetery thus becomes a symbol of cyclical trauma: new graves are dug as deeper scars in the earth because old graves have been scarred open. The defilement of a cemetery also has psychological weight; it communicates to Gaza's people that nothing is sacred to the oppressor – not life, not death. This continuous desecration perpetuates what sociologist Erikson (1976) would call collective trauma, damaging the community's cohesion and faith in any refuge. And yet, Nasrallah also shows the cemetery as a gathering point of communal memory. The characters speak of martyrs with reverence; their graves are honored even if imperiled. Scenes at the cemetery likely involve multiple families coming to pay respects, sharing stories of those they lost. In doing so, they collectively assert the dignity of their dead against the forces that try to erase them. The persistence of these visits, despite the danger, is an act of resistance – a refusal to let trauma have the final word on their identity. From a literary standpoint, setting the quiet, introspective moments (like Amna's monologues to her brother) in a cemetery imbues the narrative with a haunting atmosphere that mirrors Amna's internal mourning. It also reinforces the blurring of past and present: in Gaza's cemetery, the past (dead) is quite literally threatened by present violence, just as Amna's present life is dominated by her past losses. Thus, the cemetery in *Gaza Weddings* deepens the exploration of trauma by showing how even the act of remembrance is conducted under fire.

IV. CONCLUSION

Ibrahim Nasrallah's *Gaza Weddings* stands as a powerful testament to the lived realities of trauma under occupation, offering a nuanced portrayal of how war, loss, and siege permeate every dimension of human existence. Drawing on the frameworks of trauma theory, this study has explored how Nasrallah intertwines personal grief with collective suffering, illustrating that in Gaza, trauma is not an isolated event but a continuous condition—one that shapes identity, distorts time, and haunts both memory and space. Through characters like Amna, Randa, Lamis, and Saleh, Nasrallah crafts a narrative in which trauma is internalized, voiced, and, at times, resisted through acts of remembrance, care, and storytelling. These figures do not merely endure violence; they respond to it by forging meaning, reclaiming memory, and asserting a fragile but persistent sense of agency.

Moreover, *Gaza Weddings* underscores the spatial dimensions of trauma, portraying Gaza itself as a landscape saturated with suffering, where homes, hospitals, and cemeteries become sites of both devastation and resilience. In this way, Nasrallah aligns with trauma scholars who emphasize the entanglement of place, memory, and psychic wounds. By refusing to present trauma as merely psychological or individual, the novel positions it as a communal burden, experienced collectively and carried across generations.

Ultimately, Nasrallah's work contributes not only to Palestinian literary heritage but also to the broader canon of trauma literature. It challenges readers to confront the enduring consequences of political violence and displacement, while also affirming the human capacity for endurance, connection, and narrative recovery. In a world where many traumas remain marginalized or silenced, *Gaza Weddings* insists on visibility, voice, and the urgent necessity of telling. It is through such stories that literature becomes both witness and act of resistance.

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