

Resilience Through Adversity: Exploring Memory and Survival in *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow*

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Abstract

The Syrian conflict has produced extensive humanitarian documentation, and its emotional and psychological impacts are profoundly captured in literature. Zoulfa Katouh's novel, *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow*, brings the Syrian experience to global literary discourse through the life of a young protagonist; illustrating fear, hope, love, and trauma amid war. Rather than presenting trauma as a static wound, the narrative illustrates how it seeps into memory, perception, behaviour, and identity. The protagonist's internal struggles reveal the cyclical nature of trauma—how it resurfaces unexpectedly, how it disrupts concentration and hope, how it alters relationships, and how survivors negotiate between remembering and forgetting. The novel portrays trauma as an inseparable companion to survival, a silent presence that shapes the protagonist's decisions even in moments of apparent calm. This paper applies trauma theory to analyze the novel's portrayal of psychological ruptures resulting from conflict and displacement, highlighting the emotional shocks of such overwhelming experiences. Few studies examine the psychological and emotional aspects of teenage experiences in the context of current conflict, despite Syrian literature's growing popularity. It is crucial to use analytical methods that look beyond superficial narrative summaries to examine trauma experiences and representations. The current study aims to close this gap by examining narrative strategies, characterization, and thematic development with a focus on the relationship between individual experience and societal change.

Keywords: Trauma, Survival, Guilt, Resilience, Hope.

Date of Submission: 24-09-2026

Date of Acceptance: 03-10-2026

I. Introduction

The Syrian Revolution, which began as a peaceful citizen's movement, soon evolved into a complex conflict characterised by state violence, militarisation, and humanitarian crisis. It disrupted the everyday life of millions, leaving behind a fractured society and a deeply traumatised population. Forced migration, whether internal or across national borders, exacerbated this trauma. In such circumstances, the psychological burden becomes overwhelming, especially for young adults who must navigate the challenges of identity formation amid pervasive instability.

As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow is a compelling example of how contemporary fiction can illuminate the human dimensions of conflict. In Zoulfa Katouh's narrative, the protagonist Salama's age heightens the intensity of trauma. Her fears, desires, relationships, and moral choices are all influenced by the rapid erosion of safety and stability. Her internal world becomes a battleground where hope competes with despair, and duty clashes with self-preservation. Despite the overwhelming circumstances, the protagonist clings to love, responsibility, and the dream of a better future celebrating resilience as her motto. Her suffering is influenced by the Syrian war, medical scarcity, gendered vulnerability, and generational violence. The trauma resulting from structural brutality is not an individualized pathology, but rather a collective condition. Instead of medicalizing trauma, the novel frames it as a rational response to sustained violence. Salama's psychological distress emerges directly from her daily exposure to death, ethical responsibility, and impossible choices within the hospital space. She feels guilt not because she is a victim of abstract violence but because of structural violence, including inadequate resources, and relentless bombardment.

Katouh's trauma narrative gains further depth when read alongside other Syrian war texts, where personal suffering is consistently framed within collective catastrophe. Like Samar Yazbek's *The Crossing* and Khaled Khalifa's *Death Is Hard Work*, *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* foregrounds ordinary lives distorted by extraordinary violence. Yet Katouh's novel distinguishes itself through its sustained focus on psychological interiority, particularly the way trauma inhabits a young woman's consciousness. Salama's experience echoes Yazbek's observation that war does not end when the shelling stops; it settles into the body and stays. Although Yazbek writes nonfiction, Katouh's fictional rendering achieves a similar effect by embedding trauma into Salama's sensory perceptions, hallucinations, and moral dilemmas. The war is never a distant backdrop; it is an invasive force shaping thought itself. Katouh's portrayal of trauma also aligns with global war literature that foregrounds psychological fragmentation. The intrusive memories and dissociative episodes Salama experiences parallel those found in works such as Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, where Septimus Smith relives battlefield horrors long after the war has ended. Salama's realization that "my body betrays me, shaking all over, and I clutch my ragged blankets to hide it" (Katouh 26) mirrors Woolf's depiction of trauma as a bodily memory resistant to narrative control. Similarly, Toni Morrison's *Beloved* resonates through Katouh's use of haunting—where Khawf functions as an internal ghost, embodying repressed fear and guilt. Like Morrison's specter, Khawf refuses silence, forcing confrontation with unresolved trauma. What distinguishes Katouh's contribution to trauma literature is her fusion of psychological realism with accessible narrative form. Writing within a young adult framework, she does not simplify trauma but renders it legible without diminishing its complexity. Salama's fear that survival might come at the cost of her humanity articulates a concern shared across war narratives globally. Yet Katouh's focus on a young female protagonist in a contemporary Middle Eastern conflict expands the demographic and cultural scope of trauma studies, challenging Eurocentric and masculinist war narratives.

Trauma & Survival

The human capacity to endure loss while holding onto traces of hope becomes central to the narrative. Trauma is a central theme in Zoulfia Katouh's novel *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* which has been extensively represented through the character of Salama. She is a young 18-year-old ambitious girl who loses everything including her family, her dreams and her happiness in the destructive war of Syria. Before the cruel and ruthless conflicts started in Syria particularly in her homeland, Salama was a carefree, energetic and lively girl who had high dreams and goals about her bright future:

For seventeen years, Homs raised me and cultivated my dreams: Graduate from university with a high GPA, secure a great position at the Zaytouna hospital as their pharmacist, and finally be able to travel outside of Syria and see the world. But only one of those dreams has come true and not in the way I thought it would. (Katouh 3)

War transforms Salama from an intelligent and zealous girl to a caretaker of her sister-in-law Layla and patients in hospital. As per her words, "[i]n the last six months, I have participated in more surgeries that I can count and closed more eyes than I ever thought I would. This wasn't supposed to be my life" (4).

Her psychological condition is first revealed through her body rather than through reflection, emphasizing how deeply war has altered her instinctive responses. Kenan's early observation, "I've noticed how jumpy you are sometimes. Your eyes dart everywhere... Are you all right?" (277), foregrounds her hypervigilance. This heightened alertness indicates a nervous system conditioned by constant danger, where safety has become unimaginable. Trauma manifests not as memory alone but as an involuntary bodily state, reinforcing that Salama does not merely remember violence—she lives inside its aftershocks.

The hospital where Salama works functions as the primary space in which trauma accumulates and intensifies. Instead of offering healing, it becomes a site of repeated psychological injury, forcing her into continual confrontation with death. She "closed five pairs of eyes today. Three children, one young woman, and one young man" (197). The calm enumeration of the dead reflects emotional numbing, a survival response to overwhelming loss. However, this numbness coexists with severe survivor's guilt. When Kenan reassures her—"You did everything you could. This isn't your fault" (197)—Salama internally rejects the comfort, condemning herself as "too slow, too pathetic to save lives" (197). Her guilt does not arise from wrongdoing but from the impossibility of saving everyone, revealing the moral injury inflicted on civilians forced into roles of responsibility during war.

Salama experiences cognitive dissonance and emotional turmoil as a result of war as Katouh reveals. She experiences PTSD through anxiety, intrusive thoughts, flashbacks, nightmares, and panic attacks, which illustrate the stress and misery Salama experiences in a war-torn homeland. She becomes more vulnerable to trauma after Layla's death when Salama's mind creates Layla's delusion. Salama suffers traumatic events every day while performing her duties as a doctor, which further aggravates her mental state. It is described in the novel that Salama wonders at the calm reaction of a six-year-old boy Ahmad, who was very close to death

because of internal bleeding caused by a bomb attack. "Am I going to die? He asks, and I see no fear. Do all six-year olds know what death is? Or is it only children of war?" (57). His last words were heartbreaking that he shared with Salama: "Auntie, don't cry! When I go to heaven, I'll tell God everything" (58). Ahmed's death affects Salama emotionally and she becomes a victim of guilt-ridden anxiety. She always feels guilty towards the life she couldn't save which contributes to her psychological decline. Despite the inner turmoil and despair, Salama survives and exhibits enduring strength which shows the power of resilience that humans hold.

Kenan's youngest sister Lama was shot by the Syrian army and she went through severe pain due to the incident. Salama operated on her without any medication and anesthesia because they were not available in the hospital. Salama states her exhaustion saying, "Bite on the belt, I tell her. This isn't what I ever envisioned myself doing. I was supposed to be a Pharmacist. I wasn't supposed to cut into children's stomachs in their homes" (65).

Katouh emphasizes the sensory saturation of trauma through Salama's descriptions of the hospital. After one devastating shift, Salama escapes the building because she can no longer endure "blood and bile and guts," desperate "to breathe in something that isn't" death (198). The wording emphasizes how trauma overwhelms the senses and permeates touch, sight, and scent. The hospital turns into a cramped space where pain is inevitable and recuperation is not conceivable. Salama's sense of time and identity is shattered by her frequent exposure to disfigured bodies and dying infants, which reinforces trauma as cumulative rather than episodic. Dissociation results from this accumulation of trauma, which is most forcefully represented by the hallucinated figure of Khawf. Salama remembers that "later that day, when Khawf appeared... I was the only one seeing him" following the explosion that killed her mother and injured her head (16). Khawf is the narrative personification of fear, guilt, and intrusive memory rather than just a sign of harm. Salama attempts to rationalize his presence, attributing it to "a head injury coupled with my PTSD" affecting her neural pathways (278), but this explanation fails to diminish his power. Khawf represents trauma's refusal to remain silent or invisible. His appearances dissolve the boundary between external violence and internal terror. When he manifests in her room, Salama notes, "Despite the window being locked, a chill sweeps the room... The horror I see isn't just confined to the hospital" (14). Beyond physical danger, trauma accompanies her, encroaching on areas that ought to provide comfort and security. This demonstrates how family life is tainted by combat trauma, turning even private areas into psychological battlefields. Khawf expresses Salama's worst anxieties and frequently accuses her of putting her loved ones in jeopardy. He warns her, "If you're not careful, Salama, you might become the instrument of your destruction" (194). His words echo her own intrusive thoughts, demonstrating how trauma internalizes blame. In one particularly disturbing hallucination, Khawf shows her Layla "sprawled on the floor... blood seeping onto the floorboards" (195). These visions reflect anticipatory grief, a condition common in prolonged conflict zones where death is expected rather than exceptional. Salama's physical condition worsens as a result of the constant violence she observes. The fact that victims are admitted to the hospital "in fragments... slick with blood" (170) serves to further emphasize how fragmented her mental state is. She becomes noticeably thinner, quits eating healthily, and has trouble falling asleep.

Besides Khawf, another shocking hallucination that Salama encounters is of Layla. Salama had a strong connection of sisterhood with Layla and after losing her parents and brother Hamza, she was her only family left alive. When Layla was three months pregnant, she was murdered by the Syrian army during a sniper attack. One military sniper's bullet went through her head and the other through her uterus during the October shooting which caused the death of both Layla and her unborn child. Salama saw her lifeless body, but the following morning she began to see her phony illusion at home. She lived with the hallucination of Layla for almost five months. As Salama explains, "But I forgot all of that...No I changed reality, I've been living alone since October. For five months, my mind has been spinning a fiction to keep my agony sealed away" (308).

The hallucination of Layla can be considered more frightening than of Khawf because with Khawf, Salama knew that he was a delusion and projection of her inner fears but Layla was real for Salama. She never considered her an illusion until Kenan exposed reality to her after seeing her talking to herself in an empty house. At one point, Salama admits internally that "as long as Layla is breathing, I can keep going" (107). This statement demonstrates how love becomes both a source of resilience and vulnerability. Layla's life gives Salama purpose, yet it also magnifies her fear, as the possibility of losing her sister becomes unbearable. Kenan's love becomes the strength of Salama in the novel. Despite the threats of Khawf, Salama keeps Kenan by her side and they even get married in their homeland Syria. Before leaving Syria, Salama decides to participate in the revolutionary protest for the first-time which triggers change and renewal. She describes the atmosphere of protest as fearless because according to Salama, fear dies in every place of Syria. "Fear dies here!" she claims (108). The sense of loneliness was so great in Salama that it created a gap in her which her mind unconsciously tried to fill. Oliver Sacks in his book *Hallucinations* talks about bereavement related hallucinations. According to him, losing family members or loved ones is like losing a part of your own self and this bereavement causes a sudden hole in one's life which must be filled (2012). Salama's situation of seeing hallucinations of dead Layla can also be explained through the process of Memory Reconsolidation. During

distressing situations, this mechanism aids the brain in updating or warping memories. In Salama's case, her brain deleted the memory of Layla's death and replaced it with the memory that Layla survived the sniper attack. She constantly worries that the worst could occur at any time. Salama's dread of moral failure grows as she keeps working. She breaks down after dissociating and almost hurting a child, recognizing that trauma has permanently changed her. "I may escape from Syria," she says, concluding with a heartbreaking clarity that even escape cannot guarantee healing. However, "I won't have survived" (137). According to the novel, survival is more than just physical stamina; it's also about maintaining one's identity, which trauma constantly jeopardizes.

As Salama's trauma worsens, the story shows how PTSD affects her view of time, memory, and responsibility in addition to her responses to violence. She is forced to relive unprocessed memories as a result of trauma, which repeatedly collapses the present into the past. Salama says she feels like she is "reliving last year" when bombs go off close, her body reacting as though the threat has already killed her (265). The resistance of traumatic memory to linear storytelling is illustrated by this involuntary recurrence. Any sense of chronological order is disrupted when the past unexpectedly encroaches on the present. The reader is able to feel the same instability that characterizes Salama's inner world since Katouh's story reflects this disintegration.

Guilt

The novel also contributes to trauma discourse by emphasizing survivor's guilt as a persistent ethical burden. Salama's belief that she must earn survival through suffering reflects a pattern identified in post-conflict testimonies worldwide. She admits, in a moment of devastating clarity, "We stand in silence, watching emotions sizzle in the crowd. Between songs, we send prayers for the souls of the martyrs, and for the ones suffering in imprisonment. I brush a tear from my eye" (261). This extended reflection exposes the moral absurdity trauma imposes on survivors, forcing them to justify existence in the aftermath of mass death. Katouh refuses to resolve this tension neatly, allowing Salama's guilt to remain unresolved rather than redeemed. Her conviction that she is implicated in death is strengthened by every life she fails to save. She becomes obsessed with the notion that she is "never fast enough" and that others perish as a result of her insufficiency after losing another patient (239). This thinking system serves as an example of how trauma warps moral judgment.

Salama internalizes the mistakes of war as personal failings and takes blame for structural violence that is well beyond her control. The book highlights that rationality does not make guilt go away; even when she realizes logically that she cannot save everyone, her emotional reality does not allow for forgiveness. Salama's job as a medical worker exacerbates this guilt. She is forced to constantly approach violent areas, in contrast to civilians who try to avoid them. She is forced to make decisions about who gets treatment first, who might survive, and who will most likely die as a result of the hospital's cycle of responsibility. When resources are limited, she acknowledges that "deciding who gets a chance to live" is the most difficult element (35). Long after she makes these choices, they come back to haunt her as obsessive thoughts and dreams. Here, trauma involves more than just seeing death; it also involves being put in ethically challenging situations where every decision has the potential to result in loss.

Khawf also embodies anticipatory trauma—the fear of future loss that becomes as debilitating as past experiences. He repeatedly threatens Salama with visions of Layla's death, forcing her to imagine outcomes she cannot prevent. When he conjures an image of Layla bleeding on the floor, Salama's reaction is immediate and visceral, her heart racing as if the scene were real. These hallucinations reveal how trauma collapses imagination and memory into a single space, where feared futures feel as real as remembered pasts. Katouh uses these moments to show how prolonged conflict erodes the ability to distinguish between what has happened and what might happen. Against this backdrop of psychological deterioration, Kenan emerges as a crucial counterforce. Unlike Khawf, Kenan's presence anchors Salama in the present, offering moments of calm and connection. His attention to small details—sunsets, rooftops, music—introduces sensory experiences not associated with violence. When he encourages her to look at the sky after rainfall, telling her that "the sky is so beautiful," Salama realizes she has forgotten how to notice such things (206). This moment is significant not because it erases trauma but because it interrupts it, creating a brief pause in the cycle of fear.

Kenan's own history of trauma deepens his empathy. As the son of a man who survived the Hama massacre, Kenan carries inherited memories of violence and loss. Although his trauma is less immediately visible than Salama's, it informs his quiet resilience and emotional sensitivity. He understands fear not as weakness but as a rational response to brutality. His refusal to dismiss Salama's suffering contrasts sharply with Khawf's cruelty. Where Khawf amplifies guilt, Kenan offers recognition and care, validating her pain without attempting to control it. Yet even Kenan cannot fully shield Salama from trauma's reach. Moments of tenderness are repeatedly interrupted by violence, reinforcing the instability of hope. When an explosion occurs during one of their rare peaceful interactions, Salama's body reacts instantly, her pulse racing as she braces for death. This reflexive response demonstrates how deeply trauma is embedded in her nervous system. Safety,

when it appears, is always temporary. The novel refuses to romanticize love as a cure, instead presenting it as a fragile but necessary form of resistance.

The novel underscores that trauma does not only threaten survival but also identity. Salama's struggle is not merely to stay alive but to remain humane. Her fear that she may lose compassion—or worse, cause harm—reveals the ethical dimension of her suffering. Trauma, in Katouh's portrayal, attacks the survivor's sense of self-worth and moral integrity, leaving them questioning their right to survive at all. Salama here, stands at a psychological crossroads. Khawf's influence grows stronger, Kenan's presence offers fragile hope, and the war continues unabated. Her trauma is no longer confined to memory or reaction; it has become an organizing force in her life, shaping decisions, relationships, and identity. Layla's fear is articulated most powerfully in moments where hope and despair collide. When she speaks of the future, her voice trembles not with excitement but dread. She confesses that she is terrified of giving birth in a city under siege, admitting, "I don't know how to bring a child into a place where people die every day" (104). This line foregrounds the ethical crisis of motherhood in wartime. Layla's trauma is not only personal but existential, rooted in the fear that survival itself may be a form of cruelty. The novel thus expands trauma beyond individual psychology, situating it within moral and generational anxieties. "No matter what happens, you remember that this world is more than the agony it contains. We can have happiness, Salama. Maybe it doesn't come in a cookie-cutter format, but we will take the fragments and we will rebuild it" (152).

Hope & Resilience

A fragile, symbolic form of hope emerges along side fear and devastation, not as optimism or certainty. Hope in Katouh's work does not exist in opposition to trauma, but rather within it, unevenly and at great emotional cost. One of the most persistent symbols through which this fragile hope is articulated is the lemon tree itself, invoked as a reminder of continuity, rootedness, and life that persists despite destruction. Salama recalls her mother's belief that lemon trees endure even in harsh conditions, reflecting that they grow anyway, even when the soil is ruined and the air tastes like smoke. This metaphor becomes central to the novel's emotional logic. The lemon tree represents resilience and bravery in Syrian history, as Salama's mother passed it on to her before her death. Although government stripped away their freedom, had taken everything from them and committed genocide in Hama but they held their heads high and planted lemon trees in act of defiance. Salama hears the old poem of Syria in protest: "Every lemon will bring forth a child and the lemons will never die out" (415). The mention of flower names, including Jasmine, Blood-root, Daisies, and Lilacs, is Salama's habitual reaction whenever Khawf threatens her and brings up painful memories or worst-case future outcomes. This demonstrates Salama's ability to persevere and confront her negative thoughts. At the novel's conclusion, Khawf reveals to Salama that he has existed in human hearts as fear since the dawn of time. Salama explains to Khawf that the hallucinations served as a defense mechanism, equipping her mind for survival. "Without Khawf, I would be buried somewhere in Homs where no one would remember me. Without Layla's appearing to me, I wouldn't have found the courage to live for Syria. To fight for my country" (392).

Salama's acknowledgment of her hallucinations and her admission that they aided her survival indicate her victory over them. Even with Kenan and Salama and little Lama, Yusuf boarded a boat, but their ordeal continued when they swam the Mediterranean for hours due to bad weather. The final pages of the novel are intentionally obscure and debatable. Their survival remains uncertain. The novel concludes with Salama posing the obscure question: "Am I dead?" (392). However, Salama's observation of the torch light suggests that she might still be alive. Through the in-depth examination of Salama's character and her battles to survive while dealing with her mental conflicts, PTSD, and hallucinations, Zoulfa Katouh skillfully illustrates the dangerous effects of war on people's mental, emotional, and psychological health.

Katouh also emphasizes the shared trauma of scarcity. Hunger, thirst, and exhaustion become communal experiences that bind characters together through deprivation. Salama notes that meals are reduced, and this constant lack contributes to cognitive and emotional deterioration, compounding psychological stress. Trauma, the novel suggests, is sustained not only by violence but by the slow erosion of dignity and bodily autonomy. Scarcity serves as a common stressful state as is revealed by:

We pass by a run-down bakery still operating. A long line is outside, people warming their hands and pulling tightly on their coats. They wait patiently, although there's an edginess in their eyes, all worrying the bread will run out and they'll have to return to their families empty-handed. (101)

The possibility of returning home "empty-handed" underscores the emotional burden of scarcity, where failure to secure food becomes a source of guilt and helplessness toward one's family. Through Salama's observation, Katouh highlights how scarce resources and fewer meals are not just incidental details but rather traumatic, collective experiences that unite people through shared deprivation, highlighting how war transforms daily life into an ongoing struggle with fear and hunger.

Memory operates as both a source of pain and a fragile hope/refuge. Salama's memories of her mother surface repeatedly, often triggered by mundane sensory details—a smell, a gesture, a phrase. These memories are not comforting in a simple sense; they reopen wounds while simultaneously affirming that love once existed. She remembers, “her fingers cold . . . I don't want to dwell on the past. I don't want to cry about how I'm going to end my teen years with nothing more than lost hope and nightmare-filled sleep. I want to survive” (13). Here memory serves as a moral compass. The present is shattered by trauma, but the values that violence seeks to destroy are preserved in memory. Salama's memories bring sorrow, but they also offer a moral compass that defies dehumanization.

Scars, both physical and psychological, recur throughout the novel as markers of survival. Salama's injuries, accumulated over time, are reminders of what she has endured, but they also signify that she is still alive. “My tongue is dry, and the half-moon scars on my palms, the result of my own nails, begin to hurt” (27). This reframes damage as testimony rather than defeat. Katouh does not romanticize scars; they ache, they limit movement, and they recall pain. Yet they also mark continuity, asserting presence in a world that repeatedly attempts erasure. The hospital, previously depicted as a site of relentless trauma, gradually acquires a more complex symbolic function. While it remains a space of suffering, it also becomes a place where acts of care persist despite hopeless conditions. Salama observes moments where doctors and nurses continue working even when resources are depleted. “I need the hospital. I need it to forget my pain. To save lives” (18). This insistence on showing up transforms care into a form of defiance. Hope, here, is not attached to outcomes but to actions. The act of treating patients, comforting families, and refusing to abandon others becomes a quiet rebellion against despair.

The novel's portrayal of optimism is further complicated by the symbolism of movement—crossing borders, leaving home, and envisioning elsewhere. For Salama, leaving Syria is both a chance and a betrayal. She understands that staying could ruin her entirely, but she also worries that leaving might mean leaving behind people who are unable to flee. “I am her and this land is me” (95). She considers that leaving entails taking everything with you rather than forgetting. This re-frames migration as the transfer of identity and memory rather than erasure. Here, hope is based on surviving with the past intact rather than on forgetting it. In the end, the novel's exploration of optimism defies resolution. Instead of offering healing as a conclusion, Katouh portrays survival as a continuous, contradictory process. Salama's trauma is still unsolved, her memories are bothersome, and her fear never goes away. However, the story maintains that meaning can still be created under these circumstances. The book challenges prevailing narratives that need recovery as evidence of resilience by allowing trauma and hope to coexist. Rather, it emphasizes perseverance, community, and moral dedication as legitimate means of survival.

Through symbolism, memory, and narrative fragmentation, *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* constructs hope as an act rather than a state. The novel opens with an epitaph, a poem that Salama and Kenan paint on their apartment wall in Toronto, “Every lemon will bring forth a child and the lemons will never die out” (258). The lemon trees, a common sight in Syrian homes, symbolize hope, continuity, and stubborn life, as they take time to grow and bear fruit, mirroring the slow rebuilding of life after destruction. In doing so, Katouh contributes a nuanced trauma narrative that refuses simplification. Hope does not heal trauma; it lives beside it, unevenly, persistently, like a lemon tree growing in damaged soil. “Each day is a year, and as each one passes, we hope tomorrow will be better” (258), as highlighted in an interview with the author. Their presence represents the eventual success of the revolution. Even if Salama and others leave, Syria will remain in their hearts: “This is my land, and just like the lemon trees that have been growing here for centuries, spilled blood won't stop us” (254). When Salama plants a lemon tree in her new garden, she explicitly states it “reminds me that as long as the lemon trees grow, hope will never die” (415). Like the Free Syrian Army and other rebels, these trees symbolize both defiance and tradition.

Memory is a potent, two-edged force in the book: it is the cause of Salama's intense sorrow and anguish, plaguing her with visions of family members she lost during the Syrian conflict, but it is also the source of her optimism and defiance. She finds courage in recalling beauty and continuing to live despite great loss, much like the lemon trees that bloom even in the midst of battle, as her memories of normalcy, love, and her hometown collide with the terrible present, leaving her to decide between fleeing the tragedy and staying to help. In the midst of the damage caused by the Syrian revolution, Kenan and Salama create a passionate romantic relationship that serves as a potent symbol of resiliency and optimism. Their unanticipated reunion was further complicated by the fact that they were supposed to be the subjects of an arranged marriage before the start of the war. As Salama struggles with severe trauma, guilt, and her personified terror, Khawf, Kenan, an enthusiastic artist and videographer chronicling the conflict, offers her unshakable emotional support. “There's still beauty, Salama. Still life and strength in Homs. There's a colour” (207). They work together to protect Kenan's younger siblings and dream of a future after the war. Ultimately, they embarked on a perilous journey to escape Syria and build a new life together as fiances in Toronto. At the heart of the narrative is their love, emphasizing the significance of human bonds and the determination to not let war extinguish life's joys.

II. Conclusion

Katouh's study is globally relevant since it emphasizes that trauma is shaped by both previous events and ongoing threat. *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* shows trauma developing in real time, in contrast to stories that concentrate on postwar rehabilitation. Salama's psychological wounds are continually renewed by new losses; she lacks the luxury of distance or introspection. The novel's immediacy places it in the context of current trauma studies that highlight persistent traumatic stress, a theory that is especially pertinent to communities experiencing protracted conflict.

As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow provides a complex exploration of PTSD, survivor's guilt, dissociation, and collective suffering through a Syrian female perspective. Katouh's narrative underscores that trauma and humanity coexist, revealing the effort needed to maintain humanity amidst destruction. Rather than seeking resolution, the story illustrates trauma as a persistent reality, exemplified by Salama's unstable psychological state, which mirrors the experiences of survivors. The novel challenges the notion of catharsis, focusing instead on the endurance of trauma and the ongoing presence of agency, culminating in Salama's acknowledgment that fear and anger persist within her psyche, reinforcing that trauma is something to live with rather than overcome. "Salama, you can't live in the past. I'm reminding you what true happiness was. This doesn't exist anymore. This isn't something you'll find here" (158). This observation marks a subtle but significant shift: trauma loses dominance not through eradication, but through resistance.

The novel challenges linear theories of suffering and recovery in trauma studies. Katouh refers to trauma as ongoing, embodied, relational, and ethical. The novel emphasizes continuous traumatic stress rather than post-traumatic resolution, an important framework for populations living under siege, occupation, or displacement. Salama illustrates how trauma reshapes identity, morality, and attachment without extinguishing compassion or agency completely. By situating trauma in communal, political, and historical contexts, Katouh challenges Western-centrist trauma paradigms.

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