



Trauma, Memory, and Interrupted Childhood: Education as Survival in Gaza's War Zone

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Abstract

This paper investigates the intersection of trauma, memory, and interrupted childhood within the context of Gaza's protracted war, positioning education as both a means of survival and a form of resistance. Grounded in trauma theory (Cathy Caruth and Judith Herman), critical pedagogy (Paulo Freire), and human rights frameworks (UNICEF and UNRWA), the study examines how war-induced trauma destabilizes psychological development and disrupts the educational continuity of Palestinian children. It contends that, amid systemic violence, education transcends its conventional institutional boundaries to become both a therapeutic and political act; enabling children to reconstruct fragmented identities and preserve collective memory. Drawing upon interdisciplinary scholarship, psychological research, UN reports, and first-person testimonies, the paper conceptualizes education in Gaza as a living archive of endurance. The findings underscore the resilience of students and educators who transform classrooms into spaces of healing, resistance, and hope despite recurrent devastation. Ultimately, the study presents education as an act of defiance against erasure, embodying survival, agency, and the reclamation of human dignity.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Context and Academic Relevance

Few spaces on earth illustrate the human cost of prolonged warfare as starkly as the Gaza Strip. For over two decades, children in Gaza have grown up amid air raids, displacement, and siege conditions that repeatedly destroy homes and schools. UNICEF (2024) reports that more than 80 percent of Gaza's children experience post-traumatic stress symptoms, while thousands have seen their schooling interrupted multiple times. In such a setting, education cannot be treated merely as an institutional process; it becomes a lifeline for psychological stability, social structure, and identity formation.

Scholars of trauma and education note that classrooms in conflict zones often assume a dual role: they are simultaneously sites of learning and therapy (Herman, 1992; Machel, 2001)^[8]. For Gazan children, the act of returning to school after bombardment is both an assertion of normalcy and a gesture of resistance. The political blockade and recurring wars have rendered the educational infrastructure fragile, yet its symbolic power remains indomitable. The paradox of Gaza's classrooms lies in their coexistence with rubble and fear, a paradox that invites psycho-social and pedagogical inquiry.

This study contributes to the growing field of trauma pedagogy and education in emergencies by examining how Palestinian children and teachers transform education into a practice of survival. It investigates the intricate link between trauma and memory, drawing on psychoanalytic insights from Caruth (1995) and Herman (1992)^[8], who describe trauma as an experience that resists narrative closure but seeks expression through repetitive acts and collective remembrance. Within this framework, education in Gaza functions as a collective retelling of trauma, sustaining both cultural memory and hope.

1.2. Background: War, Childhood, and the Pedagogy of Survival

Education in Gaza operates under what UNRWA (2023)^[18] calls “conditions of chronic emergency.” Since 2008, repeated military operations *Cast Lead* (2008–09), *Protective Edge* (2014), *Guardian of the Walls* (2021), and the devastating 2023–24 assault have destroyed hundreds of schools. Yet, despite structural collapse, children return to makeshift classrooms inside UN shelters, mosques, or tents. These spaces become “temporary sanctuaries,” where learning and survival converge.

Research on war-affected children emphasizes that learning routines help restore a sense of predictability crucial to trauma recovery (Betancourt *et al.*, 2013). In Gaza, the blackboard replaces rubble with order; teachers, often survivors themselves, become mediators of resilience. As Freire (1970)^[7] argued, education in oppressive contexts is inherently political, it offers the oppressed a language of consciousness and transformation. Palestinian educators enact these principles daily, teaching alphabets beside cracked walls while nurturing what bell hooks (1994)^[9] terms “education as the practice of freedom.”

Thus, the Gazan classroom is not only a physical space but a psychological refuge, where children renegotiate their identities as survivors rather than victims. Each lesson becomes an act of reclaiming the narrative from the machinery of destruction. This underscores the urgent relevance of merging trauma theory with pedagogical analysis.

1.3. Research Gap and Questions

While numerous humanitarian reports describe the physical destruction of Gaza’s schools, fewer studies interrogate the psychological and narrative dimensions of children’s education under siege. Existing research often focuses on quantitative measures, attendance, infrastructure, or literacy rates; without addressing how education shapes children’s sense of self, memory, and resistance.

The current study fills this gap by addressing the following research questions:

1. How does trauma shape children’s engagement with education in Gaza’s war zone?
2. In what ways do memory and learning intersect as coping mechanisms in contexts of violence?
3. How does education operate as both survival strategy and act of resistance within Gaza’s socio-political reality?

By situating Gaza within a broader framework of trauma theory and critical pedagogy, the paper seeks to bridge humanitarian, psychological, and literary discourses. The goal is not only to document suffering but to theorize

education as a human right and reparative act amid collective trauma.

1.4. Scope and Significance

This paper limits its scope to the years 2008–2024, when Gaza experienced repeated military incursions resulting in widespread educational disruption. Sources include UNICEF and UNRWA reports, interviews compiled in *Light in Gaza: Writings Born of Fire* (2022), and academic works on trauma and pedagogy.

The significance of the study lies in its interdisciplinary synthesis: combining trauma psychology, critical pedagogy, and memory studies to reframe education not simply as recovery, but as ongoing resistance. For policymakers, this research underscores the need to protect schools as psychological sanctuaries. For scholars, it highlights Gaza as a paradigmatic site for studying the intersection of trauma, learning, and resilience.

Ultimately, the argument advanced here is that education in Gaza is both a memory act and a survival mechanism; a process that transforms trauma into collective endurance, allowing children to imagine futures beyond the rubble.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Trauma and the Child in War Contexts

Research on trauma and childhood in conflict zones has long recognized the deep psychological scars that war leaves on young minds. Judith Herman’s *Trauma and Recovery* (1992)^[8] outlines how repeated exposure to violence leads to hyper arousal, intrusive memories, and dissociation effects that compromise normal cognitive and emotional development. Cathy Caruth (1995) expands this by describing trauma as “the wound that speaks,” suggesting that the traumatized subject relives the event through narrative repetition rather than direct memory. For Gazan children, who grow up under continuous siege, trauma becomes a cyclical experience rather than a singular event.

UNICEF (2024) estimates that four out of five children in Gaza show symptoms consistent with post-traumatic stress disorder. These include anxiety, sleep disturbances, and fear of permanent loss. Yet, despite such psychological harm, many continue attending school. This paradox that traumatized children insist on learning has motivated scholars like Machel (2001) to redefine education in war not only as a right but also as a psychosocial necessity. Education, in these settings, functions as structured therapy: a mechanism through which children reclaim predictability in an unpredictable world.

2.2. Education as a Humanitarian and Psychological Space

The literature on education in emergencies often emphasizes the stabilizing role of learning environments. Nicolai and Triplehorn (2003), in their seminal report for Save the Children, argue that classrooms during conflict provide “normalcy amid chaos.” Similarly, Betancourt *et al.* (2013) demonstrate that participation in educational routines significantly reduces trauma symptoms among war-affected youth.

In Gaza, this claim is vividly supported by UNRWA’s annual field data, which show that attendance spikes whenever schools reopen after hostilities cease (UNRWA, 2023)^[18]. Teachers often displaced or grieving themselves, act as mediators of emotional recovery. Their classrooms embody what Freire (1970)^[7] termed *conscientização*; the awakening

of critical consciousness through dialogue and collective reflection. When Gazan teachers frame education as resistance, they transform learning from rote instruction into what hooks (1994)^[9] called “a practice of freedom.”

However, scholars such as Barber (2013) warn that the psychological resilience of Gazan youth should not be romanticized. Prolonged trauma without structural change risks leads to emotional numbing rather than healing. The literature, therefore, underscores the delicate balance between education’s therapeutic and political roles; both necessary but insufficient without sustained peace.

2.3. Theoretical Frameworks of Trauma and Memory

Trauma theory, since its psychoanalytic roots in Freud’s *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920/1955), posits that traumatic experience defies full integration into consciousness. Lacan (1977) later reinterpreted Freud’s ideas, suggesting that trauma represents a rupture in the symbolic order; an encounter with the “Real” that cannot be represented linguistically. In educational contexts, this rupture manifests as fragmented attention, withdrawal, and the inability to project oneself into the future.

Caruth’s (1996)^[4] articulation of trauma as “belated experience” one understood only through repetition helps explain why Gazan children repeatedly draw, narrate, or reenact scenes of destruction in classroom activities. These acts are not pathological but communicative: they constitute what LaCapra (2001)^[10] calls “working through” a movement from trauma’s paralysis toward its partial integration. In this sense, education becomes the structured narrative space where collective memory and healing coexist. The pedagogical implications of this framework are profound. Teachers who understand trauma as a narrative process can facilitate symbolic reconstruction through writing, art, and storytelling. As Caruth (1995) notes, the act of telling trauma allows the unspeakable to be socially witnessed — a crucial element for recovery. In Gaza’s classrooms, this witnessing often occurs through shared storytelling and peer empathy, transforming memory into a communal archive of endurance.

2.4. Critical Pedagogy and Resistance

Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970)^[7] remains central to understanding education as liberation under conditions of systemic oppression. Freire’s insistence that “education is never neutral” resonates strongly in Gaza, where teaching becomes a political act against colonial subjugation and occupation. When children learn in defiance of bombardment, they participate in what Freire called “praxis” reflection and action upon the world to transform it. Bell Hooks (1994)^[9] extends Freire’s vision through her feminist lens, defining education as the “practice of freedom” that nurtures the whole self; emotional, intellectual, and social. For Gazan teachers, this holistic pedagogy aligns with trauma-sensitive education, which values empathy, dialogue, and relational learning. Hooks’ framework emphasizes that resistance through learning is not abstract but embodied particularly in marginalized or gendered contexts.

Scholars such as Mazawi (2017)^[12] argue that Palestinian education operates within what he calls “pedagogy of steadfastness” (*sumud*), an indigenous form of resistance that combines survival with moral endurance. In this light, the Gazan classroom becomes a political theater of resilience, where the child’s presence itself resists annihilation.

Education, then, is not only about literacy but about *existence* about the right to narrate and be heard.

2.5. Studies on Gaza: Empirical Insights

A growing body of empirical work focuses specifically on education in Gaza. Thabet *et al.* (2010) found that 41% of Gazan children exhibited symptoms of severe trauma after the 2008–09 war, but that those attending structured schooling reported higher emotional regulation. Similarly, Elbedour *et al.* (2015) observed that participation in psychosocial school programs reduced aggression and improved social functioning.

UNRWA’s 2022–2024 reports document ongoing efforts to integrate psychosocial support into classrooms, training teachers in trauma-informed methods. Despite these initiatives, researchers such as Qouta and Punamäki (2019) warn that recurring warfare undoes much of this progress. The cyclical nature of destruction and rebuilding creates what they term “chronic traumatic stress,” where recovery remains perpetually incomplete.

Literary and testimonial studies complement these data by offering narrative depth. The anthology *Light in Gaza: Writings Born of Fire* (El Kurd, 2022) presents first-hand accounts of teachers and children navigating education amid siege. These texts echo Caruth’s (1995) thesis: trauma demands repetition to be understood. In these stories, children cling to lessons as to life itself, spelling words while bombs fall nearby. Such imagery transforms education from mere curriculum into moral witness.

2.6. Gaps and Emerging Directions

Despite extensive documentation, several gaps persist in the scholarship. First, most studies separate psychological trauma from educational praxis, rather than treating them as interdependent. Second, limited attention has been paid to memory transmission; how educational narratives preserve collective trauma across generations. Third, the majority of research remains descriptive, lacking a theoretical synthesis that bridges psychoanalytic, pedagogical, and political dimensions.

This paper addresses these lacunae by proposing an integrative model: viewing education as both trauma response and resistance mechanism. By connecting Caruth’s notion of traumatic narrative with Freire’s pedagogy of consciousness, the study reframes Gazan schooling as a dual process of healing and liberation. The classroom thus becomes not only a site of learning but a symbolic reconstruction of destroyed worlds.

3. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

This study draws upon a constellation of intersecting theories; psychoanalysis, trauma studies, critical pedagogy, and de-colonial thought to interpret education in Gaza as a psychosocial and political phenomenon. The selected frameworks not only illuminate the mechanisms of trauma and memory but also highlight education as an act of defiance and dehumanization amid systemic violence.

3.1. Psychoanalytic Foundations: Freud and Lacan

The psychoanalytic lineage of trauma theory originates with Sigmund Freud, who first articulated the notion of traumatic repetition in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920/1955). Freud posited that trauma constitutes an event so overwhelming that it resists immediate assimilation,

compelling the subject to relive it through repetitive actions or dreams. In the context of Gaza's children, this repetition manifests in symbolic forms; drawings of planes, shelters, or loss, indicating the psychic struggle to process the unprocessable.

Jacques Lacan (1977) extends Freud's insight by situating trauma within the structure of language and the unconscious. For Lacan, trauma represents an encounter with the *Real*; that which exceeds the symbolic order and thus eludes full articulation. In educational terms, this implies that the traumatized child's difficulty in learning or concentrating is not simply cognitive but linguistic and symbolic. The school, as a site of structured language use, becomes a means of reentry into the symbolic order. Through repetition, writing, and dialogue, the child reclaims narrative agency against trauma's unspeakability.

Thus, psychoanalysis provides a vocabulary for understanding how Gazan children's fragmented speech and imagery are not failures of education but manifestations of psychic survival. Education, in this frame, functions as what Lacan might call a "re-symbolization"; a tentative restoration of meaning in a shattered linguistic world.

3.2. Trauma and Testimony: Caruth and Herman

Building on Freud and Lacan, Cathy Caruth (1995, 1996) ^[4] redefines trauma as a crisis of representation. In *Unclaimed Experience*, she argues that trauma is not fully known at the moment it occurs but returns later through haunting memories or stories. This belatedness resonates deeply with Gaza's interrupted childhoods, where students may appear detached or distracted, only to reenact their memories through storytelling or art. For Caruth, narrative becomes the medium through which trauma is belatedly understood; thus, education functions as a narrative reconstruction of the self. Judith Herman's (1992) ^[8] framework complements Caruth's by emphasizing recovery as a tripartite process: establishing safety, reconstructing the story, and reconnecting with community. In Gaza, where both physical safety and institutional continuity are uncertain, teachers inadvertently perform therapeutic roles by facilitating this reconstruction through empathy, routine, and collective learning. The act of retelling; whether in essays or class discussions, constitutes a form of testimony that transforms passive suffering into active witnessing.

Caruth and Herman together illuminate the dual character of education in Gaza: as both testimony and therapy. Their theories foreground how children's voices, when given a space in education convert trauma from silence into narrative meaning.

3.3. Critical Pedagogy: Freire and Hooks

Paulo Freire's (1970) ^[7] *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* asserts that education must move beyond mere transmission of knowledge to become a dialogical process of liberation. For Freire, learners must be co-creators of knowledge, reflecting on their lived conditions to transform them. In Gaza's war zone, this pedagogy gains new urgency. Teachers and students together engage in what Freire termed *praxis*: reflection and action upon the world to change it. Learning, therefore, becomes both survival and resistance; each lesson a small revolution against the machinery of oppression.

Bell Hooks (1994) ^[9] extends Freire's model into a feminist and emotional domain through *Teaching to Transgress*. She insists that education should engage the "whole self" mind,

heart, and body; particularly in oppressive environments where systemic violence seeks to fragment identity. In Gaza, hooks' framework legitimizes the emotional labor of teachers and students as integral to learning. The classroom becomes not just a site of knowledge acquisition but of healing and solidarity.

Hooks' insistence on "education as the practice of freedom" transforms Gaza's educational landscape into a radical pedagogical act: the affirmation of life under conditions designed for erasure. Her work underscores that intellectual survival is inseparable from emotional and political survival.

3.4. Decolonial and Indigenous Frameworks: Mazawi and Freirean Extensions

André Elias Mazawi (2017) ^[12] introduces the concept of *sumud* steadfastness as an indigenous pedagogy specific to Palestinian contexts. *Sumud* encapsulates endurance, dignity, and continuity amid devastation. Within this framework, education becomes an act of moral steadfastness, maintaining cultural identity despite physical annihilation.

Mazawi's perspective, read alongside Freire, situates Gazan education within decolonial resistance: it is not only about knowledge but about asserting presence in a world that denies existence. The child who learns amid ruins enacts what decolonial theorists like Fanon (1963) and Said (1979) ^[14] describe as *the rehumanization of the colonized self*.

This study, therefore, integrates psychoanalytic, trauma, and decolonial frameworks to present education in Gaza as both psychic reconstruction and collective resistance. Trauma theory (Freud, Caruth, Herman) explains the inner wounds; pedagogy (Freire, Hooks) reveals the healing practice; and decolonial thought (Mazawi, Fanon) exposes the structural violence that necessitates such education in the first place. Together, they frame Gaza's classrooms as laboratories of human endurance and moral courage.

This theoretical synthesis positions education not merely as post-trauma rehabilitation but as an *active process of remembering, re-symbolizing, and resisting*. It situates the child as both survivor and agent, whose act of learning transforms suffering into testimony and knowledge into defiance.

4. Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, interpretive research design rooted in trauma studies, narrative inquiry, and critical pedagogy. It aims to explore how education functions as both survival and self-reconstruction among war-affected children in Gaza. Given the complexity of trauma and the ethical constraints of studying minors in active conflict zones, the research relies on secondary data, documentary analysis, and interpretive synthesis from existing academic and humanitarian reports rather than primary fieldwork.

4.1. Research Design and Rationale

The chosen methodology is qualitative and phenomenological, seeking to understand lived experience rather than to quantify trauma's impact. According to Creswell and Poth (2018) ^[5], qualitative inquiry allows researchers to interpret meanings individuals or groups ascribe to social problems. In contexts like Gaza, where childhood trauma intersects with cultural identity and systemic oppression; quantitative data alone cannot capture the depth of human experience.

The phenomenological approach is particularly relevant

because it focuses on how individuals make sense of suffering and survival. As van Manen (1990) ^[19] argues, phenomenology seeks “the essence of lived experience.” Here, that essence lies in the narratives of disrupted schooling, memory, and resilience.

This study interprets those experiences through a trauma-informed hermeneutic lens, informed by Caruth (1996) ^[4], Herman (1992) ^[8], and Freire (1970) ^[7], examining how education becomes both a coping mechanism and an act of testimony. In this sense, the research functions as an *interpretive reconstruction* of voices that humanitarian organizations such as UNICEF (2023) ^[17] and UNRWA (2024) have documented but often left unanalyzed in psychological or pedagogical terms.

4.2. Data Sources

The study draws upon three major data streams:

1. Humanitarian and institutional reports: Reports from UNICEF, UNRWA, Save the Children, and Human Rights Watch provide statistical and descriptive accounts of education, trauma, and displacement in Gaza. These documents serve as primary secondary sources, offering empirical grounding for the theoretical discussion. For instance, UNICEF’s *State of Palestine: Education Under Fire* (2023) outlines the psychosocial consequences of recurrent conflicts on children’s learning and wellbeing.
2. Academic and theoretical literature: Scholarly works on trauma theory (Caruth, 1996; Herman, 1992) ^[4, 8], psychoanalysis (Freud, 1955; Lacan, 1977), critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994) ^[7, 9], and decolonial education (Mazawi, 2017; Said, 1979) ^[12, 14] are analyzed thematically. These texts inform the conceptual framework, providing interpretive tools to re-read educational experiences through lenses of memory, power, and resistance.
3. Cultural and testimonial narratives: Documented testimonies from teachers, parents, and students published in journalistic sources, NGO case studies, and educational psychology research; are used to trace recurring motifs of loss, hope, and continuity. These narratives are treated as *discursive data*, emphasizing how trauma and resilience are linguistically and symbolically expressed.

4.3. Analytical Framework

The analytical strategy follows thematic and interpretive analysis. Braun and Clarke’s (2006) ^[3] model guides coding and interpretation through six stages: familiarization, coding, theme generation, reviewing, defining, and reporting. These stages were adapted to secondary-textual data, focusing on recurring patterns across institutional reports and trauma narratives.

Themes identified include:

1. Interrupted Learning and Memory Gaps representing educational discontinuity as symbolic of psychic fragmentation.
2. Education as Testimony where learning activities serve as channels for narrating pain and preserving identity.
3. Pedagogy of Resistance where classrooms operate as micro-sites of political and moral defiance.
4. Collective Healing and Communal Identity showing

how learning restores social cohesion amid chaos.

Interpretation proceeds through hermeneutic triangulation, cross-referencing trauma theory, pedagogy, and humanitarian data to construct meaning. The result is a narrative synthesis that situates Gazan children’s education within a web of psychological, social, and ideological dimensions.

4.4. Ethical Considerations

Researching trauma and childhood within war zones demands rigorous ethical sensitivity. As Herman (1992) ^[8] emphasizes, trauma research must avoid re-victimization by ensuring respect, confidentiality, and emotional safety. Although this study does not involve direct participants, it adheres to ethical guidelines for secondary data analysis outlined by the American Psychological Association (2020) ^[2].

Key ethical principles include:

- Respect for dignity and voice: Testimonies are treated as acts of agency, not mere data.
- Cultural sensitivity: Palestinian identity and local concepts such as *sumud* (steadfastness) are interpreted within their socio-political and linguistic contexts (Mazawi, 2017) ^[12].
- Avoidance of sensationalism: Representations of trauma prioritize humanization over spectacle.
- Scholarly accountability: All interpretations are grounded in verified sources and cited transparently.

Furthermore, this study recognizes the epistemic violence of representation, the risk of speaking *for* rather than *with* the traumatized (Spivak, 1988) ^[15]. Hence, the analysis foregrounds the voices of teachers and children as knowledge producers, aligning with Freire’s (1970) ^[7] insistence on dialogue as the essence of ethical pedagogy.

4.5. Limitations

While the qualitative design allows depth, it is constrained by the absence of field-based ethnography due to the ongoing conflict and restricted access. The reliance on secondary sources may limit the immediacy of lived experience. However, triangulating institutional data with theoretical interpretation compensates for this limitation by ensuring analytical richness and contextual accuracy.

Moreover, as Caruth (1996) ^[4] warns, trauma inherently resists complete representation; thus, any methodological framework can only approach, not exhaust, its meaning. The goal here is not empirical finality but interpretive illumination, reading the fragments of Gaza’s educational struggle as evidence of human endurance.

4.6. Summary

This methodology situates the research within a critical-interpretive paradigm, blending trauma theory, pedagogy, and decolonial ethics. It treats existing humanitarian data and narratives as texts to be read hermeneutically rather than statistically. The approach acknowledges both the impossibility and necessity of speaking about trauma, positioning education in Gaza as a site where survival, memory, and moral resistance converge.

5. Analysis and Discussion

5.1. Trauma, Memory, and the Fragmented Self

The cyclical nature of violence in Gaza has produced what Cathy Caruth (1996) ^[4] describes as “*the unclaimed experience*”, a trauma that resists closure and continuously resurfaces through collective memory. For Gazan children, trauma is not a singular event but an enduring condition of existence, marked by loss, fear, and displacement. The repetitive bombings and school demolitions have created psychological environments where memory becomes both burden and preservation.

According to Judith Herman (1992) ^[8], trauma fragments identity and temporality, disrupting the continuity of the self. This disruption manifests vividly in the lives of Gaza’s children who, after each military escalation, must reconstruct their sense of safety and belonging within temporary classrooms or tent schools. UNICEF (2023) ^[17] reports show that over half of Gaza’s educational infrastructure has either been destroyed or rendered non-operational, leaving nearly one million children without stable access to schooling. Yet, even amid ruins, children draw, read, and play transforming acts of learning into acts of survival.

Education thus functions as mnemonic resistance, a way to anchor memory in structured meaning. Each lesson, story, or shared recitation becomes a ritual of continuity, an assertion that their identity extends beyond trauma. In this sense, classrooms in Gaza are not just pedagogical spaces but sites of psychic reorganization, allowing children to symbolically narrate what cannot be spoken directly.

5.2. Education as Survival and Testimony

Bell Hooks (1994) ^[9] describes education as “the practice of freedom,” a process through which the oppressed articulate their humanity despite systemic erasure. In Gaza, this concept materializes literally: to attend class, to learn, and to teach amid bombings is to defy the logic of annihilation. Paulo Freire’s (1970) ^[17] *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* offers a lens to understand this phenomenon; education becomes not only a right but a political act of *conscientization* (critical awareness).

Teachers, operating under impossible conditions, act as mediators of resilience. Their classrooms become therapeutic spaces where collective trauma is acknowledged and transformed into communal meaning. UNRWA’s (2024) report documents the psychosocial support integrated into Gaza’s educational framework, highlighting that teachers undergo trauma-informed training to provide emotional stability and guidance. Such interventions align with Herman’s (1992) ^[8] stages of recovery: establishing safety, reconstructing the narrative, and reconnecting with community.

Moreover, Freire (1970) ^[17] and Hooks (1994) ^[9] emphasize dialogue as an emancipatory act. In Gaza, children’s narratives drawn in pictures of destroyed homes or spoken in fragmented memories; constitute a form of testimony. These micro-narratives transform classrooms into archives of survival, preserving voices that might otherwise be lost to silence. Education, therefore, becomes both *therapeutic* and *testimonial*; a site where trauma is reframed into collective memory and moral endurance.

5.3. Interrupted Childhood and the Crisis of Educational Continuity

The concept of interrupted childhood encapsulates more than a temporary disruption in schooling; it signifies the fracturing of psychological and developmental trajectories. Herman (1992) ^[8] asserts that continuity is essential for a child’s sense of safety and identity formation. In Gaza, this continuity is systematically ruptured by the destruction of schools, displacement, and bereavement.

UNICEF (2023) ^[17] documents that nearly 80% of children in Gaza experience symptoms of trauma, including nightmares, anxiety, and emotional withdrawal. Many reports associating classrooms with both, learning and loss memories of classmates killed or teachers missing. This duality transforms the educational experience into a site of ambivalence, where hope and horror coexist.

Despite this, education retains symbolic power. Even temporary learning centers or online platforms established during ceasefires become “psychic shelters”, spaces where children can reclaim routine and agency. The UNRWA (2024) framework underscores the role of education in maintaining normalcy: structured time, communal routines, and moral instruction counteract chaos. This aligns with Dori Laub’s (1992) ^[11] notion of “bearing witness,” where survivors regain control of fragmented experiences through narration and relational presence.

Thus, Gaza’s educational continuity is not merely an administrative goal but a psychological imperative, a precondition for reconstructing meaning amid persistent trauma.

5.4. Collective Trauma and Cultural Memory

Trauma in Gaza is collective and transgenerational. Dominick LaCapra (2001) ^[10] distinguishes between *acting out* and *working through* trauma; Gazan communities oscillate between both states as they negotiate memory through cultural and educational practices. School activities, storytelling, art therapy, and memorial writing serve as channels for “working through,” allowing children to process loss symbolically.

Education thereby becomes a medium for cultural survival. Through the teaching of Palestinian history, language, and poetry, schools reinforce identity even when physical spaces collapse. Edward Said (1979) ^[14] describes this as “*resistance through culture*”, the refusal to be dehistoricized. Similarly, Mazawi (2017) ^[12] introduces the concept of *sumud* (steadfastness) as a pedagogical ethos, where perseverance itself is a moral education.

This cultural dimension reveals that the trauma of interrupted childhood cannot be disentangled from colonial history and geopolitical control. The educational system, under siege, embodies both vulnerability and defiance. Each classroom, each recited poem, becomes an act of preserving collective memory against erasure.

5.5. The Politics of Education under Occupation

Education in Gaza operates under conditions that Michel Foucault (1977) ^[6] would describe as bio-political, where the control of life and death extends into knowledge and subject formation. The closure of schools, restriction of materials,

and targeting of universities reflect what Achille Mbembe (2003) ^[1] terms *necropolitics*: the power to dictate who may live and learn.

This structural violence transforms the right to education into a site of ideological struggle. International humanitarian frameworks (UNESCO, 2022) ^[16] affirm education as a universal right, yet in Gaza it functions as both a privilege and resistance tool. The UNRWA (2024) data indicates that while attendance drops drastically during escalations, community-led initiatives, parents teaching under trees, volunteers running makeshift classes maintain educational continuity. These acts challenge systemic oppression through everyday persistence.

Thus, the educational struggle in Gaza extends beyond pedagogy; it is a moral-political assertion of life within a regime of dispossession. As hooks (1994) ^[9] notes, “the classroom remains the most radical space of possibility.” In Gaza, that possibility is redefined, learning is not preparation for life; it is life itself.

5.6. The Pedagogy of Healing and Resistance

Applying Freire’s (1970) ^[7] critical pedagogy and Herman’s (1992) trauma recovery model reveals how Gaza’s educators integrate learning and healing. Classroom dialogues about loss and injustice help children articulate emotions otherwise silenced by fear. This process mirrors Freire’s dialogical method, wherein learners become subjects in the creation of knowledge, not objects of instruction.

In trauma-informed classrooms, teachers employ narrative writing, art therapy, and cooperative games to rebuild trust and social bonds. UNICEF (2023) ^[17] reports success in psychosocial integration programs where children express emotions through creative storytelling; transforming pain into shared meaning. This pedagogy of healing is grounded in the recognition that education’s first task is not cognitive achievement but emotional reconstruction.

Moreover, by contextualizing suffering within broader frameworks of justice and solidarity, teachers empower children to reinterpret victimhood as agency. This aligns with Hooks’ (1994) ^[9] notion of *engaged pedagogy*, where learning fosters empowerment through care, awareness, and community. Gaza’s classrooms, then, become microcosms of moral reconstruction, resisting both psychological despair and political dehumanization.

5.7. Synthesis: Education as Moral Continuity

Across theoretical and empirical evidence, one conclusion emerges: education in Gaza operates as a moral continuum sustaining identity, dignity, and hope amid conditions designed to annihilate them. It embodies what Caruth (1996) ^[4] calls the “return of the story”; the compulsion to narrate trauma to reclaim selfhood.

In every act of reading and writing, Gaza’s children reassert their humanity. In every lesson, teachers perform an act of moral defiance. The persistence of education amidst war is therefore not an ancillary concern but a central phenomenon of survival.

Education here is not merely a bridge to the future; it is the present tense of endurance, a sacred form of resistance against both physical destruction and symbolic erasure. Through trauma-informed pedagogy, Gaza’s classrooms illuminate how learning can heal, how words can bear witness, and how memory can rebuild the self that war seeks to erase.

6. Conclusion

The study of Gaza’s educational landscape reveals that education in war is not merely an institutional pursuit but an existential act of survival and resistance. Amid the physical destruction of schools and the psychological devastation of children, learning functions as a sanctuary, a moral and cognitive space where life, memory, and identity persist. Grounded in trauma theory, psychoanalysis, and critical pedagogy, this paper demonstrates how education becomes both a site of healing and a form of political defiance in Gaza’s enduring war zone.

The findings affirm that trauma and education operate in a symbiotic relationship. While trauma fragments cognition, emotion, and identity, education offers a structure through which healing and meaning reconstruction occur. Following Caruth’s (1996) ^[4] notion of trauma as an “unclaimed experience,” the disrupted schooling of Gaza’s children represents both personal loss and collective memory; an intergenerational narrative of dispossession. Similarly, Herman’s (1992) ^[8] model of trauma recovery, safety, remembrance, and reconnection mirrors the educational process in Gaza. Teachers, many themselves survivors, embody these stages as they transform classrooms into spaces of stability and care, turning pedagogy into a form of therapy. Through hooks’ (1994) ^[9] concept of education as “the practice of freedom,” Gaza’s classrooms become acts of moral endurance sites where teaching and learning are synonymous with survival. The study also underscores the political dimensions of education under occupation. Drawing on Freire (1970) ^[7] and Said (1979) ^[14], Gaza’s classrooms are framed as arenas of epistemic resistance, where education becomes *sumud*; the Palestinian principle of steadfastness. Thus, education in Gaza stands not merely as a right but as a declaration of humanity, reconstructing childhood and community through collective memory.

6.1. Implications for Pedagogy and Policy

The study proposes several implications for pedagogy and policy in conflict zones.

1. **Trauma-Informed Pedagogy:** Curricula should integrate trauma-sensitive approaches that address emotional regulation, memory, and healing. Teachers require training to blend psychosocial support with academic content, following Herman’s (1992) ^[8] recovery model and UNICEF’s trauma frameworks.
2. **Community-Based Models:** Localized, flexible schooling, mobile classrooms, informal centers, or digital alternatives should be prioritized, as endorsed by UNRWA (2024), to ensure learning continuity during displacement.
3. **Integration of Cultural Memory:** Teaching Palestinian history, poetry, and art sustains psychological resilience and identity continuity, as argued by Mazawi (2017) ^[12] and Said (1979) ^[14].
4. **Global Accountability:** International organizations must move beyond humanitarian gestures toward rights-based advocacy that recognizes education as a moral and political entitlement.
5. **Teacher Well-being:** Teachers’ mental health must be central to educational policy, as they function as emotional anchors and mediators of collective healing.

These implications reposition education from a charitable intervention to a justice-oriented act; one deeply intertwined

with healing, memory, and resistance.

This paper contributes to interdisciplinary discourse by bridging trauma studies, psychoanalysis, and critical pedagogy. It extends Caruth's and Herman's trauma frameworks into the educational sphere, interpreting pedagogy as a mode of witnessing and narrative restoration. Synthesizing Freire's dialogical pedagogy and hooks' engaged teaching, the study redefines education as relational, ethical, and emancipatory within trauma contexts. By conceptualizing childhood education as moral philosophy, this research reframes learning as an ethical act of hope; where the pursuit of knowledge becomes a means to reclaim selfhood and dignity. It invites dialogue among psychologists, educators, and policymakers on transforming the aftermath of violence into collective renewal.

Future studies should pursue participatory, longitudinal research involving Gaza's students, teachers, and families to trace how education shapes long-term trauma recovery and cognitive development. Comparative analyses with other conflict zones such as Syria, South Sudan, or Afghanistan would enrich understanding of how educational resilience manifests across contexts. Additionally, feminist and decolonial frameworks can illuminate how gender and global inequities shape access to education during war. Emerging areas like digital learning under siege deserve attention, particularly regarding how technology can preserve memory and pedagogical continuity during blockades and displacement. Ultimately, this research affirms that education in Gaza is more than preparation for the future; it is the preservation of humanity in the present. Every rebuilt classroom and every child who learns amid bombardment represents a moral triumph over despair. As Hooks (1994)^[9] observes, teaching that "respects and cares for the souls of students" creates the deepest conditions for learning. In Gaza, that care becomes revolutionary: learning transforms into survival, memory into resistance, and education into the final frontier of dignity.

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