Mapping the Erased: Narrative, Form, and Counter-History in *Palestine – 1*

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Abstract

This article analyzes *Palestine – 1: Stories from the Eve of the Nakba* (Comma Press, 2025) as a formally coherent counter-archive that revisits 1948 through speculative, fantastical, and non-realist narrative strategies. Conceived as a prequel to *Palestine + 100*, the anthology reverses futurist projection in order to confront catastrophe "from the eve" of the Nakba, moving across villages, towns, and neighborhoods whose naming operates as an ethical act of resistance to erasure. Building on debates about how extreme violence fractures time, memory, and meaning, the article argues that the collection's non-realism—ghosts, doubles, temporal fractures, speaking landscapes—functions not as aesthetic ornament but as a necessary narrative technology for an unfinished historical condition. The anthology's ordering is read as a "counter-map," where geography replaces chronology and recurrence replaces linear progression, generating unity without stylistic uniformity. Situating the collection within Palestinian narrative lineages (Kanafani, Habibi, Darwish) and postcolonial critiques of imperial "imaginative geographies," the article shows how *Palestine – 1* mobilizes form to resist closure and to restore erased places to cultural memory. Ultimately, the anthology demonstrates that non-realism can operate as historical method: a way of narrating dispossession not as concluded past but as an ongoing structure organizing Palestinian time and space.

Keywords: Nakba; Palestinian Literature; Speculative Fiction; Non-Realism; Counter-History; Counter-Map; Place-Names; Erasure; Trauma and Memory; Imaginative Geographies; Settler Colonialism; Literary Form

Introduction

Palestine – 1: Stories from the Eve of the Nakba, edited by Basma Ghalayini (Comma Press, 2025), is a twelve-story anthology that returns to the events of 1948 through speculative, fantastical, and non-realist fiction. Conceived as a prequel to *Palestine + 100*, the collection reverses the earlier volume's futuristic gaze and instead moves backward into the late 1940s—before, during, and immediately after the Nakba.

The formal challenge this anthology confronts—how to narrate catastrophe when violence fractures time, memory, and meaning—has been identified in different historical contexts within world literature. Writers such as Primo Levi and W. G. Sebald argued that extreme violence strains the resources of linear realism, producing narratives marked by recursion, fragmentation, and spectral return (Levi 1988; Sebald 2001). *Palestine – 1* approaches a comparable formal problem from a fundamentally different historical position: not from the aftermath of a catastrophe that has been memorialized and institutionally acknowledged, but from the ongoing consequences of a settler-colonial project whose violence remains structurally unfinished.

Within Palestinian literature itself, this problem has long been articulated in its own terms. Ghassan Kanafani famously insisted that the *Nakba* is not a concluded historical event but an enduring condition shaping Palestinian political and narrative consciousness (Kanafani 1974). Emile Habibi's satirical and absurdist strategies in *The Secret Life of Saeed: The Pessoptimist*, likewise demonstrated that non-realism could function as a mode of survival and critique under conditions that defy ordinary logic (Habibi 2001).

Mahmoud Darwish's poetry, with its insistence on naming place against erasure, further established memory and geography as inseparable sites of resistance (Darwish 2000).

Palestine – 1 extends this Palestinian lineage rather than borrowing it from elsewhere. Its speculative strategies—ghosts, doubles, temporal fractures, and speaking landscapes—do not aestheticize loss but respond to what Edward Said described as the power of "imaginative geographies" in colonial domination (Said 1978). Against imperial cartography and administrative fictions, the anthology produces counter-geographies: literary worlds that restore erased villages and interrupted lives to cultural memory. In doing so, it demonstrates that non-realism is not an escape from history but a necessary narrative technology for confronting a catastrophe that has not ended.

Structure, Ordering, and the Logic of the Counter-Map

The ordering of *Palestine – 1* is neither chronological nor random. Instead, the table of contents reads like a counter-map: a sequence of villages, towns, and neighbourhoods—Saffouryeh, al-Lydd, Tantura, Katamon, Deir al-Qasi, Ein Karem, Bethlehem, al-Barriyya, al-Dawayima, Sheikh Jarrah—whose very naming resists erasure (Ghalayini 2025, v–vi). These are not simply settings but acts of insistence. To name a place here is already to contest the violence that sought to unname it.

This spatial logic recalls earlier postcolonial anthologies—most notably Chinua Achebe's *The Penguin Book of Modern African Short Stories*—where unity emerged not from chronology or stylistic uniformity but from a shared historical wound refracted through diverse narrative forms (Achebe 1992). As in those collections, coherence in *Palestine – 1* is ethical rather than aesthetic. What binds the stories is not a single tone or genre, but a common refusal to treat dispossession as finished business.

At the same time, *Palestine – 1* distinguishes itself from documentary collections of Nakba writing that organise testimony chronologically or archivally (Khalidi 1992). Here, geography replaces timeline as the primary ordering principle, and recurrence replaces linear progression. The movement between rural and urban spaces, between massacre sites and zones of slow dispossession, and between the interior of historic Palestine and the expanding geography of exile produces a structure that mirrors the lived experience of Palestinian history: uneven, interrupted, and spatially dispersed.

The stories are arranged so that modes of narration recur and mutate—haunting, doubling, temporal slippage, testimonial silence, and speculative reframing. As Ghalayini notes in the Introduction, "a recurring theme is that this nightmare is itself recurring," with characters who "fuse," "split," or return in doubled forms (Ghalayini 2025, xi–xii). This recurrence creates unity without uniformity. Rather than imposing a single aesthetic or ideological template, the editor allows each writer to respond differently to the same historical rupture. The result is what might be called a *polyphonic ethics of memory*.

This structural choice matters because it resists closure. By refusing both chronological neatness and thematic overdetermination, the anthology prevents the Nakba from being narrativised as a concluded past. Non-realist devices recur across the book not as stylistic repetition but as a shared grammar for addressing an event that continues to reorganise time, space, and subjectivity. In this sense, non-realism is not escapist but anti-closure. It keeps the wound open not for aesthetic provocation, but for historical truth: a catastrophe that remains ongoing cannot be narrated as if it were neatly finished (Kanafani 1974).

What *Palestine – 1* ultimately achieves through its structural design is a rare balance between plurality and coherence. The anthology enables difference to articulate itself without dissolving into fragmentation, while allowing coherence to emerge without imposing formal or thematic uniformity. Rather than functioning as either a curated exhibit or a loose aggregation of voices, the collection operates as a deliberately assembled **counter-archive**—one that organizes loss spatially, frames memory as an ethical practice, and insists on the continued presence of 1948 within the contemporary moment. In this sense, the anthology aligns with Edward Said's critique of imperial modes of spatial representation, offering narrative form as a corrective to cartographic and archival regimes that naturalize erasure (Said 1978).

Yara El-Ghadban's "The Forest of Saffouryeh," which opens the collection, establishes this logic with particular clarity. Initially framed through the language of a guided tour of Tzipori National Park, the narrative gradually exposes the forest as a material strategy of concealment, planted over the destroyed village of Saffouryeh. The story's speculative turn—allowing the village itself to speak in the first person—transforms landscape into testimony, revealing how what appears as environmental preservation functions instead as historical camouflage. By giving voice to what has been rendered invisible, the story models the anthology's broader project: converting sites of erasure into sites of narration.

Literarily, the story's power lies in its ventriloquism of landscape. El-Ghadban transforms ecology into testimony and tourism into complicity. Its contribution to the anthology is foundational: it establishes fantasy not as ornament but as a forensic tool for exposing how violence is curated, aestheticised, and naturalised.

Read through an ecofeminist and ecopolitical lens, the story acquires additional ethical depth. Ecofeminist thinkers have long argued that the domination of land and the silencing of marginalized voices—especially women's voices—are mutually reinforcing processes, sustained by shared logics of control, abstraction, and disposability (Plumwood 1988; Merchant 2005). In settler-colonial contexts, environmental "management" often becomes a technique of moral laundering, transforming sites of destruction into landscapes of care while erasing the human histories embedded in them (Eckersley 1992; Dobson 1990).

That this act of narrative reclamation is performed by a Palestinian woman writer is not incidental. El-Ghadban's story restores agency simultaneously to land and to voice, aligning with what ecofeminist political theory has described as an ethics of care that resists domination by insisting on relational responsibility rather than ownership (MacGregor 2006). By allowing the village itself to speak—"Me, Saffouryeh"—the story refuses both environmental and historical domestication. Nature here is not a passive backdrop but a gendered archive, and its testimony exposes how ecological harm, colonial violence, and narrative silencing operate together.

In this sense, "The Forest of Saffouryeh" does more than mourn an erased village. It reframes the forest itself as a political fiction, and literature as a form of counter-ecology—one that resists environmentalized narratives of innocence and reopens spaces that have been buried, administratively managed, and rendered "natural" through violence. The story thus exposes how ecological discourse can function as an instrument of historical erasure, while speculative narration operates as a mode of ethical re-inscription.

Ibtisam Azem's "Ismail al-Lyddawi" extends this logic by shifting the site of erasure from landscape to embodiment. If El-Ghadban's story maps silencing onto geography—villages covered by forests and histories absorbed into managed terrain—Azem's narrative traces how that same violence migrates inward, into the body itself. Here, erasure manifests through voice, breath, and the fragile mechanics of sound, transforming historical catastrophe into a prolonged somatic condition. Read together, the two stories form a deliberate opening sequence: one registers how place is rendered mute, while the other shows how subjects are made voiceless within that muted geography. The anthology thus establishes, from its outset, a model of erasure that operates simultaneously across spatial and corporeal registers.

Set around the Dahmash Mosque massacre in Lydd, Azem's story centres on the sudden disappearance of Ismail's singing voice. Before 1948, Ismail is remembered as a gifted singer and a familiar presence at weddings and communal celebrations. After the massacre, his voice vanishes and does not return for decades. The narrative marks this moment with chilling precision: Ismail "seemingly swallowed his voice whole on 11 July, 1948." The sentence anchors trauma to a specific historical date while locating its effects squarely in the body. Voice loss here is neither metaphorical nor medical; it is a corporeal afterimage of violence.

Azem's refusal to narrate the massacre directly is central to the story's ethical force. Rather than staging violence as spectacle, the text attends to its aftermath: how terror reorganizes the body, disciplines expression, and teaches survivors what cannot safely be said. Silence thus functions as what trauma

theorists describe as a *durational wound*—an injury that persists not merely as memory but as altered capacity (Caruth 1996). Ismail does not forget the massacre; his body remembers it by foreclosing speech.

Sound studies further illuminate this condition. R. Murray Schafer's concept of the *soundscape* emphasizes that sound is a structuring element of social life, shaping belonging, memory, and communal rhythm (Schafer 1977). The loss of a familiar voice therefore signals not only individual trauma but a rupture in the community's acoustic order. Brandon LaBelle likewise argues that voice circulates within "acoustic territories" regulated by power, exclusion, and vulnerability (LaBelle 2010). In this light, Ismail's silence marks a form of sonic dispossession: he remains physically embedded in his community yet is expelled from the shared auditory space through which recognition and presence are produced.

This condition resonates strongly with Erving Goffman's analysis of social presence and absence. Goffman observes that individuals may be physically present while being rendered interactionally marginal—treated as "non-persons" whose voices no longer carry authority within the social order (Goffman 1963). Ismail exemplifies this suspended presence. He lives among others, marries, raises a family, and remains visible, yet the social function that once defined him—his singing, his audibility as a communal participant—has been withdrawn. As the narrator observes, it is "as if a part of him had vanished, even though he remained right there with us." He becomes present as an absence, audible precisely through what he can no longer produce.

Scholars of voice and political repression emphasize that silencing is rarely absolute. Instead, it operates by making speech dangerous, costly, or unintelligible, so that censorship becomes internalized. Wes Jamison argues that under conditions of social trauma, the loss of voice often signals the moment when repression migrates inward and speech is pre-emptively withheld as a strategy of survival (Jamison 2011). Azem's story gives this insight narrative form. Ismail does not choose silence; silence settles into him, becoming a learned bodily response to a world that has demonstrated what speaking—or being heard—can cost.

The eventual return of Ismail's voice does not function as healing or closure. It coincides with renewed violence, collapsing temporal distance and reinforcing the anthology's larger claim that the Nakba's injuries do not belong safely to the past. Voice here operates as a temporal medium: its disappearance and re-emergence trace the cyclical logic of Palestinian catastrophe, where trauma lies dormant rather than resolved.

By foregrounding vocal decay rather than overt spectacle, Azem offers one of the anthology's most conceptually precise meditations on repression. The gradual loss of the ability to sing functions not only as a personal injury but as a broader collapse of testimonial capacity: the inability to mourn publicly, to narrate loss, or to name violence without fear. In this sense, "Ismail al-Lyddawi" demonstrates how political violence disciplines not only land and movement, but expression itself. Silence here is not absence or void; it is history sedimented in the body, lodged in the throat as an enduring aftereffect of catastrophe.

Anwar Hamed's "Trapped" advances the anthology's inquiry by shifting the focus from silencing to enclosure as a lived condition. If Azem traces the persistence of violence through the body's impaired capacity to speak, Hamed locates repression in the experience of being unable to move, choose, or exit. Violence in this narrative does not appear as a discrete event but as an environmental force that reorganizes space, time, and moral perception. History is no longer something that happens and recedes; it becomes an inescapable surround, converting confinement into a totalizing structure of experience.

From its opening lines, "Trapped" establishes confinement as both physical and psychological. The attempted escape unfolds under the pressure of failing technology and aerial assault: "The choking sound coming from the worn-out engine warned that the car might not be able to take them anywhere," even as "the roar of the sorties above filled him with dread" (Hamed 2025, 25–26). The scene conveys a crucial insight: entrapment is not produced solely by soldiers or borders, but by the gradual realization that motion itself has become futile. The family is not stopped at a checkpoint; they are stopped by the collapse of possibility.

Hamed reinforces this sense of enclosure through spatial narrowing and temporal compression. Urgency, waiting, fear, and hesitation collapse into a continuous present, producing what Henri Bergson described as *durée* under pressure—time experienced not as sequence but as stagnation (Bergson 1911). The characters are trapped not only in space but in a suspended now, where action no longer opens onto meaningful consequence.

The story's speculative force intensifies when enclosure extends beyond the living. In a haunting sequence, the dead inhabitants of Tantura move together through dark passageways toward the sea, chanting in unison, "*To Tantura!*" (Hamed 2025, 40). Yet even in death, return is denied. Armed guards block the shore and declare, "No entry to the Great-Grandparent's land except with our permission" (41). The absurdity of this prohibition prompts Grandma Fatima's devastating question: "But are there barriers and barbed wire even in paradise?" (41). With this line, Hamed crystallizes the story's central claim: enclosure has become total, extending into imagination, memory, and the afterlife itself.

The figure of the "Great-Grandparent," who "doesn't meet or talk to anyone but us" (42), evokes a form of unreachable authority familiar from world literature. As in Kafka's *The Trial*, power is omnipresent yet inaccessible, endlessly invoked and never accountable. Explanation is promised but perpetually deferred, and the subject is left suspended in a system that offers neither clarity nor appeal. Camus's reflections on moral paralysis under absurd conditions also resonate here: choice appears to exist, but every path leads back to enclosure.

Within Arabic literature, "Trapped" enters into clear dialogue with Ghassan Kanafani's *Men in the Sun*, where physical confinement becomes a metaphor for political suffocation. Yet Hamed radicalizes Kanafani's logic. In *Men in the Sun*, silence leads to death; in "Trapped," even death does not undo the condition of being trapped. The story also recalls Sonallah Ibrahim's existential realism, in which the absence of dramatic resolution functions as political diagnosis rather than narrative failure. Stagnation itself becomes the sign of historical injury.

Importantly, Hamed's speculative mode does not rely on the supernatural as spectacle. Although the dead walk and speak, the true horror lies in the persistence of barriers. As Fredric Jameson argues, speculation often works by defamiliarizing the present rather than inventing alternate futures (Jameson 2005). "Trapped" achieves this by exposing enclosure as the governing logic of Palestinian historical experience.

The story's closing movement introduces a fragile ethical counterpoint. When the armed men fire at the advancing dead, they realize too late that "The bullets don't work, then?" (Hamed 2025, 42). Resistance here does not take the form of liberation or victory, but of collective insistence: a refusal to accept enclosure as destiny. The dead cannot be killed again, and their forward movement exposes the limits of force.

By centering psychological and spatial paralysis, "Trapped" contributes a crucial tonal register to *Palestine – 1*. The story demonstrates that the afterlives of the Nakba are not only voiced or silenced, remembered or erased, but inhabited as a condition of being stuck—suspended between life and death, past and present, hope and exhaustion. If Azem's narrative locates history in the throat, as an embodied impairment of testimony, Hamed's situates it in space itself, transformed into a trap whose logic must first be recognized before it can be resisted. The story thus reframes confinement not as an episodic injustice but as an enduring spatial ontology.

Selma Dabbagh's "Katamon" extends this inquiry by shifting attention from the metaphysics of enclosure to the administrative texture of dispossession. Following the claustrophobic allegory of "Trapped"—where even the dead are halted at a barrier and informed, "No entry... except with our permission" (Hamed 2025, 41)—Dabbagh's story turns toward the quieter infrastructures that render such obstruction durable. This editorial sequencing is significant: the anthology moves from the spectacle of armed restriction to the everyday mechanisms that normalize it. Where "Trapped" dramatizes the impossibility of return through surrealized border logic, "Katamon" reveals how that logic is stabilized through maps, routes, institutions, and professional reassurances—through a bureaucratic economy that distributes fear and legitimacy in equal measure.

Dabbagh's narrative is set in Jerusalem at the hinge-moment of 1948, and it unfolds not through overt drama but through a controlled observational voice that registers the violence of legality. The narrator begins with a phone call from Ralph Bunche announcing that her husband André has been shot; from the outset, language is managed, sanitized, and procedural: "'Dead' was not a word either of us used" (Dabbagh 2025, 45). The sentence establishes the story's method. Catastrophe appears first as euphemism, as professional speech designed to keep panic within acceptable limits—an early hint that "administration" is not merely a backdrop to violence but one of its forms.

The story's Jerusalem is rendered through interiors and institutional corridors rather than battlefields. The hospital is described as a "high-ceilinged white hall with archways" (Dabbagh 2025, 45), an architecture of order that paradoxically heightens dread: the narrator can "see winged dragons" perched in the space even as she performs composure (45).

Dabbagh's controlled restraint—her refusal to turn this into spectacle—allows the institutional scene to do its work: the hospital becomes an emblem of rationality haunted by the irrational knowledge that rationality cannot protect.

Crucially, "Katamon" is also about mapping and route-allocation, the administrative grammar through which life and death are managed. The narrator notes the men's questions, delivered like an investigation into procedural deviation: "Why had they changed the route? Why had… the vehicle [not been] on its allocated route on the map? Why had it veered into Ka-ta-mon?" (47). Here, dispossession is not staged as a single act of expulsion; it is encoded as a logic of routes and allocations. The story's obsession with "the map" implicitly anticipates what later theorists of the modern state describe as the administrative production of legibility: violence becomes governable when it becomes cartographic.

Katamon itself is described with a classed, almost incidental gaze—"leafy streets, quiet mansions, the zone of a rich élite" (Dabbagh 2025, 47) which is precisely the point. In Dabbagh's telling, dispossession is not always registered as rupture by those positioned to pass through it; it can arrive as a neighborhood name one mispronounces, a route one "shouldn't" take, a property world one notices only when it becomes available. The narrator's line—"That neighbourhood, Katamon, had little significance to me" (47) functions as an ethical diagnostic: colonial modernity depends not only on active cruelty, but on cultivated irrelevance, on the ability to treat inhabited places as administratively interchangeable.

This is why Dabbagh's story is so effective as a complement to the anthology's preceding pieces. In Azem, voice disappears as a bodily afterimage of massacre; in Hamed, the dead demand return and are stopped by guns; in Dabbagh, the core violence is the way institutions normalize what should be unthinkable. Even sympathy is bureaucratized. Bunche is "professional" and reassuring; the men "fly around the corridors" looking for who is to blame; the narrator observes how blame-management replaces justice (47). This is the bureaucratic face of dispossession: not only the taking of property, but the production of narratives that make taking appear as unfortunate deviation, mishap, or "security necessity."

Philosophically, "Katamon" sits close to the tradition that reads modern violence through administration and legality. Hannah Arendt's account of how procedural systems can normalize harm helps clarify Dabbagh's emphasis on professionals, corridors, and routinized language (Arendt 1963). Michel Foucault's analyses of modern governance—how power works through institutions, documentation, and the management of bodies—also illuminate why the story foregrounds hospitals, maps, and controlled speech rather than battlefield heroics (Foucault 1977). And in a settler-colonial context, this is where legality becomes violence's preferred mask: dispossession is enacted through routine, and routine becomes the alibi.

The story's bureaucratic dread recalls Kafka's universe of procedural opacity, where authority is everywhere and accountability nowhere. But Dabbagh's achievement is to tether that Kafkaesque atmosphere to a historically specific Jerusalem, with named international actors and named institutional settings, preventing "absurdity" from floating free as metaphor. The narrator's closing understatement, "There was another war in 1948. Relatively short. Nobody removed me from my home. I stepped aside"

(54), lands like a moral verdict on liberal spectatorship: stepping aside is what makes structural violence possible without requiring personal sadism.

Ultimately, "Katamon" reveals how the Nakba is enacted not only through moments of overt violence—massacre and flight—but through the mundane, repeatable technologies of governance that render dispossession durable: allocations, maps, institutions, euphemisms, and the professional management of fear. Within the anthology's editorial sequence, the story's quietness is strategic rather than incidental. After "Trapped" renders the barrier visible as a spectacle of obstruction, "Katamon" demonstrates how such barriers become normalized—how dispossession is converted into routine procedure and administrative common sense. Violence here no longer announces itself; it persists as paperwork, as the everyday grammar of history.

Mazen Maarouf's "A Chronicle of Grandad's Last Days Asleep" marks a further shift in scale and register. If Dabbagh's story exposes the bureaucratic rationality through which dispossession is stabilized, Maarouf's narrative withdraws from institutions and documents into the fragile interior of family life. This editorial transition is among the anthology's most effective. Having traced violence through systems of control and management, the collection turns to what resists administrative processing altogether: exhaustion, waiting, and the body's refusal to continue participating in a world rendered unbearable. In doing so, the anthology foregrounds the intergenerational psychic toll of dispossession, revealing how historical violence persists not only in structures and spaces but in inherited states of fatigue and suspended life.

Maarouf's story is narrated from the perspective of a child and centers on a grandfather who, at a moment of escalating danger, simply closes his eyes and does not wake. The gesture is initially ambiguous, poised between sleep, death, and strategic withdrawal. When shaken for days, the grandfather briefly opens his eyes only to say that he "just wanted to give his back a rest" before closing them again (Maarouf 2025, 58).

The understatement is characteristic: Maarouf refuses melodrama, allowing humor and tenderness to coexist with despair.

 Sleep in this story functions as a form of temporal suspension. The grandfather's refusal to wake mirrors the family's endless waiting—"We waited for the body every day at noon" (58) a waiting that never resolves into return or burial. Time ceases to move forward; instead, it loops around anticipation, rumor, and deferred catastrophe. In this sense, sleep becomes an alternative temporal strategy, a refusal to enter a historical present that offers only repetition of loss.

The story's surreal tenderness deepens as sleep becomes associated with vision and miracle. Told that he "needed a miracle," the grandfather is instructed to sleep beneath a loquat tree "until you see who killed the schoolteacher" (80).

Dreams here replace official knowledge; revelation is sought not through institutions but through withdrawal from them. This logic resonates powerfully with Qur'anic narratives of suspended time and miraculous sleep. The Companions of the Cave (*Ahl al-Kahf*) retreat into sleep to escape persecution, awakening centuries later to a transformed world (Q 18:9–26). Likewise, the figure in Qur'an 2:259—who passes by a ruined village and is made to die and revive—embodies a divinely imposed suspension through which history is both negated and revealed. Maarouf's grandfather participates in this tradition, but without divine guarantee: sleep offers not salvation, but a fragile pause.

World literature provides further echoes. Washington Irving's "Rip Van Winkle" famously sleeps through political revolution, awakening to a world he no longer recognizes. Yet where Rip's sleep is comic escape, Grandad's sleep is ethically charged. It is not an evasion of responsibility but a symptom of generational exhaustion—a body that can no longer absorb the demands of catastrophe. In this sense, Maarouf's story aligns more closely with Samuel Beckett's figures of inertia and waiting, for whom exhaustion becomes a form of truth-telling about history's weight.

Humor plays a crucial role in sustaining this ethical balance. The narrator's deadpan acceptance of absurdity—calling his absent father "the corpse" and noting that the sun "would fry my brain like an

omelet" (Maarouf 2025, 58) introduces levity without trivialization. Henri Bergson's theory of laughter as a response to rigidity is useful here: humor emerges not to deny suffering, but to make survivable what would otherwise be unbearable (Bergson 1911). Maarouf's comedy is not release from trauma but coexistence with it.

Philosophically, the story can be read alongside Emmanuel Levinas's reflections on fatigue and responsibility. Levinas writes of exhaustion as a state in which the self's capacity to respond to the world is temporarily suspended—not out of indifference, but because the burden of being-for-others has become overwhelming. Grandad's sleep marks such a limit-point: a withdrawal that testifies to ethical saturation rather than moral failure.

The final movements of the story refuse closure. Dreams blur into waking life; animals return wounded; the grandfather remains inaccessible even in vision. The image of Grandad flying in a dream, his bag of straw turning into wings, is both tender and disturbing—a fantasy of escape that never quite lands (84).

The miracle, if there is one, lies not in awakening but in endurance itself. Within the architecture of *Palestine – 1*, this story performs a crucial structural and affective function. After silence (Azem), enclosure (Hamed), and bureaucratic dispossession (Dabbagh), Maarouf introduces suspension as a fourth response to catastrophe. Sleep becomes neither resistance nor testimony, neither confrontation nor administration, but a temporary refusal to continue participating in an unbearable historical present. In doing so, "A Chronicle of Grandad's Last Days Asleep" expands the anthology's emotional and philosophical register, demonstrating how grief, humor, and imagination can coexist without neutralizing one another.

Ahmed Jaber's "The Sleepless Spring" reverses this logic entirely. If Maarouf explores sleep as withdrawal—a fragile pause carved out of exhaustion—Jaber presents wakefulness as an imposed condition rather than a chosen stance. Insomnia here does not signal alertness or vigilance, but a body denied rest, trapped in relentless temporal exposure. This marks a decisive editorial turn in the anthology. Following silence (Azem), enclosure (Hamed), bureaucracy (Dabbagh), and exhaustion-through-sleep (Maarouf), "The Sleepless Spring" introduces wakefulness as a mode of survival that offers no reprieve. The sequencing is deliberate: what follows the refusal to wake is the impossibility of sleeping. Together, the two stories articulate a dialectic of exhaustion that reframes endurance itself as a central condition of life after catastrophe.

Jaber's narrative centers on Amira and the village of Ein Karem, where night offers no refuge. The story opens in deceptive calm—gold-orange light, birds returning to nests, familiar paths—but this serenity is already unstable, "quite strange" in its quietness (Jaber 2025, 89).

As darkness falls, memory and fear intensify rather than recede. Violence does not erupt suddenly; it seeps into perception, saturating the senses and preventing rest. When catastrophe arrives, it does so with overwhelming immediacy: "Time seemed to stop and even the air was too thick to breathe" (95).

Sleeplessness here is not nervous anticipation; it is enforced vigilance. The story's central contribution lies in this embodied temporality. Insomnia becomes a historical posture, a refusal of the body to disengage when danger persists. Unlike Maarouf's grandfather, whose sleep suspends time, Amira's wakefulness stretches time unbearably. Night becomes the space where past and present collapse, where memories, visions, and immediate threat converge. Jaber writes: "In her dreams, the cries were faint and distant, but in reality, they tore through the stillness of the night" (95). The sentence draws a sharp distinction between dream and wakefulness: sleep would soften terror, but reality refuses that mercy.

This sleepless vigilance places Jaber's story within a long tradition in world literature in which insomnia registers moral and historical crisis. Ernest Hemingway's war fiction—most notably *A Farewell to Arms*—repeatedly links sleeplessness to the soldier's inability to escape awareness of death, even in moments of physical stillness. As in Hemingway, Amira does not sleep because sleep would require a trust in continuity that history has shattered. Yet Jaber's insomnia exceeds combat psychology. It is collective and geographic: the land itself refuses rest. The spring of Ein Karem "had witnessed all the people who'd come and gone" (90), functioning as a living archive that keeps the village awake.

Jaber's treatment of insomnia also recalls Hemingway's "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place," where wakefulness signals not trauma alone but an existential vigilance against darkness, despair, and nothingness. In Hemingway's story, the old man remains in the café because the night outside is unbearable; light offers a fragile ethical shelter against meaninglessness (Hemingway 1933). In "The Sleepless Spring," however, no such refuge exists. Wakefulness is not chosen but imposed, and illumination fails to neutralize fear. Even familiar spaces are saturated with erased histories and unresolved violence. Insomnia here is neither pathology nor preference but a historical condition—an enforced attentiveness that transforms wakefulness from solace into survival.

Philosophically, the story resonates with Emmanuel Levinas's account of vigilance as ethical condition. For Levinas, wakefulness is not merely physiological but moral: to remain awake is to remain exposed to the other and to responsibility. Amira's insomnia is precisely this—an enforced openness to loss and injustice. At the same time, Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the body helps clarify how perception itself is altered under such conditions: fear thickens the air, slows movement, and transforms space into threat. Jaber renders this phenomenologically when he writes that Amira realizes that "there was nowhere she could escape to" (95).

Within the anthology, "The Sleepless Spring" also extends the collection's engagement with landscape as witness. Where El-Ghadban makes the village speak and Azem makes the body fall silent, Jaber makes the land remember actively. Olive trees "had witnessed everything that had happened here" (90), and the spring preserves images of those who belonged to the place. This memory-work is not consolatory; it intensifies insomnia by refusing erasure. Even the later silent confrontation at the spring—where no words are exchanged—confirms that wakefulness has replaced speech as the primary ethical stance (99–100).

Seen in this light, Jaber's story completes a conceptual arc begun earlier in the anthology. If sleep in Maarouf is a fragile miracle sought under oppression, insomnia in Jaber is its dark counterpart: the condition of those who cannot afford miracles. The Nakba inhabits the body here not as silence or exhaustion alone, but as permanent alertness. The body becomes a watchtower, the night an unending present.

By framing sleeplessness as a form of historical vigilance, "The Sleepless Spring" deepens the anthology's central claim that catastrophe does not conclude with displacement or rupture. Instead, it persists in the rhythms of the body itself—in the capacity to rest or the compulsion to remain awake. History here is not recalled episodically but lived physiologically, inscribed in the temporal regulation of sleep and wakefulness. The story thus extends the anthology's exploration of how political violence reorganizes not only space and memory, but the most intimate cycles of embodied life.

Lina Meruane's "Al-Shataat" executes a decisive editorial pivot outward. Following Jaber's story—where Ein Karem's spring functions as a localized archive, witnessing generations and rendering the land itself a bearer of memory—Meruane relocates historical vigilance into the dispersed condition of exile. This sequencing is among Ghalayini's most conceptually astute decisions. Where Jaber situates memory within a single, enduring site, Meruane maps it onto movement, fracture, and dislocation. The anthology thus shifts from place-memory to diaspora-cartography, from the grounded archive of the village to the oceanic ungrounding of the refugee body. Memory no longer resides in a stable location; it travels, fragments, and recomposes itself across routes rather than roots.

Meruane's story is the collection's most explicitly diasporic piece, and it begins with an incantatory chorus that frames displacement as theological and epistemic dilemma: "At the peak of despair, we implore the gods of diaspora: Help us understand this dilemma" (Meruane 2025, 101).

From the outset, the voice is collective ("we"), and the setting is the sea—an anti-place where orientation fails and survival depends on external signals. The premise is brutal in its surreal precision: survivors are forced onto boats and "pushed… out to sea… alive but desperate on the ocean's murky waters" (104).

Diaspora is not a metaphor here; it is a forced technology of disappearance. The conceptual daring of "Al-Shataat" emerges when modern digital mapping becomes the new compass of exile. The oldest survivor

raises a phone "towards the smoke-orange sky as if offering a sacrifice to the gods of diaspora," not to pray but to search for signal (Meruane 2025, 105).

Then comes the story's signature gesture: his fingers type "pa, then les, then tine," and the screen lights up with "innumerable Palestinian points across the globe" (Meruane 2025, 105). The word "Palestine" becomes both locator and wound. It is discovered not as a homeland, but as a proliferating label—streets, gardens, cemeteries—scattered across continents. In a single stroke, Meruane reframes diaspora as cartographic fragmentation: the name survives everywhere, but the people are nowhere "allowed" to belong.

The irony is sharpened by the story's attention to language and pronunciation. The narrator notes that "among ourselves the name was falestin," and that the name had been "stifled in our mouths; we had silenced it on our lips and in our bones" (Meruane 2025, 105).

Now the letters can be pronounced because they appear safely on a screen, "twinkling like innumerable stars on a virtual map" (105). This is diaspora as mediated speech: the name returns first as an interface, as searchable text, not as lived ground. In that sense, Meruane dramatizes what theorists of colonial space have long argued: power does not only seize territory; it governs the conditions under which territory can be named, imagined, and mapped (Said 1978). Here, the map is not neutral representation—it is a stage where recognition, humiliation, and false options are performed.

As the old man scrolls, the refugees reject the substitute Palestines—"a Palestine Street," a "Palestine Garden" reduced to a concrete memorial, even a cemetery called Palestine—because each is a parody of return (105).

The story thus turns digital mapping into a site of grief and political critique: the world offers "Palestine" as signage and monument, but refuses Palestine as rights, refuge, or home. This is why the story sits so powerfully near the anthology's center. It becomes the drowning heart around which the other stories revolve: the internal archives of village, voice, and spring are here re-encountered as data points and displaced names.

Meruane also expands diaspora temporally, folding multiple expulsions into one drifting present. The old man explains that there are "cousins" in Chile from an "age-old *shataat*" (Ottoman-era emigration), alongside "siblings" who arrived from "the catastrophes of the successive *nakba*s of the previous century" (106).

Diaspora is not one event but a layered history of departures, producing what Paul Gilroy calls a "counterculture of modernity" shaped by forced movement and memory across routes rather than roots (Gilroy 1993). The sea scene literalizes that insight: identity is carried by drift, by a moving body holding onto names.

In world-literary terms, the story belongs to a long tradition of oceanic exile—from the *Odyssey* to modern refugee-boat narratives—but it modernizes the sea-journey through the device. The phone replaces the star. The map replaces myth. Yet the ethical structure remains: the sea tests what remains of community when land is unavailable. What distinguishes Meruane's version is that the map does not lead home; it multiplies homes into decoys. The result is closer to the modernist and postcolonial critique of mapping itself: the cartographic impulse promises orientation while producing domination and misrecognition (Harley 1989; Massey 2005). Meruane's refugees are offered coordinates instead of justice.

Finally, "Al-Shataat" is not only about diaspora as dispersion; it is about diaspora as spectatorship at a distance. The exiles watch their land being destroyed from "screens," realizing the violence continues "as if we were still there," as if each stone embodied them (102–103).

This constitutes a devastating development of the anthology's recurring concern with recurrence. Catastrophe is no longer only survived in place or remembered retrospectively; it is now streamed, monitored, and endured remotely, unfolding in real time yet beyond the possibility of intervention. In this sense, "Al-Shataat" reframes displacement as a condition of permanent spectatorship, where proximity to

violence is intensified even as agency is withdrawn. The story thereby closes a conceptual loop with earlier pieces in the collection. Like El-Ghadban's speaking village and Jaber's witnessing spring, Meruane's sea-chorus insists that place is not simply lost or erased; it is made to persist as image, name, and coordinate—while the people themselves are compelled to drift, suspended between attachment and dispossession.

Sonia Sulaiman's "The Dragon" then marks a deliberate editorial return from spatial fragmentation to symbolic condensation. If Meruane disperses Palestine into a cartography of scattered names, transforming diaspora into an ocean of coordinates, Sulaiman recenters fear and violence within a single, concentrated figure: the monster. This placement is telling. After the anthology's most outward-oriented, oceanic narrative, "The Dragon" pivots inward, shifting the analytic focus from the geography of exile to the psychology of terror. Through allegory, the story compresses diffuse structures of fear into a legible form, allowing the anthology to move from dispersion back to symbolic confrontation.

Sulaiman employs myth and folklore to examine how violence is internalized, narrated, and reproduced within communities under prolonged threat. The dragon in the story is not merely an external enemy but a pedagogical figure—one through which fear is taught, justified, and normalized. Early in the narrative, Salma explains the dragon's logic with chilling clarity: its victims must believe "that life is not worth living anymore, and that the dragon is inevitable and its victory absolute" (Sulaiman 2025, 117).

Terror here is not brute force alone; it is psychological saturation. The dragon feeds not only on bodies but on despair.

The story's central tension unfolds through dialogue between Ahmed and Salma, where the dragon becomes a mirror for competing ethical worldviews. Ahmed's rejection of hope—"hope does nothing but hurt" and is merely "the way of the unwise" (117) articulates a logic familiar from zones of extreme violence: survival through identification with power. To be like the dragon is to refuse vulnerability. Salma's counter-voice insists on a different moral grammar, warning Ahmed not to confuse the monster for a hero: "Dragons are strong, and they do as they like, but they are always defeated by a hero" (117).

What makes "The Dragon" particularly effective is its refusal to resolve this tension cleanly. The story does not offer a triumphant slaying of the monster. Instead, it tracks the process by which the dragon becomes internalized, even seductive. Ahmed admits that he would rather be strong "like the dragon," even if that means becoming monstrous himself (117).

This is allegory at its most unsettling: the monster is more than an external occupier; he is a model of power that threatens to colonize the self.

In this sense, Sulaiman's story deepens the anthology's exploration of how violence circulates symbolically. Earlier stories externalize terror through land (El-Ghadban), silence (Azem), barriers (Hamed), bureaucracy (Dabbagh), exhaustion (Maarouf), vigilance (Jaber), and diaspora (Meruane). "The Dragon" gathers these dispersed effects into a single mythic figure, showing how folklore can encode political terror without reducing it to spectacle. The dragon is at once ancient and contemporary, abstract and intimate.

The story recalls George Orwell's use of animal allegory in *Animal Farm*, where beasts embody political systems rather than individual villains. It also resonates with Kafka's parables, in which opaque forces govern life without clear origin or accountability. More broadly, Sulaiman's dragon belongs to a long mythological lineage—from Leviathan to Grendel—where monsters represent collective fears produced by historical crisis. Yet unlike heroic epics, "The Dragon" withholds catharsis. The question is not whether the dragon can be slain, but whether one can live without becoming it.

Morally, the story aligns with Hannah Arendt's insight that violence succeeds most fully when it reshapes moral imagination—when the logic of domination is accepted as inevitable (Arendt 1963). It also echoes Frantz Fanon's warnings about how colonial violence breeds counter-violence that risks reproducing the oppressor's values. Ahmed's "double," who smiles and waves before running back toward childhood, dramatizes this fracture within the self: one part resists monstrosity, another embraces it as protection (118).

By the story's end, the dragon is no longer simply an external threat but a contagious condition—something that "would steal into him and with a sudden fierceness transform him from a boy into a monster" (Sulaiman 2025, 118). This closing image reinforces the anthology's broader claim: that catastrophe does not end with physical destruction. It continues in the stories people tell, the fears they inherit, and the ethical compromises they are pressured to make.

Placed where it is, "The Dragon" functions as a moral fulcrum within *Palestine – 1*. It reminds the reader that resistance is both a matter of reclaiming land or memory, and a matter of resisting the transformation of fear into destiny. In doing so, Sulaiman shows how myth—far from being escapist—can become one of literature's sharpest tools for diagnosing political terror.

From this point in the anthology, the register shifts. After the allegorical intensity of "The Dragon," where violence assumes a mythic and coercive visibility, *Palestine – 1* deliberately lowers its narrative temperature. The turn to Mahmoud Shukair's "My Mother in Changing Times" marks a movement away from symbolic excess toward the textures of everyday life, where history is no longer figured as a monster but lived through habit, memory, and familial presence. Shukair's narrative is realist-inflected and deliberately quiet. It centers on a mother figure whose life unfolds through ordinary routines, domestic gestures, and incremental adaptations to political upheaval. There is no spectacle here, no overt dramatization of violence. Instead, history appears obliquely, filtered through the rhythms of the household and the small recalibrations required to endure. The mother does not narrate history; she lives through it. As the story makes clear, change is registered not through declarations but through shifts in habit, tone, and expectation through what must now be done differently, and what can no longer be assumed.

The mother emerges as a repository of historical continuity, carrying memory not as explicit testimony but as embodied practice. She remembers where things belong, how meals are prepared, how children are protected from knowledge that would overwhelm them. Shukair's realism insists that catastrophe exceeds the interruption of life at moments of rupture; it actually insinuates itself into the everyday, demanding constant, often invisible adjustments. In this sense, the story complements earlier contributions in the anthology by showing how the *Nakba* persists as trauma or exile, and as domestic recalibration.

This focus on the everyday resonates strongly with Shukair's broader literary project, long noted for its attention to Jerusalem's ordinary inhabitants and their strategies of quiet persistence. Here, the mother's endurance recalls what Pierre Nora describes as *milieux de mémoire*—environments in which memory is sustained through lived continuity rather than monumental commemoration. The home becomes such a milieu: a space where history is preserved not by archives or slogans, but by repetition and care.

Within the anthology's internal logic, "My Mother in Changing Times" functions as a grounding counterweight. After diaspora without land (Meruane), allegory without refuge (Sulaiman), and vigilance without rest (Jaber), Shukair offers continuity without illusion. The mother does not overcome history, nor does she mythologize it. She adapts to it. This editorial sequencing underscores a crucial claim of the collection as a whole: that survival is not always heroic, and resistance is not always loud. Sometimes it takes the form of keeping life going.

Shukair's approach finds kinship with writers who locate historical catastrophe within domestic realism instead of epic narrative. Natalia Ginzburg's *Family Lexicon* similarly treats political upheaval as something absorbed into family language and routine rather than staged as drama. Likewise, Primo Levi's quieter moments—those concerned with habit, work, and minor gestures—demonstrate how dignity survives through attention to the ordinary. Shukair's mother belongs to this lineage: a figure whose strength lies in persistence rather than confrontation.

Additionally, the story aligns with Hannah Arendt's distinction between action and life processes. While political action may be interrupted by violence, the processes of life—care, upbringing, nourishment— continue, often carried disproportionately by women. Emmanuel Levinas's ethics of responsibility also resonate here: the mother's orientation toward others, her concern for children and household, exemplifies

an ethical stance grounded in care rather than abstraction. The political significance of such care lies precisely in its refusal to disappear.

What makes "My Mother in Changing Times" particularly powerful is its refusal of sentimentality. The mother is neither idealized nor mythologized. She is sometimes weary, sometimes firm, sometimes silent. Her memory is practical rather than nostalgic. In presenting her this way, Shukair resists the temptation to turn the maternal figure into a national emblem. Instead, he insists on her specificity—and through that specificity, on the countless unnamed women whose lives have carried history forward without recognition.

Placed late in the anthology, the story performs a quiet synthesis. It reminds the reader that after monsters, maps, sleepless nights, and drifting seas, life continues in kitchens and living rooms. Large-scale catastrophe is endured not only through resistance and remembrance, but through small, daily acts of adjustment. Shukair's contribution thus anchors *Palestine – 1* in the intimate realism of lived experience, reaffirming that history is not only made in moments of rupture, but sustained in the patient work of care.

With Shukair's reaffirmation of domestic continuity, *Palestine – 1* reaches a momentary stillness. The anthology now turns outward again, away from the interior labor of endurance and toward forced motion. Abdalmuti Maqboul's "Eastwards" resumes the logic of displacement, but in a bleaker key: movement no longer promises escape or possibility, only direction imposed by power. "Eastwards" is organized around routes, thresholds, and the burden of orientation. At one point, the narrator is urged to look carefully at the map of everyday life—roads to Acre, Gaza, al-Khalil—an inventory that sounds almost like nostalgia until it becomes clear that these lines no longer signify belonging but dispersal: "Look at all the roads, this way is to Akka… and that way goes to Gaza, and this road goes to al-Khalil" (Maqboul 2025, 142). The power of this moment is that it frames geography as a system of forced options: knowing the routes does not restore agency; it merely clarifies how agency has been confiscated.

The story's deepest metaphorical engine, however, is the cave—Tur al-Zagh—where history becomes simultaneously a refuge, a massacre site, and a portal across time. The narrator sees a girl inside the cave even as his companion insists, "there's nobody there" (Maqboul 2025, 132). This contested perception is crucial: the cave is not merely a physical shelter; rather, it is an epistemic rift—what is "there" depends on what history allows the living to see. The girl, Mahbouba, beckons the narrator forward, drawing him into a space where the past is not past. Maqboul's cave recalls two major cave motifs in intellectual history: Plato's allegory of the cave and *Sūrat al-Kahf*. In Plato's *Republic*, the cave is the site of illusion: people chained in darkness mistake shadows for reality, and the painful ascent into light represents epistemic awakening. Maqboul explicitly stages a Platonic threshold when Mahbouba and the narrator approach "the dividing line between darkness and daylight," step over it, and are struck by the sun (173).

Yet Maqboul reverses Plato's moral geometry. Emerging into light does not deliver stable truth or liberation; it delivers temporal shock and historical trauma. The moment they cross, Mahbouba is "no longer a little girl… But a very old woman. Over a hundred years old!" (173). Enlightenment, here, is not a clean access to reality—it is the violent arrival of accumulated time.

At the same time, the cave also evokes *Ahl al-Kahf*, where withdrawal into the cave and miraculous sleep becomes divine protection and a suspension of time. Maqboul borrows the structure of temporal discontinuity—centuries condensed, time "jumping"—but strips it of transcendental guarantee. There is no protected awakening that confirms providence; instead, the cave bears witness to what history has done. In effect, Maqboul fuses Plato and al-Kahf into a single Palestinian predicament: should one *leave* the cave (Plato) or *enter* it (*al-Kahf*)? In "Eastwards," both are catastrophic. Outside is exposure to violence; inside is the risk of erasure. The cave becomes not a solution but the collapse of meaningful choice under terror.

This collapse is mirrored by the story's ethical drama around evacuation. In a key mosque scene, Mahbouba's grandfather refuses to flee, grounding dignity in rootedness: "By God, I won't leave, even under threat of death… I was born here and I gave my sweat and blood so my land would bloom. I won't die or be buried anywhere else" (145).

His language embodies the counter-ethic to "eastwards" as exile: remaining is not stubbornness but a philosophy of place. Yet the story refuses romantic closure. Mahbouba's urgent counsel and the encroaching violence make clear that "direction" is not a preference; it is the remainder left when all other options are destroyed.

In this sense, Maqboul's lyricism does not aestheticize displacement; it exposes displacement as a spatial technology of domination. The story aligns with thinkers of space and power: space here is not neutral background but a produced field of permissions and prohibitions (Lefebvre 1991), while routes become relations saturated with inequality and memory (Massey 2005). "Eastwards" also echoes Edward Said's insistence that exile is movement without the innocence of travel: it is a condition in which the world is reorganized against one's ability to remain (Said 2000).

Placed where it is in the anthology, "Eastwards" functions as a hinge-text: it gathers earlier motifs—barriers, silences, haunted landscapes—into a single spatial allegory anchored in a real massacre geography (as the story's notes remind us).

The cave becomes the collection's most philosophically charged site: at once Plato's problem of vision, *al-Kahf*'s problem of time, and Palestine's problem of survival. Eastward movement is thus not mere plot; it is the story's moral syntax—exile as directionality imposed on the body.

After "Eastwards," which renders exile as compulsory movement, the anthology turns to the crisis that follows displacement: the difficulty of making lived experience believable. Liana Badr's "I Swear, All This Happened" confronts the erosion of narrative credibility itself.

The insistence of the title—"I Swear, All This Happened"—announces the story's central tension: violence so extreme that it exceeds the listener's threshold of belief. The narrative deliberately blurs testimony and imagination, exposing how colonial violence often produces events that sound implausible precisely because they are real. Early in the story, the narrator recalls how absence during a population census "sealed our fate once more, condemning us… to permanent exile" (Badr 2025, 184).

Bureaucratic procedure, once again, determines destiny—but what follows is not an administrative account, but a haunted narrative saturated with dreams, doubles, and impossible images.

One of the story's most disturbing sequences is the recurring nightmare of the school gate, where strangers gather to storm a place that should be safe. The dream culminates in a grotesque vision: a crane suspending "thick, white chunks of fish," while a voice whispers that they are the body of Imtiyaz, "transformed into these chunks" (184–185). The narrator insists that even decades later she wakes "trembling at this image, even though I know it's just a dream" (185). The story refuses to separate dream from testimony. The nightmare is not a distortion of reality; it is the only form capable of registering violence that resists linear narration.

Badr intensifies this epistemic instability through the motif of the Qareen, the underground double who lives beneath each person. Introduced as a schoolgirl story told by Farida, the idea becomes an ontological problem: "we do not only exist in one form," and our subterranean double "mirrors all our thoughts and actions" (176).

This doubling resonates powerfully with earlier stories in the anthology—Azem's doubled voice, Hamed's returning dead, Maqboul's temporally split figures—suggesting that under conditions of catastrophe, subjectivity itself fractures. The Qareen is not folklore as ornament; it is a structural response to lives lived simultaneously above and below legality, visibility, and recognition.

The story's most devastating revelation arrives later, when the narrator finally learns what happened to Imtiyaz. Farida's silence gives way to a truth almost too banal to be believed: Imtiyaz fled to Kuwait, married, and was killed during coalition airstrikes while buying food for her children—"bombing them, along with countless other civilians, leaving many of the injured to die in the desert" (186). The earlier dream of bodily dismemberment turns out not to be exaggeration but premonition. Reality catches up with nightmare.

Within the anthology's internal architecture, "I Swear, All This Happened" consolidates a recurring argument: that non-realist strategies are not aesthetic choices but epistemic necessities. Earlier stories give land a voice, silence the body, suspend time, or mythologize terror. Badr confronts the final obstacle: disbelief. Her story demonstrates how testimony under colonial conditions is routinely dismissed as exaggeration, hysteria, or fantasy. As Primo Levi observed in another context of extreme violence, survivors often fear that the truth will not be believed because it violates the listener's moral imagination. Badr's insistence—I swear—is both plea and indictment.

Badr's strategy recalls W. G. Sebald's fusion of archival fact and dreamlike narration, where trauma emerges obliquely because direct representation fails. It also resonates with Latin American testimonial fiction, where the boundary between memory and invention collapses under state terror. Yet Badr's intervention is distinct in its emphasis on gendered memory, schooling, friendship, and bureaucratic disappearance—domains often dismissed as secondary to "major" political events.

The story also aligns with Paul Ricoeur's work on testimony and narrative truth, particularly his insistence that credibility is not guaranteed by factual accuracy alone but depends on ethical willingness to listen. Under colonial regimes, that willingness is structurally absent. Badr's story exposes this absence, showing how violence produces not only victims, but a crisis of intelligibility itself.

Placed near the end of *Palestine – 1*, "I Swear, All This Happened" performs a crucial function. After displacement, monsters, maps, and forced routes, it asks the final question: *who will believe us?* Its answer is bleak but necessary. Literature must step in where testimony fails—not to embellish the truth, but to make it bearable, sayable, and, against all odds, imaginable.

With Badr's exposure of the limits of testimony, *Palestine – 1* reaches the edge of narratability itself. The anthology closes by abandoning retrospection altogether. G. Abraham's "Flood" does not ask to be believed, explained, or reconstructed after the fact; it confronts the reader with catastrophe as a present and ongoing condition. What follows is not memory or witness, but immersion—violence experienced in real time, without narrative shelter. "Flood" is built around the image announced in its title—an inundation that collapses temporal and moral boundaries. Unlike earlier stories that approach catastrophe obliquely through memory, allegory, or displacement, Abraham's narrative refuses distance. Images surge rather than unfold, overwhelming both characters and readers. The flood functions simultaneously as natural force, political metaphor, and historical verdict. It is not contained within a single moment; it sweeps together earlier violences, present destruction, and the foreclosed future. In this sense, the story does not represent catastrophe—it enacts its structure.

What distinguishes "Flood" within the anthology is its rejection of what might be called temporal safety. Earlier stories allow moments of suspension: sleep (Maarouf), vigilance (Jaber), allegory (Sulaiman), testimony (Badr). Abraham denies even these fragile shelters. Time does not pause, loop, or fracture; it rushes forward relentlessly. Past and present are indistinguishable within the current of violence. The flood carries memory with it, but does not slow down for remembrance. The story thus insists that continuity—not rupture—is the defining condition of Palestinian catastrophe.

This refusal of closure marks a final editorial statement. Ending the anthology with "Flood" ensures that the reader cannot exit the book with a sense of narrative completion. There is no return, no reconciliation, no ethical resolution offered. Instead, the final image leaves the reader inside an ongoing process. The Nakba's logic does not recede into history; it flows forward, absorbing new events into its momentum. To close the book is not to conclude the story, but merely to stop reading.

Abraham's strategy recalls texts that use overwhelming imagery to deny consolation. The story resonates with the apocalyptic currents of modernist and post-modernist writing—from the relentless accumulation of ruin in T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* to the tidal metaphors of catastrophe in postcolonial disaster narratives. Yet "Flood" is not speculative or symbolic in the abstract sense. Its power lies in its historical specificity. The deluge is not an imagined end of the world; it is a recognizable continuation of a world already structured by dispossession and mass death.

The story lines up with Walter Benjamin's conception of history as catastrophe rather than progress. Benjamin famously warned against viewing history as a sequence of discrete events moving toward redemption; instead, he described a single catastrophe piling wreckage upon wreckage. "Flood" embodies this vision with brutal clarity. The water does not cleanse or renew; it accumulates debris. Likewise, Giorgio Agamben's analysis of the permanent state of exception helps clarify the story's temporal logic. What appears as emergency is revealed to be the norm. The flood does not break the rules—it confirms them.

Within the architecture of *Palestine – 1*, "Flood" gathers and radicalizes the anthology's central claims. Land spoke (El-Ghadban), voices were silenced (Azem), movement was blocked (Hamed), legality disguised violence (Dabbagh), exhaustion sought sleep (Maarouf), bodies remained awake (Jaber), diaspora drifted at sea (Meruane), myth encoded terror (Sulaiman), domestic life persisted (Shukair), direction hardened into exile (Maqboul), and testimony struggled to be believed (Badr). "Flood" allows none of these strategies to stand apart. It absorbs them into a single, unstoppable motion.

Ending the anthology here is not pessimism; it is ethical clarity. To offer resolution would be to falsify the present. Abraham's story insists that literature's responsibility, at this moment, is not to console but to remain with what continues. The book closes, but the catastrophe does not. The final gesture is not silence, but continuity.

Artistic Difference and Thematic Unity

What distinguishes *Palestine – 1* is not stylistic uniformity but ethical coherence. The anthology gathers markedly different artistic modes—realism and allegory, lyric compression and surreal dilation, testimonial insistence and speculative displacement—without attempting to smooth their edges. Unity emerges not from a shared aesthetic program but from a shared refusal: each story rejects the premise that the Nakba is finished, manageable, or narratable on neutral terms.

This refusal takes different formal routes. Some texts insist on the ordinary and domestic, locating catastrophe in kitchens, courtyards, and habits of care; others displace history into mythic figures, spectral landscapes, or impossible temporal folds. Still others confront the limits of testimony itself, dramatizing the difficulty—sometimes the impossibility—of being believed. What binds these strategies is not repetition of theme but a grammar of recurrence: motifs return transformed, pressures reappear in altered registers, and time repeatedly doubles back on itself without offering closure.

Across the collection, space functions as a moral medium rather than a backdrop. Villages speak, springs witness, caves suspend and compress time, routes harden into exile, seas disperse bodies and names, and floods absorb past and present into a single current. Bodies, too, are sites of history: voices disappear and re-emerge, sleep becomes withdrawal or vigilance, exhaustion seeks miracles, wakefulness becomes an ethical stance. Even when the mode shifts—from quiet realism to allegory or speculative vision—the ethical work remains constant: to register how violence reorganizes perception, credibility, and the conditions of life.

Crucially, the anthology's unity is also an editorial achievement. The sequencing stages an argument without announcing it. Stories of interiority follow stories of obstruction; myth condenses what geography disperses; testimony confronts disbelief just before the final refusal of temporal safety. The reader is led not toward synthesis or reconciliation, but toward recognition: that difference of form is itself necessary when a single form cannot bear the weight of an ongoing catastrophe.

In this sense, *Palestine – 1* models a politics of form. Non-realism is not escapist; realism is not neutral; lyricism is not consolation. Each mode becomes a tool calibrated to a particular impasse—of speech, of movement, of belief. Together, the stories do not assemble a comprehensive picture of the Nakba; they demonstrate why such comprehensiveness would be false. What they offer instead is continuity without closure, coherence without homogenization, and an ethics that insists—again and again—that history has not ended simply because it is inconvenient to acknowledge.

The result is an anthology whose unity lies precisely in its differences: a collection that understands artistic plurality as the only honest response to a catastrophe that persists, mutates, and returns.

Conclusion: Why This Book Matters

Palestine – 1 accomplishes what few story collections have managed. It neither monumentalises the Nakba as a sealed tragedy nor dissolves it into metaphor alone. Instead, it demonstrates—through formally diverse but ethically aligned narratives—that speculative and non-realist fiction can operate as rigorous historical inquiry and as moral witnessing, especially when ordinary realism cannot adequately bear the weight of ongoing catastrophe.

Its publication in English, in Britain, is not incidental. English becomes here a vehicle of circulation and confrontation: these stories move into wider publics and critical arenas that often encounter Palestine through policy language, media shorthand, or depoliticised "conflict" framing. Translation, in this context, constitutes a reconfiguration of audience, risk, and circulation, extending beyond linguistic transfer. It can amplify writers constrained by censorship, market pressures, or political intimidation, while at the same time exposing their work to new forms of misreading and appropriation. The anthology is alert to this tension; it does not ask for sympathy as a substitute for responsibility.

The book's greatest achievement is its refusal of comfort—comfort for the occupier, comfort for liberal spectatorship, and comfort even for the reader who wants an ending that tidies history into closure. What it offers instead is something rarer: sustained attention, ethical demand, and the unsettling recognition that history does not end when we stop looking. The stories repeatedly deny the reader the relief of distance. They force confrontation with the ongoingness of dispossession—its afterlives in bodies, spaces, bureaucracies, dreams, and fractured geographies.

In doing so, *Palestine – 1* does more than remembering the Nakba; it demonstrates how literature can keep memory alive as an active, resisting force. The anthology insists that erasure does not entail only the loss of land and life; more profoundly, it constitutes an attempted foreclosure of narration itself. Against that foreclosure, these stories insist—again and again, across different forms and voices—on presence: *we were here, and we still are*.

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