

**“Cached memories”: Spatiotemporal (Dis)ruptures and Postmemorial Absence in *Palestine***

**+100**

Layla AlAmmar

Department of English Literature and Creative Writing, Lancaster University

**Author Note:**

Layla AlAmmar <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0287-7693>

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Email: [l.ammam@lancaster.ac.uk](mailto:l.ammam@lancaster.ac.uk)

**Abstract**

Each story in the collection *Palestine +100* (Basma Ghalayini, ed, 2019) takes place in 2048, or 100 years following the collective trauma of the Nakba (when Palestinians were forced to flee their land upon creation of the State of Israel). However, analysis reveals that this event has not been relegated to the past but continues to reverberate through successive generations, resulting in a uniquely Palestinian postmemory. Science fiction, with its future orientation, has not been popular with Palestinian authors whose literature is largely characterized by allegiance to the past. *Palestine +100* is unique in that the intentional framing compels writers to contend with a future imaginary. This results in stories dominated by spatiotemporal (dis)ruptures: characters inhabit parallel spaces and simulations; time moves backwards or stands still; and the notion of “return,” which looms large in the Palestinian psyche, is digitized in innovative and unique ways. The article argues that these stories illuminate a narrative present (which, for the reader and writer, is the near future) characterized by profound absence and the alienated suspension of identity. This is a time that lacks meaningful existence in light of a past that has not passed. In such a void, memory and, by extension, history become the enemy. Consequently, characters are trapped between a duty to remember and a desire to forget. This tension illustrates an attempt to sever the inter- and transgenerational link of trauma that is produced by the structure of postmemory.

*Keywords:* Palestinian postmemory, collective trauma, memory, transgenerational trauma

### “Cached memories”: Spatiotemporal (Dis)ruptures and Postmemorial Absence in *Palestine +100*

In his self-elegy, *In the Presence of Absence*, celebrated Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish posits that “he who was born in a country that does not exist...does not exist either” (Darwish, 2011, p. 49). This statement encapsulates the degree to which a spatiotemporal anchor is pivotal for identity; that is to say, how the twinned notions of time and space provide ontological axes around which a sense of self may cohere.<sup>1</sup> It follows that dislocations and disrupted temporalities have profound implications for identity, and this is the problematic when considering Palestinian cultural expressions. In the case of Arab literature, there has been a recent turn towards speculative fiction, which moves away from a realist aesthetic and provides a new framework in which to explore identities shaped by the legacies of collective trauma, both past and present. This move suggests the need for a novel vocabulary with which to interrogate identity construction, the role of memory in sustaining communal identity, and its impact by collective trauma. Recent examples of such speculative fiction include Basma Abdel Aziz’s *The Queue* (2013), Ahmed Saadawi’s *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (2013), Ibtisam Azem’s *The Book of Disappearance* (2014), and Mohammad Rabie’s *Otared* (2016). In this article I argue that, by disrupting spatio-temporalities, the stories in *Palestine +100* are able to dismantle existing power structures and combat concomitant erasure in order to claim an identity space.

The collection follows *Iraq +100*, which asked authors to imagine their country in 2103, a century after the US/British-led invasion. The future imaginary of both collections compels writers to depart from dissection of the past/present in order to project their fears and hopes into a coming horizon. For *Palestine +100*, the science fiction framing throws into stark relief how modern-day Palestinian identity is constructed over a void, constituted by the spatiotemporal absence left in the wake of the Nakba. Speaking to the use of science fiction in her films, artist-filmmaker Larissa Sansour (in a conversation with Lindsey Moore), references both dimensions, noting how the genre “works formally for the Palestinian predicament because our identity is suspended between the past and the future. The Palestinian present is an odd space, a limbo” (Moore, 2020, p. 111).

Each story in *Palestine +100* takes place in 2048 – a century after the Nakba (or ‘catastrophe’). This event was one where over 700,000 Palestinians, or half of the pre-war population, were forced to flee their land and homes when the State of Israel was created (Morris, 2001). These people (and their descendants) have since resided in refugee camps in Gaza, the West Bank, and neighbouring Arab countries; were displaced within the land that became Israel; or have settled in exile. As Basma Ghalayini notes in her introduction to the collection, Palestinians are “like nomads travelling across a landscape of memories” (Ghalayini, 2019, p. viii). Remembrance becomes a duty in service of the dream of ‘return’ in addition to fortifying an ethos of resistance. Consequently, memories of the Nakba and life in pre-1948

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<sup>1</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy sees a vital dimension of subjectivity as “the presence of the existent. [...] Present is that which occupies a place. The place is *place*—site, situation, disposition—in the coming into space of a time” (J. L. Nancy, 1991, p. 7). See Nancy, J. L. (1991). Introduction. In Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor, & Jean-Luc Nancy (Eds.), *Who Comes After the Subject* (pp. 1-8). New York: Routledge. One might also consider Kant’s concept of space and time as “necessary representation[s], lying at the foundation of all our intuitions.” See Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Pure Reason* (Auckland: The Floating Press, 2009), p. 88.

Palestine are passed down from generation to generation. Indeed, for many families, memories are the only things from home to which they can claim ownership. Saleem Haddad (2020), whose story “Song of the Birds” opens the collection, says:

For Palestinians and other people subjected to settler colonialism and erasure, the question of the value of collective memories is an important one – they are important, both as a testament to a history that is trying to be taken from us and a way to assert that we did exist.<sup>2</sup>

Collective memory is not only intergenerational, transmitting itself – as per Jan Assman (2011) – in a communicative, familial sense, but it also extends transgenerationally, beyond the scope of those who directly experienced an historic event. In other words, collective memory is forged and refined through cultural artefacts of expression, including art and literature, to form a cultural memory. This type of memory has an undeniable role in identity formation, both individual and social: Jan Assman notes that “groups ‘inhabit’ their past just as individuals do, and from it they fashion their self-image” (Assman, 2011, p. 33). Furthermore, Aleida Assman notes that “groups define themselves by agreeing upon what they hold to be important, to which story they accord eminence, which anxieties and values they share” (Assman, 2010, p. 38). Marianne Hirsch, in *The Generation of Postmemory* (2012), extends this work to incorporate the impact of collective historic trauma in shaping cultural expressions of successive generations. My reading of *Palestine +100* shows that these stories illustrate spatiotemporal (dis)ruptures which expand and problematize Hirsch’s concept to produce what I call a “postmemorial absence.” When articulated through a critical framework of Dominick LaCapra’s *Absence and Loss* (1999), the stories attest to an historic trauma that has not been relegated to the past but continues to echo through successive generations, with haunting effects.

In many ways Palestinian identity has become constituted by what Ghalayini refers to as an “ongoing Nakba” (Ghalayini, 2019, p. ix). In her article “Who will we be when we are free? On Palestine and futurity,” Sophia Azeb calls it a “forever-catastrophe” and asks: “What if [...] we have been formed and effaced in catastrophe? What if [...] our Palestinianness continuously manifests itself in our suspended state of catastrophe?” (Azeb, 2019, p. 22). More relevant still when considering the forward-looking concept of this collection, Rosemary Sayigh (2013) notes that “the Nakba is not merely a traumatic memory, but continually generates new disasters, voiding the present of any sense of security, and blacking out the future altogether” (p. 56). This is what, I believe, distinguishes Palestinian postmemory from Hirsch’s theory. Her work centers on writing and visual cultural artefacts *after* the Holocaust and, consequently, there is a temporal demarcation between the artefact and the historic trauma it seeks to represent. There is no such demarcation for Palestinian writers, who are driven by a cultural duty to remember the Nakba (from which they derive their sense of identity), in light of present-day continuing injustices. Consequently, this literature has been refined by consistent appeals to the past, which demonstrate, in the words of Edward Said (1994), “not only disagreement about what happened in the past and what the past was, but uncertainty about whether the past really is past, over and concluded, or whether it continues, albeit in different forms” (p. 1).

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<sup>2</sup> Personal communication to author, July 6, 2020.

This allegiance to the past helps explain why science fiction, with its focus on future imaginaries, has not been popular with Palestinian authors. For them (and Arab writers more broadly), realism has been the preferred literary aesthetic. Indeed, in *The Palestinian Novel*, Bashir Abu-Manneh (2016) concludes that realism is the dominant form in this literature up to the end of the twentieth century as it allows for the embodiment of historical and societal struggles within the lives of individual characters as they negotiate contradictions in objective reality. Drawing on Lukács' notion of realism as a revolutionary product, Abu-Manneh (2016) shows how, in the Palestinian context, realism "is strongly connected with emancipatory desires" (p. 11) while a shift to an Adornian modernism in the 1980s points to a defeated despair that acknowledges and combats a breakdown in praxis (p. 137). Perhaps the closest this literature has come to science fiction is Emile Habiby's *The Secret Life of Saeed: The Pessoptimist* (1974), which, according to Abu-Manneh, "pierces to the heart of 1948 Palestinian reality by using elements of other-worldly fantasy and invention: figures from outer space rupture the burden of the real and convey the main protagonist's wish for redemptive messianic intervention" (p. 23). This lone exemption proves the rule that "the cruel present (and the traumatic past) have too firm a grip on Palestinian writers' imaginations for fanciful ventures into possible futures" (Ghalayini, 2019, p. x).

The intentional framing of *Palestine +100* produces an uncomfortable tension, then, as it compels writers to confront a future imaginary by interrogating notions of reified space and linear temporality. Thus, chronotopic considerations are paramount within these narratives: Mikhail Bakhtin's (1981) thesis of "time-space" as a "formally constitutive category of literature" (p. 84) is stretched to new dimensions when applied to Palestinian science fiction.<sup>3</sup> Though he draws attention to the ways in which space responds to historical events, Bakhtin fails to address the ways in which both time and space manifest and operate as modalities of power; and therefore, how such modalities can be subverted within literature. I argue that science fiction allows the writers in this collection to disrupt the daily realities of chronotopic power structures as an act of resistance and reclamation. The experimental nature of the genre provides a new framework for writers to highlight the anxiety of perpetual spatiotemporal insecurity and imagine pathways out of it. In an interview, Haddad asserts that:

Palestine is a rich canvas for science fiction: it is the frontier where tools of subjugation, occupation and resistance are experimented and used. There are powerful themes of past and present, memories and alternative realities, questions of homeland and belonging, of resistance and the limits of solidarity. (Mende, 2019)

This results in stories dominated by jarring chronotopic configurations: characters inhabit parallel spaces and simulations, such as in Haddad's "Song of the Birds" and Majd Kayyal's "N."; time moves backwards as in Abdalmuti Maqboul's "Personal Hero" or stands still as in Talal Abu Shawish's "Final Warning". Furthermore, the notion of 'return,' which looms large in the Palestinian psyche, is digitized across the collection in innovative ways. As a whole, the stories

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<sup>3</sup> Bakhtin's influential 1937 essay canvasses canonical "Western" literature, ranging from Ancient Greece through medieval European texts and up to 19th and early-20th century classics. He locates different time-space configurations which give distinct narrative character to different genres, such as the adventure novel or the chivalric romance novel.

highlight how, as Lindsey Moore (2017) states, “time/space is constituted through epistemic and other forms of violence. Home space is historically dislocated, uncanny, haunting and, to the extent that it still exists, systematically fractured so as to produce disjointed lives” (p. 166). This article argues that by illuminating a narrative present (which, for the reader and writer, is the near future) characterized by profound postmemorial absence, the stories interrogate (and, simultaneously, dismantle) the chronotopic power structures that define realities of collective trauma.

### **“Poisonous memories”: The Burden of Collective Remembrance**

Cultural memory, through ritualistic use of symbols, can transform historic trauma into foundational myths, which in turn solidify collective identity. In *Dark Continents*, Ranjana Khanna (2003) elaborates Volkan and Kakar’s notion of “chosen trauma”, describing it as:

an event that the group experienced together with particular group affective responses, often employed by groups to consolidate a sense of collective identity. [...] The event qua event, takes on a particular resonance for the history of the people, their most deeply felt cultural affiliations and anxieties, and collective symbols of a community. (p. 14)

Palestinian literature abounds with signifiers of collective identity. In terms of the Nakba, Carol Bardenstein (2007) notes that the orange serves as a “metonymic fragment” of the homeland which has acquired “emblematic status in the process of [...] being repeatedly mobilized and circulated” (p. 24). Likewise, she notes that the key and deed to the house in Palestine can serve as “anachronistic objects” which provide “tangible links to a version of house, village, and homeland frozen in time before dispersion” (p. 26). The repeated activation of these symbols reinforces a collective identity and connection to home. Interestingly, such iconography is absent from *Palestine +100*, which may suggest that these signifiers no longer function as useful coherents of identity. The only exception is Anwar Hamed’s “The Key, in which an Israeli family is terrorized by the sound of a key turning in the lock of their front door. When investigations reveal no one lurking on the property or attempting to enter the home, the husband seeks the help of a psychiatrist who then becomes haunted in the same way. That night, the sound of keys in the door keeps the doctor awake; eventually he retrieves his service rifle and shoots out the lock. The story ends with the doctor triumphantly exclaiming, “There is no lock left, where will the intruder put his key? (p. 76)” Thus, the symbolic function of the key has been deployed in a subversive gesture of resistance and restitution by ghosts of Palestinians seeking to reclaim space which was taken from them.

In thinking of collective memories as formative of identity, it is important to take stock of how these are impacted by large-scale trauma. Hirsch (2012) finds that collective trauma can dominate the transmission of memories, both through and across generations, asserting that “both embodied communicative memory and institutionalized cultural memory would be severely impaired by traumatic experience” (p. 33). This impairment results in postmemory, which she defines as an “inter- and transgenerational transmission of traumatic knowledge and experience. It is a *consequence* of traumatic recall but [...] at a generational remove” (p. 6, emphasis in the original). Collective trauma, in the form of the Nakba, constitutes, implicitly or

explicitly, the core of most (if not, all) Palestinian literature; however, the historicity of the event, the extent to which it is bracketed in time, has been repeatedly challenged. There is a pervasive sense that with this event Palestinians were ejected from 'time' itself; in the novel *Mornings in Jenin*, Susan Abulhawa writes: "In the sorrow of a history buried alive, the year 1948 in Palestine fell from the calendar into exile, ceasing to reckon the marching count of days, months, and years, instead becoming an infinite mist of one moment in history" (p. 35). In other words, the Nakba has taken on the transhistorical and – most importantly – atemporal aspects of what LaCapra (1999) would call 'Absence.' He defines this as a structural state of grief, unlinked to *direct* experience of a specific event, which he contrasts with 'Loss' as representative of an historic trauma or event to which not everyone is subject. LaCapra warns that conflating Absence and Loss can obfuscate historic losses and "etherialize them in a generalized discourse of absence" (p. 700). In the Palestinian context, I argue that the specific Loss of the Nakba, through the structure of postmemory, has been transformed into a subtending state of Absence, or what I call a 'postmemorial absence.' In such cases, according to LaCapra, when "absence, approximated to loss, becomes the object of mourning, the mourning may (perhaps must) become impossible and turn continually back into endless melancholy" (p. 715).<sup>4</sup> Thus, the sense of an existence that is spatially suspended, isolated, and unresolved in an atemporal sphere is reiterated across Palestinian artefacts of cultural expression.

*Palestine +100* highlights a tension between the duty to remember and the desire to forget, with many characters attempting to sever the inter- and transgenerational transmission of trauma that keeps them in a state of postmemorial absence. In Majd Kayyal's "N.", the father shields his son from what he calls "predatory memories that spew poison into our children" (p. 62). He has resisted sharing recollections of a war he spent "a lifetime trying to bury," but which he fears may have traveled to his son's subconscious like "dust transmitted from the throat of one generation to the next" (p. 44). In Haddad's "Song of the Birds", Ziad is resentful of the postmemory with which his generation has been saddled, saying, "these cached memories wrap themselves around us like a second skin" (p. 11). "Cached" is a provocative term: the gesture to technology fits the collection's science fiction framing, but it also carries negative connotations that conflict with the notion of rose-tinted, nostalgic memories with which the reader might be more familiar. The term "cache memory" is used for junk files or files which assist in the running of software, and users are often encouraged to clear cache data to increase the efficiency of their devices. Consequently, the story suggests that collective traumatic memories not only imprison successive generations, but that they weigh them down and prevent individuals from functioning as well as they could. This further suggests that severing the link to those memories might be necessary before the future can have any meaningful viability. And indeed, later in the narrative, Ziad's father wonders, "Would our personalities have been different without this weight inside our souls?" (p. 17)

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<sup>4</sup> In "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917) Freud conceives of the latter as a static, unproductive pathological condition in which the subject grieves over an unnamed or unidentified loss. See S. Freud & J. Strachey. (1957). *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Vol. 14 (1914-1916): On the History of the Psycho-analytic Movement; Papers on Metapsychology; Mourning and Melancholia and Other Works*. London: The Hogarth Press & The Institute of Psychoanalysis.

In some stories – and in a move reminiscent of The Pact of Forgetting after the Spanish Civil War – severing the link with the past is institutionalized as a core component of the ‘peace’ that has been achieved.<sup>5</sup> In “N.” the agreement between Israelis and Palestinians contains Article 7, stating that, “Both parties shall refrain from commemorating the hostilities that occurred between them, or any part thereof. This shall include commemorations of a direct and/or symbolic nature, as well as commemorations of celebration and/or mourning” (p. 54). Consequently, interest in the past is limited to scholarly endeavours whereby it is agreed that “the parties shall limit activities related to the history of the hostilities between them to the field of research, under the stipulation that any such research activities must be authorised jointly by both parties” (p. 54). However, Samir El-Youssef’s “The Association” goes further in that history itself has become the enemy and the study of the past is outlawed. In this story, the 2028 Peace Agreement between Muslim, Christian, and Jewish parties includes a law which “ban[s] anyone going back over the past by writing, speculating or in any way publishing about it” (p. 144). Though the law was initially “well-received by an exhausted, war-weary people” (p. 144), extremist organizations subsequently spring up whose aim is to resurrect and preserve history. These groups, some of which are labeled as terrorist, include “the Jidar who harboured evidence of the effects of the near 20-year blockade of Gaza” and “the Mathaf who secretly preserved evidence of the atrocities of Occupation” (p. 145). The association to which the story’s title refers is one such organization; believing that “war is better than the lies that they call peace” (p. 146), it facilitates a political assassination in order to alert people that forgetting “is a sign of deep-rooted corruption” and that “no one has the right to forget the past” (p. 150). Consequently, laws enacted in a spirit of reconciliation, and which presuppose the suppression of painful memories for all parties involved, prove futile and inadequate to the goal of lasting peace given that they necessitate a denial of justice and withholding of restitution.

This desire to forget, whether at an intergenerational or institutional level, contributes to postmemorial absence, which in turn produces a profound sense of isolation and detachment. As a result, the sense of present existence as a limbo is rendered digitally across the collection. In “N.”, the solution to the conflict is presented as two parallel worlds occupying the same geographical space. In other words, there is a Palestinian Haifa and an Israeli Haifa, a Palestinian Hebron and an Israeli Hebron, and so on. Furthermore, only Palestinians born after the establishment of these spaces can move freely between them, which opens up a fissure between the eponymous N. and his father when he decides to go to the Israeli side to study. The father is left feeling suspended in the Palestinian world, watching his son disappear through the departure tunnel, which he says, “swallows our children to over there, to the other over there” (p. 45). Thus, the solution presented is no solution at all really; in fact, N.’s father recalls how a friend likened it to “a hi-tech, scientific apartheid” (p. 58). Likewise, in “The Key” the Israeli solution is another kind of wall, one which “would not be a solid, concrete edifice,

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<sup>5</sup> Institutionalized in the 1977 Amnesty Law, the Pact of Forgetting (or *Pacto del olvido*) was an agreement between leftist and rightist parties after the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). Made in an effort to smooth the transition to democracy in the wake of Franco’s death in 1975, the pact ensured that no particular party would be held responsible for mass suffering during the war or the repression that followed. The law has been widely criticized for equating victims and victimizers, with the UN calling for its repeal in 2012. See *Legacies of Violence in Contemporary Spain: Exhuming the Past, Understanding the Present*. (2016). Ofelia Ferrán & Lisa Hilbink (Eds.) London: Routledge.



like those of the past – that would have the wrong psychological effect” (p. 69). This wall would be digitized such that only persons implanted with the correct chip could pass through it. However, the persistent haunting by Palestinian ghosts attempting to infiltrate the characters’ homes suggests that such a measure would ultimately fail. It becomes clear then, that these stories illustrate how “even the most extraordinary future technology can do little more than mirror or reframe the current, real-world impasse” (Ghalayini, 2019, p. xii).

In fact, future technology only enhances and deepens separation. In “N.” citizens escape the present via virtual realities (VRs) which depict everything from war to pornography to ‘historical-cultural’ realities, such as one of early-20th-century Egypt that N.’s father returns to over and over. He notes how some of these realities attempt to alter history by, for example, removing “a young Gamal Abdel Nasser from its database, so that you can’t detect his presence” (p. 48). Tying these forms of entertainment to Article 7 of the Agreement, N.’s father concludes that the VRs’ success depends on the users’ willingness to forsake the past, the “complete abandonment of their memory” (p. 49). Furthermore, it relies on the isolation that characterizes their circumstances: “Isolation from the other, isolation from the self, isolation from existence” (p. 49). In other words, the VRs are a method to escape the separation imposed by the establishment of the parallel worlds, and yet they also reinforce that isolation by allowing “everyone – Arabs and Israelis – [to bury] themselves in the warmth of their sofas, in their different realities” (p. 49). A similar form of VR appears in Emad El-Din Aysha’s “Digital Nation”, in which the protagonist laments that this technology allows “kids everywhere to spend all their free time in parallel worlds, on far away planets... anywhere but here” (p. 77).

“N.” amplifies the theme of isolation and detachment in form as well as content. The polyphonic story is divided into three parts: The Departure is narrated by N.’s father; The Encounter contains contributions by Ibn al-Qalaq (the fishmonger), N., and N.’s father; and the final section, The Return, is again narrated by N.’s father. While there is a temporal circularity here – where the closing section is labeled with the emotionally-charged word “Return” (or *‘awdah*) – the story stylistically highlights the alienation expressed by the characters in that the individual narrative threads are depicted as one-sided conversations that only cohere for the reader as they move through the story. In other words, N., in his section in The Encounter, responds to topics raised by his father in other sections as though they were in the midst of a conversation: N.’s section opens with “It smells good. Bull’s tail? Wow. Eight hours? It smells amazing” (p. 52) while his father’s second narration ends with “Another piece? Bull’s tail is good, eh?” (p. 59). Thus, the different contributions are not standalone narrations but can be threaded together as coherent conversations. However, in keeping characters isolated in their sections, Kayyal spotlights how alienation and absence take hold within a displaced existence while transferring that jarring sense of discontinuity to the reader.

### **“Digital Return”: Chronographies of Power and Spatiotemporal Reclamation**

Thus far I have argued that *Palestine +100* extends Hirsch’s notion of postmemory which, when articulated through LaCapra’s theory of Absence and Loss, produces a postmemorial absence. This is a state defined by isolation, suspension, and an inability to cohere a sense of self as an individual grows up burdened by weighty inter- and transgenerational memories of collective trauma that are compounded by present-day collective injustices and lack of closure. Now I will turn to the ways in which the writers in this collection employ science fiction in a subversive

gesture, whereby chronotopic power structures are dismantled in an act of resistance that allows them to claim an identity space amid historical (and current) erasure and silencing.

Science fiction offers the temptation of utopia, of future technological advancements ameliorating or even eradicating present-day concerns. However, often this vision proves to be dystopian, or even, as Fredric Jameson (2005) states, anti-Utopian, in that such fiction is “informed by a central passion to denounce and to warn against Utopian programs in the political realm” (p. 199). Such is the case in Haddad’s “Song of the Birds”, which takes place in a Gaza City filled with sunbathers on the beach, the smell of freshly grilled meat, and “cheesy music blasting from the drone speakers in the sky” (p. 1). It is a city of beachfront hotels, “quaint cafés and vintage furniture shops” (p. 14). In short, it is not a Gaza anyone in the present-day would recognize. Often described as an ‘open-air prison’ Gaza is a place of fences and walls, ringed by Israeli snipers. According to a *Guardian* article by Sarah Helm “A Suicide in Gaza” (2018), which Haddad cites as an influence, after more than a decade under siege, the two million strong population “find themselves without work, their economy killed off, without the bare essentials for decent life – electricity or running water – and without any hope of freedom, or any sign that their situation will change.”

And yet “Song of the Birds” takes place in a world of bio-therapeutic bandages that disintegrate as they heal, robo-cleaners, and teaching holograms, leading the reader to believe that a long-desired liberation has resulted in prosperity. However, what appears to be an idyllic existence quickly begins to unravel. Teen suicides have been increasing rapidly across the city, one of whom is eighteen-year-old Ziad, the brother of the story’s protagonist, fourteen-year-old Aya. Ziad hanged himself the year before and begins to appear in her dreams to convince her that they live in a simulation concealing the actual, ravaged city. This simulacrum of Gaza is what Foucault (1984) might call a “heterotopia of compensation,” or “a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well-arranged as ours is messy, ill-constructed, and jumbled” (p. 8). The siblings were born in the simulation, and the only escape is to commit suicide. Moreover, Ziad tells Aya that in order to construct this world, the Israeli authorities “harnessed our collective memories, creating a digital image of Palestine” (p. 14) with which to placate the population. In other words, memory, that perennial link to subjectivity and communal identity, has been weaponized against a people for whom acts of remembrance have always constituted a duty.

During their dream conversations, Aya experiences what Bardenstein (2007) might term a diasporic anachronism, albeit a digitized one, which does not represent “being ‘out of time’ or ‘in time’ or history, but the perception and sensibility of living in and being shaped by multiple time frames simultaneously” (p. 26). In a sense, Haddad’s Gaza is not so much dystopic as it is *dys-chrono*-topic, revealed to be a literal and metaphorical ‘fake place’ whose inhabitants are suspended in a sphere where both time and space no longer carry any ontological meaning. Furthermore, this “right to digital return” (Haddad, 2019, p. 15) not only makes a mockery of the ‘right of return’ enshrined in UN General Assembly Resolution 194,<sup>6</sup> but, in fact, constitutes

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<sup>6</sup> Article 11 (adopted December 1948): “Refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible.” See UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East, <https://www.unrwa.org/content/resolution-194>.

a new and experimental colonisation which requires new tools of resistance. In discovering this deceit, the siblings take on the attributes of the exile, whose “actual condition,” according to Said (1994), “makes it impossible to recapture [the sweetness of the homeland], and even less possible to derive satisfaction from substitutes furnished by illusion or dogma, whether deriving from pride in one’s heritage or from certainty about who ‘we’ are” (p. 407). The sense of simultaneous (em)placement destabilizes Aya and leaves her despondent, caught between accepting the mirage of liberation and escaping the simulation: “The two worlds were merging, and what emerged wasn’t one or another but a third dimension, a nightmarish new conglomeration” (pp. 18-19). She eventually chooses to join her brother, walking into the sea with a backpack full of stones.

In Aysha’s “Digital Nation”, utopia is “a dangerous thing. It had to be stamped out. Hope was ‘calculating’ and *calculatable*” (p. 81, emphasis in the original). In this story, Palestinians launch a digital war against the Israelis, infiltrating their systems by way of a programme/hacker that comes to be known as Hannibal. The stock market and social media are initial targets followed by a virus that “convert[s] all online use of Hebrew into Arabic” (p. 82). Eventually, the programme succeeds in creating “the world’s first virtual government” (p. 88). Going beyond infecting just computers in Israel, it tracks “its way to every player whose medical records showed Levantine blood (dated to 1948, including Jewish and Christian players, of course). The slogan that appeared on their screens as it downloaded read, ‘It’s time to come home’” (p. 89). It would be a mistake, however, to view this “digital return” – where Palestine becomes a “single government, free floating in a digital sea” (p. 89) – as a *de facto* surrendering of the land so long fought over. On the contrary, the third stage of the offensive involves a reversal of the renaming of streets and areas in Palestine, which is an exercise of power by the Israeli state and constitutes yet another trauma lingering in the Palestinian psyche.<sup>7</sup> In “N.”, the father strolls through a neighbourhood he used to frequent, saying, “We always used to dream about bringing back the real names of the streets, the names the Zionists changed for those 76 years” (p. 57). These spaces are reclaimed in “Digital Nation” where, over the course of a single day, “virtual tour guides, eBooks and online atlases all began rewriting themselves, telling tourists they were, in fact, in Palestine, and replacing all Hebrew names with their pre-1948 Arabic ones” (p. 86). Without a sense of irony, the Israeli protagonist, Asa Shomer, asks: “Who needed to ‘liberate’ Palestine if you could *convert* Israel into Palestine? You wouldn’t even need to build a new world, just repaint the existing one” (p. 84, emphasis in the original). Though this would seem to be the only story in the collection with a wholly victorious narrative resolution – with “the Palestinian flag [...] fluttering – the right way up this time – over the Dome of the Rock” (p. 92) – it is revealed that an Israeli psychiatrist was the prime facilitator of the hacking programme. It is a problematic end as it gestures to the need for an Israeli ‘saviour’ before Palestinian liberatory desires can be realized while also suggesting that escape from the existing framework of total dominance is futile.

Space is not the only plane on which power struggles occur. Time – its control, organization, and disruption – also constitutes a site of conflict. In his article on Middle Eastern

<sup>7</sup> Nur Masalha argues that such toponymic projects were integral to ethno-nationalist aspirations and intensified following the creation of the State of Israel in 1948. For more, see Masalha, N. 2015. Settler-Colonialism, Memocide and Indigenous Toponymic Memory: the appropriation of Palestinian place names by the Israeli State. *Journal of Holy Land and Palestine Studies*, 14(1), 3-57.

futurisms, Jussi Parikka (2018) notes how “time is a central part of struggles across a horizon of [...] politics of ethnicities, race, and neoliberalism as formative of everyday habits and practices” (p. 43). This is certainly the case in Palestine/Israel where authorities exert enormous power by manipulating and controlling Palestinian temporal modalities. Movement restrictions in the territories are well-documented, with various obstacles – from checkpoints to curfews to the Separation Wall – severely disrupting daily economic and social life. According to the United Nations (2020), there are 593 fixed obstacles to movement in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, up from 542 in 2013. Additionally, the United Nations noted that permanent obstacles, such as roadblocks, are being replaced with flexible ones such as partial checkpoints. There is a temporal aspect to restricted movement that is often overlooked: checkpoints translate to long delays while roads classified as for-Israeli-use necessitate detours that can be considerably longer than direct routes. This is in addition to burdensome bureaucratic and administrative processes to secure permits and licenses, which also hamper social life and undermine livelihoods. Such policies serve as examples of how, as Parikka (2018) notes, “reality creation (or what some would just call *ideology*) is fundamentally related to modalities of time” (p. 44, emphasis in the original).

This “reality creation” is taken to extremes in Tasnim Abutabikh’s “Vengeance” wherein high levels of pollution require the population to wear lifemasks in order to breathe. Citizens receive a mask at birth, “which adapted, expanded and even changed colour as they got older” (p. 108). And though the masks occasionally require repair, they are never replaced. Essentially, they serve as a tool to monitor and control the population. This is elevated to an appalling degree as Israeli authorities issue ‘deactivation’ dates to citizens. One character, Yousef, becomes involved in a black market smuggling unassigned lifemasks because his daughter had been “sentenced to deactivation at the age of two due to a congenital heart disease, putting her on a ‘high cost’ list” (p. 115). The protagonist, Ahmed, betrays Yousef to the authorities in exchange for an extension on his sick mother’s deactivation date. When the soldiers arrive, a deputy steps forward and “after first swiping an identity card past the side of Yousef’s head, [flips] a switch just behind his left ear” (p. 114). Onlookers watch as Yousef falls to the ground, clutching his neck and choking, until “his face turned purple and by the third minute, he stopped thrashing” (p. 114). Thus, the story chillingly illustrates a chronography of power that specifies “whose future was cancelled and when it was (already) cancelled” (Parikka, 2018, p. 43) – a dynamic which has particular resonance in the case of the contemporary coloniality of the Occupied Territories.

According to Parikka (2018), futurism, as an aesthetic expression, confronts these chronographies as such works aim to “unhinge existing temporal schemes and complexify already existing regimes of time as forms of power” (p. 44).<sup>8</sup> Two stories in *Palestine +100* serve this aim. Talal Abu Shawish’s “Final Warning” takes place in Ramallah where the Imam, Sheikh Hassaan, sits in a mosque after leading the dawn prayer and awaits sunrise. When the sky remains dark longer than it should, the Imam grows anxious. Another character, Rahel, panics when she looks at her great-great-grandfather’s clock and notices that its pendulum “wasn’t moving; it hadn’t moved, apparently, since 5 o’clock that morning” (p. 162). As the characters

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<sup>8</sup> Parikka (2018) builds on Sara Sharma’s use of the term “chronography of power” in referring to “temporality as an invisible and unremarked relation of power” (p. 42).

register that the sun is not rising, they also notice that all electrical equipment is out: smartphone screens remain black; the air-conditioning will not turn on; and telephones have no dial tones. The sheikh moves towards Al-Manara Square, “shaking and frothing as he cited verses from the Quran” (p. 162). This reaction not only stems from the shock one would feel upon waking to discover that the sun is not rising but is also due to the fact that this phenomenon is considered, in Islam, as one of the End Signs. These are signs which are understood to appear to mankind in anticipation of Judgement Day, one of which is the sun rising in the west. The sheikh affirms this when he tells a panicked citizen, “It’s all over. Allah’s wrath is upon us, this is the end. It is Al-Qiyaamah, Judgement Day” (p. 164). Soon the crowd is joined by the Christian and Jewish inhabitants, along with the local rabbi and priest, who stand and watch as “the colossal white limbs of [a] creature” (p. 165) rise up over the horizon. At the fearful sight – which they understand to mean that the world has come to an end – “Sheikh Hassaan and Father Yohanna approached Rabbi Weiss [...]. As if following some script, the three figureheads solemnly joined hands and began chanting in a single tongue” (p. 166). However, it transpires that the creature is in fact a spaceship as a “long haunted wail seemed to come from all of [its] orifices at once, [...] followed by a shrill, robotic voice that translated [the sound] into Hebrew and Arabic” (p. 167). Alien beings tell the assembled crowd that they are intervening because the Palestinian-Israeli conflict “acts as a symbol, a case study, a metaphor, a lightning rod, a red rag for conflicts across the entire planet’s surface” (p. 168) and that the conflict further risks the wider galaxy’s stability. In order to capture humanity’s attention and deliver their warning, they have “deactivated all [...] electron-based technologies, as well as paused [the] planet’s rotation” (p. 168). Promising not to interfere again in the future, the alien beings declare that they will “redraw the borders correctly” and “monitor [the] world from afar” (p. 168). As the spacecraft departs, the crowd watches “the edge of the sun appear in the distance, to the east” (p. 169). In other words, the alien intervention serves as a kind of messianic redemption in which this conflict requires an external agent to intercede in the situation. Thus, the story suggests that peace necessitates overthrowing existing power structures, in both their spatial and temporal dimensions. Resolution is not so simple though and, indeed, like in the majority of the stories, it is a futile one. As the crowd disperses, Isaam (an atheist who did not believe that Judgement Day was upon them) watches a group of settlers make their way back to the Jewish sector and laughs when he sees their “way blocked by a colossal new wall that hadn’t been there before” (p. 170). The ‘redrawing of borders’ has resulted in new obstacles and restriction of movement, suggesting that additional conflicts are inevitable.

Rather than bringing time to a halt, Abdalmuti Maqboul’s “Personal Hero” completely unhinges temporal mechanisms from accepted norms. The two narrative strands – one depicting the life and death of Palestinian nationalist resistance fighter Abd al-Qadir al-Husayni (1907-1948) and the other depicting the night of a scientific breakthrough by his granddaughter, Laila – run concurrently. However, while Laila’s narrative adheres to a temporal linearity, Abd al-Qadir’s story unfolds in reverse. Laila is a scientist who has invented a technology called ‘Turing’s 10D’ which “converts all data into virtual reality. [...] The device works by running a fully-intelligent simulation of world history in reverse” (p. 102). Conducting the first test, Laila brings her grandfather back to life in a haunting unpacking of time, in which the reader learns that “Today is the ninth of April [1948], and tomorrow the eighth, a hero will be returned to life” (pp. 96-97). Abd al-Qadir’s narrative, which is the primary one in the story,

is characterized by a “queer direction of time, its gears in reverse. [...] Returning home at the end of a new day, people are caught in morning traffic, but arrive in time for the rooster’s first call” (p. 96). Brought back to life, Abd al-Qadir leads a charge to reverse Operation Nachshon<sup>9</sup> and crashes a meeting where he berates Arab leaders for betraying the Palestinian cause. He then returns home and greets his daughter (Laila’s mother), Haifa. If we were to follow the logic of his timeline, she should be ten years old (as she was when he died), but the Haifa who greets him is an adult: “I waited so long for you. I waited until I was old, then until I was young again. [...] I am not sure how it is the days are returning. Only that they have brought us together” (p. 100). Haifa sought stories of her father, which she then passed down to Laila who (presumably) used them to populate the Turing’s 10D device. With this technology, not only is Laila able to turn back time, but she has entirely dismantled its mechanisms, so that her mother is able to converse with Abd al-Qadir as an adult while retaining memories of his death and the years that followed. It is a bittersweet achievement, however; as Abd al-Qadir’s narrative continues “the old grow spryer and the young slip back to first beginnings. Difficult days for all the parents who have to watch their children fade before their eyes (p. 101).” Abd al-Qadir and Laila watch as Haifa gradually “becomes a wailing, screaming lump of flesh between his hands,” until her birthday, 2 April 1937, when she is returned to her mother’s body. Nevertheless, Laila has conquered the vagaries of history in a way. By allowing Haifa to converse with the father she had previously only known by his ‘absence,’ Laila negates his death at the hands of the Zionist military and counteracts a wider policy of suppressing and erasing Palestinian voices and experiences.

“Personal Hero” has sharp resonances with the “synchroniz[e] diachrony” Bakhtin (1981) saw in the *Inferno*, where the vertical logic of Dante’s world allows for events to coalesce “into pure simultaneous coexistence” (p. 157). It is only when time, Bakhtin says, “is deprived of its authentic reality and its power to shape thinking,” that we can begin to understand “the true meaning of ‘that which was, and which is and which shall be’” (p. 157). While Bakhtin does not address the chronotope as a modality of power, that is to say, an ideological tool that shapes reality, he notes how Dante’s world (like that of “Personal Hero”) is populated with historical figures who have been affected by time. Thus, political and reactionary forces thrust themselves forward and resist the extratemporal form in which they have been placed; in other words, Abd al-Qadir al-Husayni’s historical reality strains toward “participation in a temporal-historical chronotope” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 157) that the world of Maqboul’s story (and the world Laila creates) denies him.

## Conclusion

Science fiction, particularly in (post)colonial inflections, is a fertile and as-yet-unexplored ground for reading under the paradigm of literary trauma theory. In foregrounding spatial and temporal modalities, the genre offers a new framework with which to interrogate genealogies of traumatic dispossession and displacement. In *Palestine +100* a near-future imaginary is presented which focalizes a postmemorial absence through spatiotemporal (dis)ruptures. The

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<sup>9</sup> A Zionist military operation during the 1948 war to open the road between Tel-Aviv and Jerusalem, blockaded by Palestinians in the Siege of Jerusalem. See Note 2 in Maqboul, A. (2019). *Personal Hero*. (Y. Seale, Trans.). In Basma Ghalayini (Ed.), *Palestine +100* (pp. 95-102). Manchester: Comma Press.

stories highlight Palestinian identities constituted by the “forever catastrophe” of the Nakba. This collective traumatic postmemory burdens the characters, and the tension between a duty to remember and a desire to forget results in varied attempts to sever the inter- and transgenerational traumatic link, on both a personal and institutionalized level.

Given the current state of Palestinian-Israeli relations and the fact that the future envisioned in *Palestine +100* is not even thirty years away from the time of writing, it comes as no surprise that most of the stories sound a bleak and fatalistic note. Indeed, the collection, as a whole, appears to confirm the conviction of Jameson (2005) that escaping ‘today’ in order to devise a ‘tomorrow’ of true alterity is impossible, and that, in fact, science fiction serves to “demonstrate and [...] dramatize our incapacity to imagine the future,” by revealing itself to be “mired in the all-too-familiar” and becoming instead “a contemplation of our own absolute limits” (pp. 288-289). No less so, then, when the present is conceived of as a long trauma-filled pause. The collection affirms that future imaginaries are not necessarily “about hope. Their visions are not wishful thinking or dreamy fables about the possibility of ‘better’ futures. They are instead a manifestation of tactical optimism; a constructivist envisioning that gives itself the means to exist through its very own formulation” (Lambert, 2019, p. 15). Resolution in these stories is not an act of settlement between conflicting parties; instead, it refers to a firmness of purpose, tenacity, and a persevering spirit. It is a new mode for expressing *sumud*, that indefatigable steadfastness which has long characterized Palestinian identity. By dismantling a present that harbours the spectre of the past, these stories unhinge fixed ideas of space and time, simultaneously asserting Palestinian existence and claiming a future horizon.

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