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VOICES FROM THE UPROOTED: THE VEGETAL NARRATOR AS A MEDIUM OF DIASPORIC TESTIMONY IN *ARḌ AL-KHAYRĀT AL-MALʿŪNAH* BY YASMEEN HANOOSH

Azimatul Mufidah[1]*, **Tafkur Bahril Wahid**[2]

[1], [2] Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Studies of Iraqi diaspora fiction have concentrated on human narrators of trauma, and ecocritical scholarship on Arabic literature has rarely treated plants as narrators of violence and displacement. The few responses to Yasmeen Hanoosh's plant-narrated anthology identify its vegetal voices without examining how they shape testimony. To address this gap, this study examines how vegetal narrators and narrative arrangement shape diasporic testimony in Hanoosh's *Arḍ al-Khayrāt al-Malʿūnah* and how vegetal uprooting relates to human displacement and the transmission or disruption of memory. After reading all thirty-six texts, the authors selected eleven for interpretive close reading, supplemented by three comparative stories. *Phytographia*, testimony, and *iqtilāʿ* 'uprooting' guide analysis of bodily traces, sources of narrative knowledge, and relations of displacement. The findings show that plants mediate violence through bodily involvement, human accounts, and inherited memories. Their narration preserves human speech while conveying judgments shaped by dependence, attachment, and limited understanding. Reverse chronology brings colonial settings into relation with later violence, while disagreement between the opening and closing narrators contests the authority to frame these accounts. Uprootedness connects botanical appropriation, forced displacement, and disruptions of language and memory, with consequences that vary according to coercion, care, and continuing relationships. Diasporic testimony emerges through these exchanges across places and generations, including accounts in which human voices remain present. The study contributes to Arabic diasporic literary scholarship by showing how vegetal narration sustains memories of violence and questions the authority to represent suffering and assign moral value to displacement.

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*Corresponding author. Email: azimatulmufidah.a@mail.ugm.ac.id
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INTRODUCTION

Iraqi diaspora literature after the 2003 invasion bears the responsibility of archiving a long history of violence. These works record memory when survivors lose the capacity or freedom to speak. That historical record includes the Halabja chemical attack in 1988, the international embargo of the 1990s, and the United States invasion in 2003 (see Hanoosh, 2013). Writers in exile respond to this history through realist narratives centered on the human subject, as in Sinan Antoon's novel *Waḥdahā Shajarat al-Rummān (The Corpse Washer)*. Told from the perspective of a corpse-washer in Baghdad, the novel has been examined in studies of Iraqi trauma narratives (Khammas, 2023; Salam & Abu-Shomar, 2024). These narratives raise questions about who can bear witness and how experiences of violence reach others. Violence can destroy witnesses, restrict their speech, and leave experiences only partially available through surviving accounts. This study examines how vegetal narration mediates these experiences of violence in a contemporary Iraqi diasporic text, including situations in which human voices remain present.

The anthology *Arḍ al-Khayrāt al-Malʿūnah* by Yasmeen Hanoosh features first-person vegetal narrators across thirty-six texts. Their bodies, movements, memories, and sources of knowledge vary between stories. Wāzin (2021) places this experiment within a literary history of speaking nonhuman beings, including *Kalīlah wa-Dimnah*, and reads the vegetal voices as masks through which Hanoosh recalls her past and her relation to Iraq. Tondi (2025) documents speaking plants' rhetorical and didactic roles in medieval Arabic floral debates. Hanoosh migrated to the United States at seventeen because of a series of wars and writes from exile. Published in Amman in 2021, the anthology was longlisted in 2022 for the *Jāʾizat al-Multaqā li-al-Qiṣṣah al-Qaṣīrah* (Al Multaqa Prize for the Arabic Short Story) in Kuwait (Portland State University, 2026). It has been examined in particular by the writer and critic Muḥammad Khuḍair (2022), who approaches it through the concept of *al-inbāt wa-al-iqtilāʿ* 'germination and uprooting'.

The present reading draws on three related fields of scholarship. The first is critical plant studies, a transdisciplinary framework that reassesses plant and human-plant relations through questions of agency, ethics, cognition, and language (Lawrence, 2022). Its founding move in literary scholarship was the reconception of the plant as a writing and thinking presence rather than a botanical object (Marder, 2013; Vieira, 2015). Later work pursued that premise along two lines. One recovered vegetal agency from the passive paradigm and mapped the historical representation of flora in literature (Jacobs, 2019; McHugh, 2021). The other developed tools for treating plant utterance as narration proper (Middelhoff & Peselmann, 2023; O'Neill, 2024; Ryan, 2024; Shang, 2022). These studies offer ways to examine vegetal embodiment and narrative roles. Williams's (2018) reading of nonhuman witnesses in *Dusklands* further shows how material objects can unsettle first-person reports of violence. These narrative functions provide a point of comparison for the speaking plants in Hanoosh's anthology, whose bodily involvement and limited knowledge shape their accounts.

The second field is the ecocriticism of Arabic literature, which remains in its early stages and, according to its practitioners, has largely confined itself to nature writing in canonical prose and poetry (Shamim, 2024). The most recent work extends into the environmental literature of the Middle East and North Africa. It traces extractive infrastructure, racial capitalocene poetics, climate futurity, and forms of creaturely solidarity that unsettle the boundary between the human and the nonhuman (Green,

2023; Khayyat, 2023; Olszok, 2023a, 2023b; Tabur, 2023). Modern Arabic prose has also engaged in nonhuman storytelling, as in Libyan novels that grant animals agency and a vulnerable voice under authoritarian rule (Olszok, 2020). Iraqi diaspora fiction has also been read through a more-than-human lens (Sakr, 2018). These approaches provide precedents for examining nonhuman agency in Arabic literature. They establish a context for asking how a vegetal narrator's perspective mediates human experiences of violence and how those relations shape its authority as a witness.

The third field is the study of trauma in Iraqi diaspora fiction, an established area centered on Sinan Antoon and Hassan Blasim and anchored in the human subject (Al-Masri, 2018; Gregory Fox, 2023; Khammas, 2023; Sadek, 2023). Adjacent work examines death, mourning, and the refugee in Iraqi texts (Atia, 2019a, 2019b). Recent work decolonizes trauma theory by exposing the limits of Western frameworks for the experiences of the Global South (Salam & Abu-Shomar, 2024). This echoes critiques of Eurocentric bias (Craps, 2013). Scholarship on Arabic migration literature traces the shift from exilic suffering toward new subjectivities (Sellman, 2018). Research on Iraqi diaspora fiction links the distance afforded by exile to writers' reconsideration of marginalized ethno-religious identities (Hanoosh, 2019). Studies of *mahjar* literature supply historical and critical contexts for migration and narration (ʿAbbās & Najm, 1982; Ḥasan, 1955; Hassan, 2011). Hanoosh's anthology brings these fields together through first-person vegetal voices that mediate violence and displacement. Its narrative arrangement and the limits of its narrators' knowledge define the present study's focus.

Khuḍair's (2022) reading of the anthology through *al-inbāt wa-al-iqtilāʿ* already associates vegetal narration with displacement, memory, and the author's distance from Iraq. The present study develops this point of departure by examining how forms of uprootedness condition witnessing. The contribution of this study lies in its close analysis of the narrators' bodily situations, sources of knowledge, and the transmission of memory. This approach brings critical plant studies into dialogue with testimony and diaspora studies while retaining the differences among the narrated experiences. Diasporic testimony is used here to describe literary narration that mediates experiences of violence through relations of displacement, attachment to places of origin, and the transmission or disruption of memory across places or generations. In Hanoosh's anthology, vegetal narrators recount their own exposure to violence and encounters with human experiences. The diasporic dimension is examined through these narrative relations and does not require every narrator or character to have migrated. Hanoosh's diasporic position provides context, but the textual evidence determines how the term applies to individual stories.

The study asks: How do vegetal narrators and the anthology's narrative arrangement shape diasporic testimony in the selected texts? What relations do the selected stories establish between vegetal uprooting, human displacement, and the transmission or disruption of memory? It argues that vegetal narration communicates experiences of violence through bodily encounters, mediated accounts, and judgments whose authority is contested within the collection. The interpretation of uprootedness follows the connections and differing consequences established by the stories.

METHOD

This study employs an interpretive close reading of Yasmeen Hanoosh's *Arḍ al-Khayrāt al-Malʿūnah: Qiṣaṣ min ʿĀlam al-Nabāt al-ʿIrāqī* (Ḥannūsh, 2021), published by al-Ahliyya in Amman. The Arabic text is the primary source. The analysis examines how

vegetal narrators mediate diasporic testimony and how the collection connects vegetal uprooting, human displacement, and the transmission or disruption of memory. The Arabic edition gives the author's name as Ḥannūsh, so the anthology and its foreword are cited under that form, and her English-language publications are cited as Hanoosh.

After reading all thirty-six texts, the authors selected eleven for their relevance to uprootedness and diasporic testimony, including two frame narratives that guide the reading of the collection. The selection encompasses bodily traces of violence, accounts received from humans, inherited memory, linguistic loss, and colonial relations. Table 1 identifies the focal corpus in the anthology's order. This purposive selection confines interpretation to these texts and their relations within the collection.

Table 1 Focal Corpus of Analysis

No	Story	Narrating plant	Narrative setting	Time marker
1	Lablāb	Ivy	-	-
2	Ṣubbayr	Cactus	Shalamcheh	2020
3	Ballūṭah	Oak	Shekhan	2017
4	Zaytūnah	Olive	Alqosh	2015
5	Damʿat Ṭifl	Succulent-like plant	New York	2001
6	Lawzah	Almond	Halabja	1988
7	Ḥashīsh	Grass	Dujail	1982
8	Khashkhāshah	Poppy	al-Ghamūkah Marsh	1968
9	ʿInabāyah	Grapevine	Kirkuk	1927
10	Chāy Saylānī	Ceylon tea	Zezafoun	1917
11	Zaqqūm	*Zaqqūm* tree	-	*al-azal* 'eternity'

Note. Entries reproduce narrative markers. The 2020 setting of "Ṣubbayr" concerns an imagined nuclear catastrophe. "Lablāb" has no closing place-and-time marker. The three comparative stories discussed below supplement the eleven focal texts.

The analysis draws on *phytographia* to examine how literary narration renders plants' bodily encounters with violence and their traces (Vieira, 2015). Testimony scholarship directs attention to the relation between experiencing violence and transmitting an account, including the gaps that mediation leaves unresolved (Agamben, 1999; Felman & Laub, 1992). Drawing on Khuḍair (2022), the analysis uses *iqtilāʿ* to examine connections between vegetal uprooting and human displacement. Its application to memory and language depends on the relations established in each story. Craps's (2013) critique of trauma theory informs attention to the historical contexts of violence and the limits of transferring concepts between them.

Arabic passages were grouped by narrative function: witnessing by proxy, the plant body as archive, memory transmission, language loss, and colonial critique. To examine how vegetal narration shapes testimony, each passage is read within its story for what the plant experiences, learns from others, remembers, and communicates. Attention to repetition, negation, and direct address connects these functions to the wording of the narrative. The opening and closing frames and the reverse chronology inform interpretation of relations among stories. Connections between vegetal and human uprootedness are assessed through the agents, circumstances, and consequences of displacement, including their effects on attachment and memory.

The interpretation is checked against passages that complicate its claims. Three additional stories provide comparisons. "ʿĀqūl" presents a mobile plant forcibly used to injure a human, "Nabkah" connects transplantation and grafting with contested

judgments of belonging, and "Yāsah" distinguishes relocation under care from subsequent violence. These comparisons test assumptions that plants are immobile, that witnessing excludes bodily involvement in harm, or that relocation necessarily produces loss. Surviving human voices and disagreements among narrators likewise limit generalizations about vegetal testimony.

The analysis was conducted in Indonesian. Indonesian translations were checked against the Arabic, and the English quotations were prepared from and verified against the original. Transliteration follows ALA-LC conventions for Arabic terms and titles, and place names follow common English spellings. The authors approach these voices as literary constructions mediated by narration and translation. Interpretations remain accountable to Arabic wording and narrative context. Historical scholarship contextualizes references to violence, but the conclusions concern their literary representation in the selected texts.

RESULT

Vegetal narration mediates experiences of violence through the plants' bodies, the accounts they receive, and the memory they inherit. Displacement shapes these relations through separation from people and places, the movement of plants, and changes in the language through which experiences are shared. The anthology brings these situated accounts into relation, while its opening and closing voices contest the authority to frame them.

Reverse Chronology, the Frame Narrator, and the Direction of Reading

The anthology moves backward from an imagined nuclear catastrophe marked Shalamcheh 2020, through the British military campaign represented in Zezafoun 1917, to "Khūṣ", marked Amarah 1914, before closing in eternity (Ḥannūsh, 2021, pp. 16, 110–115). Place-and-time markers locate the voices within this arrangement. At the opening, the Ivy claims to make other beings speak in their own condition.

Excerpt 1

لست القصة الإطار بل إطار القصة. [...] أنا الطبيعة نفسها في أصدق صورها. [...] لم آت هنا لاستبعاد الكائنات الحية والترميز لها، بل جئت لأجعلها تنطق بلسان حالها. ما جئت لأكمّل، بل لأنقض. (Ḥannūsh, 2021, p. 13)

Lastu al-qiṣṣah al-iṭār bal iṭār al-qiṣṣah. [...] anā al-ṭabīʿah nafsuhā fī aṣdaq ṣuwarihā [...] Lam āti hunā li-stibʿād al-kāʾināt al-ḥayyah wa-al-tarmīz lahā, bal jiʾtu li-ajʿalahā tanṭiq bi-lisān ḥālihā. Mā jiʾtu li-ukammil, bal li-anquḍ.

I am not the frame story but the frame of the story. [...] I am nature itself in its truest forms [...] I did not come here to exclude living beings and to symbolize them, but I came to make them speak in the voice of their condition. I did not come to complete, but to tear down.

The repeated first-person declarations present the frame's authority as an explicit claim. Its assertion of being nature itself accompanies an act of mediation, making others speak. The surrounding passage gives that act a vegetal form. Unable to stand alone, the Ivy clings to other plants and wraps their stories into a conceptual unity. Readers may

nevertheless rearrange or replant them in other contexts (Ḥannūsh, 2021, pp. 13–14). The frame assembles relations without fixing a single reading. Its reversal of Matthew 5:17 reinforces the Ivy's rejection of representations that reduce living beings to symbols. The closing Zaqqum, however, questions whether this frame conceals the violence it claims to challenge.

Excerpt 2

أنظر من حولك، إطار أنيق من اللبلاب الإنجليزي [...] يتظاهر برفق وحنان الأمومة [...] لكن، أيا ويحك، هل أمعنت النظر في داخله؟ حضارتكم لم تؤطر سوى لعنف الذكورة المنغرس في أرواحكم منذ بدء الكلمة. لم تزد أو تنقص منه شيئًا. (Ḥannūsh, 2021, p. 115)

Unẓur min ḥawlik, iṭār anīq min al-lablāb al-Injilīzī [...] yataẓāhar bi-rifq wa-ḥanān al-umūmah [...] Lākin, ayā wayḥak, hal amʿanta al-naẓar fī dākhilihi? Ḥaḍāratukum lam tuʾaṭṭir siwā li-ʿunf al-dhukūrah al-mungharis fī arwāḥikum mundhu badʾ al-kalimah. Lam tazid aw tanquṣ minhu shayʾan.

Look around you, an elegant frame of English ivy [...] it feigns the gentleness and tenderness of motherhood [...] But, woe to you, have you looked closely into its interior? Your civilization has framed nothing but the violence of masculinity embedded in your souls since the beginning of the word. It has neither added to it nor taken anything from it.

The verb *yataẓāhar* 'feigns' casts doubt on the Ivy's maternal tenderness, and the invitation to look inside its ordered frame exposes the masculine violence it contains. The Zaqqum's claim that civilization has neither added to nor taken from this violence presents it as embedded in human souls since the beginning of the word. By contrasting the frame's cultivated appearance with its contents, the closing voice subjects the Ivy's opening claim of representational authority to scrutiny.

The story "Lawzah" turns scrutiny toward the recognition of suffering. After recounting belated judicial recognition, the Almond questions why its story of Halabja circulates more widely than other accounts of massacre.

Excerpt 3

قصتي متداولة عالميًا أكثر من غيرها [...] وليس لأن موتهم كان أكثر فظاعة وليس لأنه كان أكثر ظلمًا [...] عليكم بدراسة الحكاية بتواليها معكوسة لتدركوا السبب. (Ḥannūsh, 2021, p. 63)

Qiṣṣatī mutadāwilah ʿālamīyan akthar min ghayrihā [...] wa-laysa li-anna mawtahum kāna akthar faẓāʿatan wa-laysa li-annahu kāna akthar ẓulman [...] ʿAlaykum bi-dirāsat al-ḥikāyah bi-tawāliyātihā maʿkūsatan li-tudrikū al-sabab.

My story circulates the world more than others [...] and not because their death was more horrific, and not because it was more unjust [...] You must study the story in its sequence reversed so that you grasp the cause.

The repeated *laysa li-anna* 'not because' rejects the horror and injustice of the deaths as sufficient explanations for the Almond's greater international visibility. Its directive to study the story *in its sequence reversed* makes that unequal circulation a

question for readers to examine. Although the anthology's reverse chronology invites comparison with other accounts of violence, the Almond does not identify what determines which atrocities become widely known. Its testimony thus distinguishes the occurrence of suffering from its subsequent recognition.

The story "Khashkhāshah", set in the al-Ghamūkah Marsh in 1968, similarly questions how death becomes a public image. A participating officer's retrospective account dates the marsh operation before the July 1968 Baʿth coup (Al-Sāʿidī, 2014). The story's *flower of memory* reworks John McCrae's "In Flanders Fields", in which the dead speakers call on the living to continue their struggle (McCrae, 1915). The Poppy exposes the consoling appearance of its own imagery.

Excerpt 4

أحمر، أسود أخضر على بياض الفراغ. وكأننا كنا نعيد نسج ذلك العلم المتماهي في جبهات القتال. وكأننا لم نخلق إلا لنوهم الإنسان بأن لا بأس بالحرب. دعني أخبرك الحقيقة يا هذا، أنت مخدوعنا الوحيد. (Ḥannūsh, 2021, p. 81)

Aḥmar, aswad akhḍar ʿalā bayāḍ al-farāgh. Wa-ka-annanā kunnā nuʿīd nasj dhālika al-ʿalam al-mutamāhī fī jabhāt al-qitāl. Wa-ka-annanā lam nukhlaq illā li-nūhim al-insān bi-anna lā baʾs bi-al-ḥarb. Daʿnī ukhbiruka al-ḥaqīqah yā hādhā, anta makhdūʿunā al-waḥīd.

Red, black, green on the white of the void. As though we were re-weaving that flag that blends into the battlefronts. As though we were created only to delude the human being into thinking that there is no harm in war. Let me tell you the truth, you there, you are the only one we have deceived.

The colors join floral beauty to a flag, giving death a political image. The repeated *as though* sustains an appearance that the direct address exposes as deception. The narrator describes the circulation of water, carbon, oxygen, and bodily matter, then depicts itself growing in the nostril of a dead soldier. This imagined growth connects the flower to the material remains of violence. The story also states that poppies had never grown in these marshes and locates the flower's appearance in Khalid's recollection as he lies dying. A poem read in London before his return to Iraq supplies the image through which his death is narrated (Ḥannūsh, 2021, pp. 80–82). Speaking as an image implicated in beautifying war, the Poppy exposes how commemoration can make the violence it remembers appear acceptable.

The Plant as Witness by Proxy and Its Body as Archive

In "Ballūṭah", Ghanimah is abducted from her fleeing family and passed between captors and slave traders before reaching the farmer's household. The Oak receives this history of forced separation from her before witnessing her execution (Ḥannūsh, 2021, pp. 17–20).

Excerpt 5

غنيمة لم تنطق باسمها لكنها أخبرتني قصتها خلال ساعاتها الأخيرة [...] لست سوى رسول الحكاية، فلم تشكِ غنيمة لأحد غيري تلك الأهوال التي أوصلها منها إليكم، أو لا تنصتون؟ (Ḥannūsh, 2021, p. 17)

Ghanīmah lam tanṭiq bi-smihā lākinnahā akhbaratnī qiṣṣatahā khilāl sāʿātihā al-akhīrah [...] Lastu siwā rasūl al-ḥikāyah, fa-lam

> *tashki Ghanīmah li-aḥad ghayrī tilka al-ahwāl allatī uwṣiluhā minhā ilaykum, aw lā tunṣitūn?*
>
> Ghanīmah did not utter her name, but she told me her story during her final hours […] I am nothing but the messenger of the story, for Ghanīmah complained to no one but me of those horrors that I convey from her to you, or do you not listen?

The movement from *she told me* to *from her to you* identifies Ghanimah as the source of the testimony and the Oak as its intermediary. Knowledge of Ghanimah's captivity depends on her telling. Proximity gives the Oak access to the execution. After her death, it addresses listeners who can receive her story. The question *Do you not listen?* requires that their attention be conveyed. Its claim to be a messenger is complicated by its branch supporting the noose and bearing the resulting injury.

Excerpt 6

> ويحي. ذهبت يا غنيمة، لكن أثر جرح الحبل على فرعي باق إلى اليوم، يلاحقني ويعاتب. (Ḥannūsh, 2021, p. 20)
>
> *Wayḥī. Dhahabti yā Ghanīmah, lākinna athar jurḥ al-ḥabl ʿalā farʿī bāq ilā al-yawm, yulāḥiqunī wa-yuʿātib.*
>
> Woe is me. You have gone, Ghanīmah, but the mark of the rope's wound on my branch remains to this day, pursuing me and reproaching me.

The phrase *to this day* connects the execution to the moment of telling. The wound *pursues* and *reproaches* the Oak, turning a bodily trace into a continuing accusation. Its wish not to have lived so long reflects its distress that its body became the instrument of Ghanimah's execution. The tree's body preserves the injury, and its narration interprets that persistence through self-reproach. Its account carries Ghanimah's received story alongside its own experience of being used against her (Ḥannūsh, 2021, pp. 19–20).

The story "ʿĀqūl" tests the relation between that involvement and intention. A rolling thorn plant is forcibly confined with a prisoner and wounds him without intending to. Some broken thorns remain in the victim when the rest of the plant tries to escape (Ḥannūsh, 2021, pp. 33–34). Movement affords no assured escape from coercion. Both stories locate the plant's injury and its harmful bodily use within acts imposed by human perpetrators.

In "Lawzah", the Almond finds its planter buried in the soil where he planted it. Premature decline and proximity to the dead ground its account in the aftermath of Halabja (Ḥannūsh, 2021, p. 62). It questions the audience's earlier neglect.

Excerpt 7

> كلكم مُلِمّون بهذه التفاصيل الآن، لكنكم لم تعيروها أهمية حين وقعت الواقعة لأنهم أخبروكم بأن العدو قام بالهجوم. أو لعلكم كنتم مثكلين بأمواتكم الكثيرين، إذ يقال إن الآدمي غير قادر على استشعار أكثر من ألم واحد في الآن ذاته. (Ḥannūsh, 2021, pp. 62–63)
>
> *Kullukum mulimmūn bi-hādhihi al-tafāṣīl al-ān, lākinnakum lam tuʿīrūhā ahammīyatan ḥīn waqaʿat al-wāqiʿah li-annahum akhbarūkum bi-anna al-ʿadūw qāma bi-al-hujūm. Aw laʿallakum kuntum muthkalīn bi-amwātikum al-kathīrīn, idh yuqāl inna al-ādamī ghayr qādir ʿalā-stishʿār akthar min alam wāḥid fī al-ān*

dhātihi.

You are all acquainted with these details now, but you did not give them any importance when the event occurred because they told you the enemy had carried out the attack. Or perhaps you had lost so many of your own, for it is said that the human is unable to sense more than one pain at the same time.

The Almond separates knowing *now* from attending to suffering when it occurred. It directly challenges its audience, citing what the audience had been told about an enemy attack and, with *perhaps*, its own losses as another explanation. The phrase *it is said* presents the claim that one can feel only one pain at a time as a received assertion. The tree's proximity supports its account of the attack's aftermath. Its explanations of others' responses include conjecture. Read with Excerpt 3, these distinctions expose a gap between suffering, attention, and later recognition without granting the witness certain knowledge of its audience's motives.

In "Ḥashīsh", the Grass's view during its final hours is limited to a garment, a heel, a sandal strap, and a shadow. Its memory nevertheless extends beyond its brief life to encompass detention, land seizure, exile, and a later trial. The narrator distinguishes memory from lived experience when it states, *Kāna jull dhālika fī al-mustaqbal alladhī ra'athu dhākiratī wa-lam a'ishhu,* 'Most of those events were in a future that my memory saw, but that I did not live through' (Ḥannūsh, 2021, p. 71). Successive embodiments widen its perspectives on the killing, yet it acknowledges, *Lā azāl ajhal mubtaghāhu* 'I still do not understand what it means' (Ḥannūsh, 2021, p. 71). The narrative expands the scope of its testimony but preserves its limited understanding of the violence it recounts.

The story "Ṣubbayr" presents survival after an imagined nuclear catastrophe. Planted to reinforce a border, the Cactus formerly heard Arabic and Persian stories from passing humans. Its retrospective narration now recalls those exchanges from isolation (Ḥannūsh, 2021, pp. 15–16).

Excerpt 8

مات كل بشر هذه البلاد إثر واقعة قذيفة النوى. [...] لم يبق إلا الصبار. [...] أكثرنا أصابه العقم. [...] فسائلنا القليلة عليلة مشوهة الشكل لا تشبهنا البتة. (Ḥannūsh, 2021, p. 16)

Māta kull bashar hādhihi al-bilād ithr wāqi'at qadhīfat al-nawā. [...] Lam yabqa illā al-ṣabbār. [...] Aktharunā aṣābahu al-'uqm. [...] Fasā'ilunā al-qalīlah 'alīlah mushawwahat al-shakl lā tushbihunā al-battah.

All the people of this land died after the nuclear blast. [...] Nothing remained but the Cactus. [...] Most of us have become infertile. [...] Our few shoots are sickly and misshapen; they do not resemble us at all.

The phrase *this land* bounds the reported human deaths geographically. Their deaths end the encounters through which Arabic and Persian stories reached the rooted Cactus. The sequence from *nothing remained but the Cactus* to *most of us have become infertile* and *our few shoots* shows that the survivor's continuity is also uncertain. The shift to collective pronouns widens the testimony from the loss of human storytellers to damage affecting the remaining cacti and their offspring.

The Inheritance of Memory and the Rupture of Language in the Diaspora

In "Zaytūnah", Ilyas brings the narrator's grandfather from a destroyed coastal village. The retained house key, references to the land of Jesus, and the right of return suggest Palestinian displacement without specifying a particular village or departure date (Ḥannūsh, 2021, pp. 21–25).

Excerpt 9

لم أر الأرض التي يتحدث عنها قط [...] لا أعرف أجدادي الذين يثيرون بكاءه [...] أستشعرهم من الحكايات فقط. (Ḥannūsh, 2021, p. 23)

Lam ara al-arḍ allatī yataḥaddath ʿanhā qaṭṭ [...] Lā aʿrif ajdādī alladhīna yuthīrūn bukāʾahu [...] Astashʿiruhum min al-ḥikāyāt faqaṭ.

I have never seen the land he speaks of [...] I do not know my ancestors who stir his weeping [...] I sense them through the accounts alone.

The Olive knows its ancestral homeland and lost ancestors through Ilyas's stories, as expressed in the phrase *through the accounts alone*. It also questions its grandfather's hostility toward foreign plants it has never encountered. Facing fundamentalist violence in Alqosh in 2015, the Olive wonders whether living among those plants in its occupied homeland would have been worse than its present circumstances (Ḥannūsh, 2021, pp. 21–22, 25). This comparison shows how the Olive reassesses its grandfather's judgment in light of the danger it now faces. Its declaration that the new homeland is no home further reveals its uncertain sense of belonging (Ḥannūsh, 2021, p. 23).

When others ask about its origin, Ilyas answers with *an olive that is neither of the east nor of the west*, echoing Qurʾān 24:35 (Ḥannūsh, 2021, p. 22). This geographically evasive reply contrasts with the lost home he repeatedly describes to the tree.

Excerpt 10

يبكي على ماضيه السليب ولا يأبه بالذي يسلبونه منا اليوم هنا. لا يبدو أنه قادر على استيعاب كارثة ثانية رغم أنه يعيشها بحذافيرها اليومية. كارثته الأولى كانت قد استحوذت على فكره بالتمام، لتقيه غلالتها الكثيفة من كل الكوارث اللاحقة. (Ḥannūsh, 2021, p. 22)

Yabkī ʿalā māḍīhi al-salīb wa-lā yaʾbahu bi-alladhī yaslubūnahu minnā al-yawm hunā. Lā yabdū annahu qādir ʿalā-stīʿāb kārithah thāniyah raghm annahu yaʿīshuhā bi-ḥadhāfīrihā al-yawmīyah. Kārithatuhu al-ūlā kānat qad istaḥwadhat ʿalā fikrihi bi-al-tamām, li-taqiyahu ghilālatuhā al-kathīfah min kull al-kawārith al-lāḥiqah.

He weeps over his plundered past and pays no heed to what they plunder from us today here. He does not seem able to take in a second catastrophe although he lives through it in its daily details. His first catastrophe had seized his mind completely, so that its dense veil shields him from all the catastrophes that follow.

The shift from *his plundered past* to what is taken *from us today here* contrasts Ilyas's earlier dispossession with the danger he now shares with the Olive. The *dense veil*

of his first catastrophe suggests that his past loss obscures the present, although *does not seem able* marks this as the Olive's interpretation. The Olive anticipates being left behind if Ilyas returns and qualifies its suspicion that the right of return may be a human deception, with the possibility that *I may be mistaken* (Ḥannūsh, 2021, p. 25). Its dependence on his care shapes its interpretation of his attachment to the lost homeland.

In "Damʿat Ṭifl", the plant travels unintentionally among a family's belongings as they flee Iraq. Its ability to absorb emotions depends on proximity. It loses access when they leave home (Ḥannūsh, 2021, pp. 42–44). Teaching its Arabic name becomes an attempt to share the mother's language with her son.

Excerpt 11 طلبتْ منه أن يكرر فلم يقدر لفظ العين والطاء ولم يفهم معنى الكلمة. أحسستُ بالألم يعتصر صدرها وهي تدرك بأن ابنها ينزلق من عالم كلماتها إلى عالم كلمات الغربة التي لن تتمكن هي من ولوجها ما تبقى من حياتهما معًا. (Ḥannūsh, 2021, p. 44)

Ṭalabat minhu an yukarrir fa-lam yaqdir lafẓ al-ʿayn wa-al-ṭāʾ wa-lam yafham maʿnā al-kalimah. Aḥsastu bi-al-alam yaʿtaṣir ṣadrahā wa-hiya tudrik bi-anna ibnahā yanzaliq min ʿālam kalimātihā ilā ʿālam kalimāt al-ghurbah allatī lan tatamakkan hiya min wulūjihā mā tabaqqā min ḥayātihimā maʿan.

She asked him to repeat, but he could not pronounce the *ʿayn* and the *ṭāʾ* [i.e., *damʿat ṭifl*], and he did not understand the meaning of the word. I felt the pain wringing her chest as she realized that her son was slipping from the world of her words into the world of the words of exile that she would not be able to enter for what remains of their life together.

The child's failure to pronounce *ʿayn* and *ṭāʾ* or understand the plant's name becomes, for his mother, a sign of their diverging linguistic worlds. As both the object of the lesson and the narrator of her distress, the plant conveys the mother's realization that she cannot enter the language her son is acquiring. After his death, her repeated words *hate crime* accompany her search for reassurance that the decision to flee did not lead to his death (Ḥannūsh, 2021, pp. 45–46). The plant's testimony thus connects linguistic separation and later loss through the words and emotions it encounters.

The Colonial Trace and the Pattern of Uprootedness

The closing Zaqqum challenges moral judgments attached to rootedness. Its cursed identity recalls Qurʾān 17:60 as interpreted by Ibn Kathīr (1999, vol. 5). It also reworks the rooted good tree and uprooted bad tree in Qurʾān 14:24–26, which are similes for good and bad words, asking what follows when those valuations extend to displaced people.

Excerpt 12 ألا يجعل هذا أشرارًا من أناسكم المقتلعين من أراضيهم عنوة أيضًا؟ (Ḥannūsh, 2021, p. 114)

A-lā yajʿal hādhā ashrāran min unāsikum al-muqtalaʿīn min arāḍīhim ʿanwatan ayḍan?

Does this not also make villains of those among your people

who are forcibly uprooted from their lands?

The Zaqqum's rhetorical question tests the consequences of turning the contrast between rooted good trees and uprooted bad trees into a moral judgment of people. Those driven from their lands *by force* would then be deemed evil for a condition imposed on them. The question exposes the problem with extending this vegetal metaphor to human displacement in a way that disregards coercion.

The story "Nabkah" complicates this objection within vegetal speech. The grafted narrator rejects human rankings of trees' purity and suffers exclusion because of its mixed branches. It nevertheless calls its lineage noble and describes foreign grafts as damage to its origin (Ḥannūsh, 2021, pp. 35–38). Its body carries the memories of several trees, yet its judgments reproduce distinctions between valued origins and alien additions. Its own experience of exclusion does not prevent it from reproducing the hierarchies it suffers under.

In "Chāy Saylānī", the tea recounts: "*Salabū ajdādanā min arḍ al-Ṣīn wa-zaraʿūhum fī al-sujūn al-musayyajah*" 'They seized our forebears from the land of China and planted them in fenced prisons' (Ḥannūsh, 2021, p. 108). Seizure and planting make cultivation a practice of dispossession. Insisting on its own story, the tea also questions a fictionalized Gertrude Bell's claim of liberation by describing the army's destruction of soil and plants (Ḥannūsh, 2021, p. 107). She consumes it while writing about government and asks, *Now that we have liberated them, how do I convince them of the idea of a single people?* (Ḥannūsh, 2021, p. 110). The consumed commodity becomes a narrator that challenges imperial self-description. Bell's question assumes her authority to define a collective identity for the inhabitants and treats their acceptance as a problem of persuasion.

In "'Inabāyah", Father Robert's cultivation and readings shape the Grapevine's understanding. It adopts his supposedly universal perspective despite its different bodily needs.

Excerpt 13 رغم اختلاف لوني وشكلي وجنسي وحتى صنفي الحيوي فإني كنت أتخذ موقف الرجل الأبيض حول الأشياء لأنه أقنعني بأن نظرته وحدها النظرة الشاملة [...] (Ḥannūsh, 2021, p. 102)

Raghm ikhtilāf lawnī wa-shaklī wa-jinsī wa-ḥattā ṣinfī al-ḥayawī fa-innī kuntu attakhidh mawqif al-rajul al-abyaḍ ḥawl al-ashyāʾ li-annahu aqnaʿanī bi-anna naẓratahu waḥdahā al-naẓrah al-shāmilah [...]

Despite the difference in my color, my form, my sex, even my biological kind, I would adopt the position of the white man on things because he convinced me that his view alone is the comprehensive view […]

The wording *he convinced me* identifies persuasion, while *his view alone* grants exclusive authority. The friar reads aloud beneath the Vine while drinking its wine, joining nourishment, care, and instruction. The Vine acknowledges that it knew of no alternative or opposing forms of knowledge. Its later *kam akhṭaʾtu al-ẓann* 'how mistaken I was' (Ḥannūsh, 2021, p. 103) follows an assertion that the unseen outlasts the visible and recalls its belief that he saw and felt its presence. The disappointment reveals a failure of recognition, although the extent of its rejection of his teachings remains uncertain (Ḥannūsh, 2021, pp. 103–104). The narrative places his arrival from

France alongside territorial partition that disregards local peoples, languages, and histories. This setting connects the plant's acquired outlook to colonial arrangements of land and knowledge.

The backward sequence brings these colonial scenes into comparison with later violence. The tea's seizure and confinement resonate with the land appropriation and exile recounted in "Ḥashīsh". The Grapevine adds the transmission of an authoritative worldview through dependence. Their juxtaposition makes displacement a question of who controls movement and its interpretation, and the different perpetrators and circumstances remain identifiable.

The story "Yāsah" limits any equation of relocation with destruction. Carefully transported and replanted, its narrator flourishes beside the royal family before witnessing their killing (Ḥannūsh, 2021, pp. 74–79). Care establishes the proximity from which it later recounts human appeals cut short by gunfire. The relocation and subsequent violence involve different actions and consequences. Across these accounts, *iqtilāʿ* connects vegetal and human experiences through acts of removal, transfer, and reattachment. Their consequences depend on who moves them, how they are treated, and what follows.

DISCUSSION

The plants' encounters with violence take literary form through *phytographia*, in which vegetal inscriptions enter writing through human interpretation (Vieira, 2015). Wāzin's (2021) reading of the plants as the author's masks identifies this mediation. Critical plant studies supports examining the narrators' varied bodily situations (Marder, 2013; McHugh, 2021), and Shang's (2022) account of nonhuman narrating, acting, and observing clarifies their overlapping roles. The Ivy's manifesto and the Poppy's exposure of how commemoration beautifies war question the uses of plants in human representations. Anthropomorphism enables this questioning through language and judgment. Wounds, growth, and dependence on care give the narrators individual relations to what they recount.

Through phytographic speech, the anthology sustains testimony where violence interrupts human accounts. The Oak receives Ghanimah's story and witnesses her execution, and the Almond awakens among the victims of Halabja. Agamben's (1999) discussion of testimony's constitutive gap, developed from Auschwitz, shows why the limits of this proxy narration matter, since the surviving speaker cannot recover the victim's experience in full. The Oak's account preserves Ghanimah's words alongside its own observations and self-reproach. The Oak's appeal for listeners places reception within testimony, as emphasized by Felman and Laub (1992). The Almond's question about Halabja's international visibility brings the public recognition of suffering into this problem of reception. Karim and Baser (2022) show how survivors' memories of Halabja challenge official commemorative narratives, locating remembrance within continuing disputes over recognition and justice. This context sharpens Almond's question about how an atrocity becomes widely known. The Almond's speculation about enduring successive losses and the Olive's account of Ilyas's absorption in an earlier catastrophe are situated judgments whose uncertainty is part of the testimony.

The plants' capacity to preserve traces is likewise shaped by their exposure and limitations. The scar on the Oak connects its body to the execution in which its branch was used. El Mitry's (2024) discussion of tree imagery on Sethe's scar in *Beloved* compares vegetal representation with the bodily inscription of violence. Pitt's (2023)

study of botanical witnesses at Hiroshima and Chernobyl examines how plants exposed to nuclear catastrophe acquire testimonial significance through human–botanical relations and practices of representation. Hanoosh gives the wounded tree itself a narrating role, turning bodily involvement into an enduring recollection of injury and loss. Vegetal memory is nevertheless uneven, since the Grass knows events beyond its brief life but does not fully understand them. In "Ṣubbayr", the imagined destruction of human life within the narrated landscape leaves the Cactus addressing a reader outside that world. The Cactus's damaged propagation threatens the continuation of vegetal life as well. Literary transmission persists through these vulnerable narrators, although it provides no exhaustive archive.

This function of witnessing extends into the transmission of diasporic memory. In the story "Zaytūnah", ancestral stories shape the Olive's attachment to a homeland it has never seen, offering a vegetal comparison with Hirsch's (2012) account of postmemory. The Olive's conversations with its grandfather give that transmission a fictional genealogy. In Hall's (1998) terms, belonging emerges as a positioning shaped by remembered dispossession and present dependence on Ilyas. Boym's (2001) distinction between restorative and reflective nostalgia explains the tension between Ilyas's hope of return and the Olive's doubts about recovering the lost home. The tree's fear of abandonment complicates its skepticism, which carries its own interest in continued care. In "Damʿat Ṭifl", the child's difficulty pronouncing *ʿayn* and *ṭāʾ* acquires significance through the mother's perception of their diverging linguistic worlds. The plant narrates this separation alongside the family's migration and subsequent bereavement. Human speech remains audible within these exchanges, through which memory is transmitted even as shared language and security become precarious.

The relation between displacement and the authority to interpret experience becomes explicitly colonial in "Chāy Saylānī" and "ʿInabāyah". The tea's ancestral seizure and confinement connect botanical transfer to imperial control. Mastnak et al. (2014) link the displacement of plants and human populations within colonial projects, and Barua's (2023) study of plantations specifies the roles of enclosure and unequal power in organizing plant life. The fictional Bell's question about making the inhabitants she claims to have liberated see themselves as one people extends colonial authority to collective identity. A comparable paternalism appears in Bell's portrayal in *Khātūn Baghdād*, where attachment to Iraq coexists with confidence in British tutelage (Maśko, 2024).

The authority to interpret the world also takes shape through cultivation and religious instruction in "ʿInabāyah", where the Grapevine identifies with a white man and adopts a racialized worldview. The Grapevine's disappointment when the friar fails to recognize it exposes an unequal attachment but does not establish a complete rejection of everything it has learned from him. These stories give *iqtilāʿ* territorial, botanical, and epistemic implications, each with its own mechanism and consequences. Olszok's (2023a) account of oil infrastructure and ecological disturbance in Arabic fiction provides a related comparison for this conjunction of political power and environmental transformation. In Hanoosh's anthology, the plants also transmit an account of the world as part of that relation.

The stories refine Khuḍair's (2022) reading through *al-inbāt wa-al-iqtilāʿ* by showing that the consequences of uprootedness vary across the collection. The story "Yāsah" presents careful relocation followed by flourishing, only to be later disrupted by violence, whereas the story "Nabkah" complicates attachment to origins through grafting and judgments of belonging. The Zaqqum's comparison of uprooted plants and

displaced people contests the moral association of rootedness with goodness. Its closing challenge to the Ivy also subjects the anthology's opening voice to criticism. With this reverse chronology, the framing invites comparison between earlier colonial scenes and later violence while preserving their distinct circumstances. Uprootedness connects the accounts through acts of separation, transfer, and reattachment.

These differences give substance to the decolonial concern with the historical conditions of trauma (Andermahr, 2015; Craps, 2013). Botanical appropriation, communal persecution, war, and racialized violence involve different agents and forms of vulnerability. The anthology preserves their specificity while making their effects on memory and belonging comparable. Its acts of recounting also engage the critique of traumatic unsayability discussed by Visser (2015) and the attention to active testimony in Iraqi fiction developed by Salam and Abu-Shomar (2024). Acknowledging gaps in testimony remains compatible with narrating violence. This narration entails responsibility for mediation. The plants select and interpret human accounts, and Hanoosh composes their voices from exile. Her diasporic position contextualizes that composition but does not guarantee access to every represented experience. Reading these accounts requires distinguishing victims' words, narrators' judgments, and the interpretations drawn from their juxtaposition.

The relation between homeland and distance connects these findings to *mahjar* poetry (ʿAbbās & Najm, 1982). Attachment to origins coexists with danger and uncertain return, giving vegetal form to the changing subjectivities examined in Arabic migration literature (Sellman, 2018). AlRamahi and Al-Shetawi (2025) identify gardens and cultivation in *Salt Houses* as means of sustaining a sense of home after displacement. Hanoosh's Olive voices its dependence on continued care, making belonging depend on present relationships. The journey in "Damʿat Ṭifl" shows how those relationships remain exposed to violence in the destination country.

The comparison with Antoon and Shafak further specifies what vegetal narration contributes. Studies of *The Corpse Washer* examine Iraqi violence through Jawād's human experience and the novel's practices of remembrance (Khammas, 2023; Salam & Abu-Shomar, 2024). Hanoosh distributes accounts across plants whose bodily involvement, inherited knowledge, and judgments differ. The Oak's scar binds narration to an execution, while the Olive's dependence on care shapes its interpretation of return. O'Neill's (2024) reading of the narrating fig tree in Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees* offers a comparison of arboreal mediation of displacement and memory. Hanoosh's collection develops these possibilities through multiple vegetal accounts whose relations are shaped by sequence and framing. Alongside Sakr's (2018) more-than-human reading of Blasim's refugee narratives, these comparisons situate the anthology within existing experiments with nonhuman mediation and identify its organization of witnessing.

The anthology thus gives diasporic testimony a vegetal form through bodily traces, received accounts, and contested judgments. Its narrators mediate experiences of violence from positions shaped by growth, injury, movement, and attachment, and the collection brings those positions into dialogue through its reverse chronology and the tension between its opening and closing voices. Within Hanoosh's writing from exile, these relations connect places and generations, although not every narrated experience is one of migration. The contribution to studies of Arabic diasporic literature lies in showing how this arrangement joins the transmission of memory to the circumstances of its telling. *Phytographia*, testimony, and *iqtilāʿ* clarify those connections, and the stories' differences preserve the unequal consequences of violence and displacement.

CONCLUSION

Hanoosh's *Arḍ al-Khayrāt al-Malʿūnah* shapes diasporic testimony through vegetal narrators' bodily encounters with violence, received accounts, and inherited memories. Their voices preserve accounts after a speaker's death and within continuing exchanges among living people. Bodily traces and dependence on others shape their knowledge, and reverse chronology and conflicting frame narrators contest testimonial authority. *Iqtilāʿ* connects vegetal uprooting, human displacement, and disruptions of memory through separation, transfer, and attachment, with consequences that vary according to coercion and care. These findings contribute to Arabic diasporic literary studies by showing how vegetal voices transmit memories of violence while questioning the authority to represent suffering. They also support critical readings that assess whose experiences nonhuman narrators convey, their sources of knowledge, and the limits of their authority.

These conclusions are grounded in purposive close reading of eleven focal texts and three comparative stories from a single anthology, considered within the complete collection. The selected cases establish differences among narrators, but their wider relevance to Arabic diasporic literature requires comparative investigation. Further research could examine vegetal and other nonhuman narrators across different works, focusing on their access to violence, dependence on human accounts, and transmission of memory. These comparisons would clarify which relations between narrative form, displacement, and belonging recur across texts and which remain specific to Hanoosh's anthology.

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AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

The first author conceived and designed the research framework, collected the data through a comprehensive reading of the literary corpus and its translation into Indonesian, and performed the data analysis. The second author designed the methodology, contributed to the analysis by interpreting the data, and drafted and edited the manuscript. Both authors have read and approved the final version of this manuscript.

DECLARATION OF AI USE

The authors used Claude (Anthropic), ChatGPT (OpenAI), and Gemini (Google) during the preparation and revision of this manuscript. Claude and ChatGPT assisted in evaluating and refining the manuscript's structure and argumentation, editing its language, clarifying conceptual terminology, and checking factual and bibliographic information. Gemini assisted with formatting Arabic transliteration in accordance with ALA-LC conventions. The authors reviewed, edited, and validated all AI-assisted material and take full responsibility for the accuracy and integrity of the final manuscript.

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AUTHORS' SHORT BIODATA

Azimatul Mufidah is a student in the Master's Program in Middle Eastern Cultural Studies, Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Her research interests include the Arabic language, Arabic diaspora literature, and Islamic studies. She can be reached via email at azimatulmufidah.a@mail.ugm.ac.id.

Tafkur Bahril Wahid is a student in the Master's Program in Middle Eastern Cultural Studies, Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. His research interests include translation studies, semiotics, Arabic language and literature, and philology. He can be reached via email at tafkurbahrilwahid@mail.ugm.ac.id; tafkurbw@gmail.com.