

Proposal

Maqluba

A LOVE STORY UNDER WAR

Sari Bashi ©

“Maqluba” – upside-down in Arabic – is a Palestinian dish of chicken, rice and vegetables that, after cooking, you turn upside down onto a serving platter. From that point on, there’s no going back.

MAQLUBA. A LOVE STORY UNDER WAR is a love story and memoir told in two voices, about a man and a woman who are separated by everything but unable to let go of each other.

Osama is a Palestinian professor, yearning for freedom, who lives and teaches in Ramallah but is trapped in the city, unable to leave it for fear of not being permitted to return.

Sari is an Israeli-American lawyer and ultramarathon runner. Her passion for freedom of movement drives her legal battles against the Israeli authorities and leads her to transverse the scarred and beautiful landscape of the West Bank.

**The story of a man and a woman who became outlaws
after their love went beyond the bounds of the law.**



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- **QUIÉN, LA AUTORA:** [Sari Bashi](#), **directora de programas del Human Rights Watch**. Antes de unirse a Human Rights Watch fundó y dirigió **Gisha** (grupo israelí pro derechos palestinos), ha sido profesora de derecho internacional y humanitario en Yale y en la universidad de Tel Aviv, y ha trabajado como corresponsal de Associated Press, da conferencias en Israel y en el extranjero, escribe artículos de opinión, se entrevista con frecuencia a los medios internacionales y nacionales y es especialista en el conflicto Israel-Palestina no sólo por formación y experiencia, sino por vivencia personal: ella es judía israelí-estadounidense y su pareja nació en Gaza y es musulmán.
- **DERECHOS VENDIDOS:** Italia (Volland), Holanda (Orlando).
- **QUÉ:** La historia de amor entre una abogada de derechos humanos israelí-americana con un profesor palestino nacido en un campo de refugiados de Gaza.
- **LOS 2 PERSONAJES:** Sari, una abogada de derechos humanos judía israelí-estadounidense que comienza un amor prohibido con su cliente, Osama, un profesor palestino de educación científica y de familia musulmana que creció en un campo de refugiados en Gaza. No hay espacio para que exista su relación: Osama no puede entrar en Israel para ver a Sari en Tel Aviv, y es ilegal que Sari visite a Osama en Ramallah, por lo que los personajes crean un no-espacio donde poderse amar.
- **CÓMO:** Las voces de los dos personajes se alternan en los capítulos, cada uno explicando la historia de amor desde su punto de vista, en los que el lector asiste a todas las fases de la historia de amor.
- **CUÁNDO:** El texto habla de hechos reales que ocurrieron entre 2010 y 2014 en Tel Aviv, Ramallah, Londres y Gaza. Las descripciones de la guerra en Gaza, la actividad militar israelí en Cisjordania y la vida diaria en Israel y Palestina ofrecen un contexto al drama de hoy.
- **EL PREMIO:** El libro en hebreo fue publicado en Israel por Asia Publishers en la primavera de 2021, con muy buena acogida de lectores y crítica, y en febrero de 2022 ganó el premio del Ministerio de Cultura de Israel, momento en lo que la autora empezó a trabajar en una edición revisada y contextualizada y la hizo traducir entera al inglés (es el texto que puedo enviarte).
- **GÉNERO:** El libro es una historia de amor con carga política donde se fusiona ficción, la no ficción más literaria y la memoir.
- **PROMOCIÓN E INTERÉS MEDIÁTICO:** El perfil de la autora es impresionante. Y ella no sólo aceptaría todo tipo de entrevistas por la promoción sino que quiere colaborar y es una actividad que conoce, que hace constantemente. Le entrevistan frecuentemente en medios nacionales e internacionales y tiene amigos como el autor Colum McCann o el columnista de *New York Times* Nick Kristof que podrían ayudar con alguna frase relevante para la novela.
- **TARGET:** Desde lectores que disfruten con historias de amores imposibles como la de Romeo y Julieta hasta aquellos que quieran aproximarse al conflicto entre Israel y Palestina sin tener que pasar por libros de historia o ensayos, pero desde un punto de vista igualmente riguroso y real.
- **VISIÓN PRIVILEGIADA:** El intento de los personajes de mantener su relación en circunstancias casi imposibles expone a los lectores a la intimidad, alienación y dominación que la ocupación militar ha creado entre palestinos e israelíes. El texto también ofrece una visión extraña y privilegiada de las sociedades israelí y palestina: mujeres mayores de Gaza que se tiñen el pelo de rojo brillante y explican chistes picantes; mujeres israelíes embarazadas de izquierdas con la esperanza de dar a luz a niñas que no lucharán en el ejército israelí; y un Osama con remordimiento planeando comprar un informe médico ficticio que le dará un permiso para entrar en Israel para pedir perdón a Sari después de una ruptura. A través de Osama, Sari comienza a aprender árabe, la lengua materna que su padre dejó de lado después de huir de Irak cuando era pequeña. A través de Sari, Osama vislumbra al Israel que una vez conoció como trabajador.

Proposal Contents:

I. Content.....	2
II. Author	3
III. Market.....	5
IV. Promotion.....	5
A. Comparable books.....	8
B. Potential Endorsers	10
V. Structure and Synopsis	10

I. Content

Maqluba: Upside-Down Love is a love story told in two voices, by a Palestinian professor who is trapped in the West Bank city of Ramallah and an Israeli-American lawyer and long distance runner who represents him before the Israeli authorities, as he seeks to travel between Ramallah and the outside world. The chapters are a dialogue between the two characters and between the societies to which they belong, but do not belong – Palestinian and Israeli.

Osama was born in Gaza and moved to the city of Ramallah 25 years ago as a university student. He is trapped in Ramallah, because the Israeli authorities don't recognize his residency in Ramallah. He is afraid to leave the city, for fear of being arrested at a checkpoint and forcibly removed to Gaza. He longs to travel abroad for study and work and to visit his mother, the sea, and the remnants of his childhood in the Jabalia Refugee Camp in the Gaza Strip.

Sari is an Israeli-American human rights lawyer and ultra-marathon runner whose passion for freedom of movement leads her to cross the scarred, beautiful landscape of the West Bank and to take on the Israeli military authorities in court battles on behalf of Osama and others subject to travel restrictions.

The book is the Romeo-and-Juliet story of their effort to find their place in Israeli and Palestinian societies and to find their way back to each other. Through Osama, Sari begins to learn Arabic, the mother tongue that her father cast aside after fleeing Iraq as a child. Through Sari, Osama glimpses the Israel he once knew as a laborer on Israeli construction sites and a prisoner in Israeli

military jails. The characters' attempt to maintain their relationship in nearly impossible circumstances exposes readers to the intimacy, alienation and domination that the half-century long military occupation of Palestine has created between Palestinians and Israelis.

Readers also experience a rare glimpse into Israeli and Palestinian societies: elderly women in Gaza who dye their hair bright red and tell jokes about sex; left-wing pregnant Israeli women hoping to give birth to girls who won't fight in the Israeli military; and a remorseful Osama scheming to purchase a fictitious medical report that will get him a permit to enter Israel in order to apologize to Sari after a break-up.

“Maqluba” means “upside down” in Arabic, after the traditional Palestinian chicken-and-rice dish whose pot, once the cooking is completed, is turned upside down onto a serving platter. The characters discover that important aspects of their own and each other's societies are upside-down and leave no space for them to love each other. They decide to create a non-space space in which their relationship can exist.

The book melds the genres of literary non-fiction and memoir with a politically-charged love story. It is written as alternating chapters by the two characters, each telling the love story from his or her point of view, vying for the sympathy of the reader during periods of break-ups and using the writing of the book to communicate with each other and to confess, accuse, apologize and reconcile. The Hebrew language book was published in Israel by Asia Publishers in the spring of 2021, to favorable reviews. **In February 2022, Maqluba won a literary award from the Israeli Ministry of Culture.** The author has translated the complete manuscript into English and made some adaptations to make the text more accessible to foreign readers (93,000 words).

The content of the book, including descriptions of war in Gaza, Israeli military activity in the West Bank and ordinary life in Israel-Palestine will be of particular interest as readers across the world seek to understand the root causes of the escalation in Israel-Palestine that began on October 7, 2023. Events in the region since October 7 carry the message that Israeli Jews and Palestinians are inherently at odds with each other. Maqluba's real-life story of a resilient Israeli-Palestinian love relationship challenges that message, offering an alternative, hopeful narrative grounded in the possibility of a different political and social reality.

II. Author

Sari Bashi is an internationally renowned human rights lawyer, writer, blogger and ex-journalist who frequently appears in major English language outlets such as [CNN](#), [MSNBC](#), [BBC](#), [ABC](#), the [New York Times](#), the [New Yorker](#), [NPR](#), the [New York Review of Books](#), [PBS Newshour](#) and others. Interviews with her also have a second life on social media, such as this [Democracy Now! interview](#) excerpt posted on Youtube and Tiktok, with 8 million views. In the wake of the crisis in Israel-Palestine, she has become a sought-after commentator in US and other Western media, and a number of recent media interviews have focused on her personal story that is the background for

Maqluba. Bashi has recently deepened relationships with prominent US media figures such as [Chris Hayes](#), [Christine Amanpour](#), [Wolf Blitzer](#), [Nick Kristof](#) and others, all of whom have featured her in their coverage of the Israel-Palestine crisis in recent months.

She is a graduate of Yale College and Yale Law School, clerked on the Israeli Supreme Court, and co-founded and directed [Gisha](#), a ground-breaking Israeli human rights organization that has become a leading voice on Israeli policy toward Gaza. Bashi has also taught international humanitarian law at Yale Law School and Tel Aviv University and won awards for her work with Gisha. She is currently the Program Director for Human Rights Watch, in charge of the flagship human rights organization's 300 research staff members doing research and advocacy in 80 countries around the world.

She is also a prominent ultra-marathon runner inside Israel and holds the record for the longest race (134 miles) completed by a woman in Israel. She has been [profiled](#) in the [news media](#) for the connection she draws between long-distance running and freedom of movement.

Between 2019 and 2022, Bashi wrote a popular [blog](#), under the pen name of Umm Forat, in the [Hebrew](#) and English versions of Haaretz, Israel's paper of record, about her life as an Israeli Jew raising two children in the West Bank city of Ramallah. The English-language blog posts on Haaretz drew between 5,000 and 25,000 online readers, and a small but dedicated group of 850 readers have signed up to receive regular updates from the blog's [web site](#), many of whom would form part of the core audience for this book.

Bashi is an expert on the issues that arise in the book: the bureaucracy of the Israeli occupation, Israeli policy toward Gaza and the West Bank, the approach of the Israeli legal system to the Palestinian territory. Her personal experience, living on the seam line between Israeli and Palestinian societies, gives her a rare perspective.

Through her background as a foreign correspondent for The Associated Press in Jerusalem and her years working closely with journalists covering Israel/Palestine, she has an extensive network of journalists, editors and producers who can be approached to publicize the book.

While most of the publicity surrounding the Hebrew language book has been in Hebrew, Haaretz's English edition prominently ran a [profile](#) of Bashi and the book, which led to numerous requests from journalists to see the English version when ready. Foreign language outlets in [Japanese](#), [Dutch](#), [Spanish](#) and Norwegian have run profiles of her also mentioning the Hebrew-language book. A number of organizations have hosted Bashi in [webinars](#) to discuss the book, even though it is not yet in English, indicating a ready market of influencers who would be interested in an English version. Her personal and professional story are of particular interest, as the desire to understand the root causes of the crisis in Israel-Palestine grows.

III. Market

This book is attractive to a number of target audiences.

First, the book has universal appeal as a Romeo-and-Juliet type love story, made more interesting by its grounding in reality and the controversy that its publication will likely arouse. At a simple, human level, it tells the story of a man and woman, at a midpoint in their lives, who meet, fall in love, and struggle with their fears, insecurities and passion for each other. The alternating chapters give readers two perspectives into the same love story, as the characters present their sides of the story, tell each other's stories and use the writing of the book itself to communicate, settle scores, and reconcile. They navigate the ordinary struggles of two people trying to build a relationship under extraordinary circumstances, in which their relations is taboo, illegal and seemingly impossible. Readers will enjoy the book and recommend it to their friends, because it's a fresh, honest, compelling and heartwarming love story.

Second, the book has broad appeal to readers interested in understanding the situation in Israel/Palestine and in particular the relationship between Israeli Jews and Palestinians from Gaza, in light of the current crisis. The narrative weaves in the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the bureaucracy of military control over the West Bank and Gaza and the growing chasm that separates Israeli and Palestinian societies. The "Osama" chapters offer readers a rare look into Palestinian society, both in Gaza and the West Bank, the small details of everyday life and the insecurity of living under military rule. The "Sari" chapters give readers access to the small Jewish Israeli community that opposes the occupation of Gaza and the West Bank and the military bureaucracy that governs Palestinians' lives. There is unprecedented interest in understanding the root causes of the current escalation in Israel-Palestine, and the book's descriptions of life in Gaza, Israel and the West Bank helps satisfy that curiosity.

Third, the book is of interest to niche audiences such as those involved in interfaith dialogue and relationships, peacemaking and racial justice. It addresses issues of identity, privilege, and multiculturalism. It is a book about struggling against oppressive military rule.

Lastly, the publication of the Hebrew version of the book and revelation of the identity of the blogger, "Umm Forat" have created a market for the English version by generating interest among journalists internationally, including American, Norwegian, French, Japanese, Dutch and German journalists, some of whom have published profiles of Bashi highlighting her personal story, who have expressed interest in covering the launch of the book in English and the true story it describes.

IV. Promotion

In addition to working with the publisher to publicize the book, I would promote it through the following avenues.

1. *Media coverage:* There is considerable interest among journalists about a Jewish Israeli woman living in Ramallah with her Palestinian partner. Over the years, even before I began writing the blog in 2019, I received numerous requests for interviews about my personal life, all of which I declined, including for features in *The New York Times*, HBO, BBC and NPR. I will agree to interviews around the time the book is published, and the expected coverage will drive book sales. In addition to those who have contacted me over the years asking for interviews, as a former AP reporter and as a spokesperson for human rights organizations in Israel, and Human Rights Watch, I have longstanding connections with journalists in key news organizations. I will approach these journalists to suggest feature stories about my circumstances or to ask that they connect me with their colleagues responsible for book reviews. For example, I have good professional relationships with Wolf Blitzer (host of CNN Situation Room); Chris Hayes (MSNBC podcast and news show host); Tim Franks (Presenter, Newshour, BBC World Service); Nick Kristof (Columnist, New York Times); Stephen Erlanger (Chief Diplomatic Correspondent for Europe, New York Times), Sheera Frankel (Cybersecurity reporter, New York Times); Isaac Chotiner (New Yorker staff writer); Dan Ephron (Executive Editor, Foreign Policy); Ethan Bronner (Israel bureau chief, Bloomberg News); Nancy Updike (producer, This American Life (NPR)); William Booth (London Bureau Chief, Washington Post); Laura King (Washington correspondent, Los Angeles Times); Jodi Rudoren (Editor-in-Chief, The Forward); Karin Laub (Middle East news director, Associated Press); Lulu Garcia-Navarro (host of NPR's Weekend Edition Sunday) Daniel Estrin (Jerusalem Correspondent, NPR); Don MacIntyre (British freelance journalist); Peter Beinart (Editor at Large, Jewish Currents) Peter Beaumont (Foreign Affairs Editor, Observer); Dina Kraft (Opinion Editor, Haaretz in English); Ron Kampeas (Washington Bureau Chief, Jewish Telegraphic Association) and many others.
2. *Podcast Interviews:* I have connections with the hosts of the following podcasts or with their colleagues, and I believe it is likely they would interview me about the book: Why Is This Happening (Chris Hayes); Haaretz weekly podcast (English translation of Israeli daily); Occupied Thoughts (Foundation for Middle East Peace); +972 Magazine's Podcast; **The Branch (Hadassah)**; The Tel Aviv Review, PeaceCast (Americans for Peace Now); Rethinking Palestine (al Shabaka); UnOrthodox (Tablet Magazine); Palestine Solidarity (Katie Miranda), Undaunted (Telos), and many others. Listeners of these podcasts overwhelmingly belong to the target audiences of the book: liberal English-speakers highly interested in the situation in Israel/Palestine and seeking content dedicated to it.
3. *Blog readership:* Until recently, I wrote a popular [blog](#) in Hebrew and English, under the pen name Umm Forat, about raising my children in Ramallah. Maqluba is a kind of prequel to the story told in the blog, and it answers questions that readers have asked about how my partner and I came to be together. The blog attracted considerable attention since its launch in December 2019. Each English-language post has been read

by an average of 14,000 people (between 5,500 and 25,000 readers for each post), and 850 people signed up to receive the blog directly to their e-mail addresses. The liberal-leaning *Haaretz* newspaper hosted the blog. *Haaretz* readers fall well within the target audience for *Maqluba* – English speakers who take a special interest in Israel-Palestine, many of whom live in the United States, and who have the financial means to purchase an online subscription to the newspaper.

4. *Events and Readings*: In addition to venues that I would develop together with the publisher, I would approach the following venues for readings and events related to the book:
 - a. House of Yes, Brooklyn, NY. One of New York City's most popular nightclubs and event venues. My brother is a part owner.
 - b. Progressive synagogues and Jewish Community Centers (JCCs), especially in the New York area, to which some I have existing ties. I have given lectures in the past in these venues, and attendees fall strongly within the target audiences for the book – liberal Jewish Americans deeply concerned about Israel and interested in different perspectives about the situation in Israel/Palestine.
 - c. Jewish book festivals in cities such as [Washington, D.C.](#), [Rochester](#), [Pomona, CA](#) and others, that sponsor author events as well as promote book sales on site.
 - d. Participation in the [Jewish Book Council](#) network, which solicits events and readings, including opportunities for book sales, at Jewish Community Centers throughout the United States.
 - e. U.S. nonprofits addressing Israel/Palestine, including human rights, policy and peace groups. Such as J Street, Human Rights Watch, the Foundation for Middle East Peace, If Not Now, the New Israel Fund and other groups that would host readings. I have close ties to many of them.
 - f. English language bookstores in Palestine and Israeli bookstores with large English-speaking readerships.
5. *Social Media*. I will promote the book on my Twitter and Facebook accounts. I currently have 15,000 followers on Twitter and 3,000 friends on Facebook, which I use for professional purposes. I also have good relationships with leading social media figures relevant to Israel/Palestine, many of whom are professional colleagues and friends who would be receptive to requests to amplify the book.
6. *Author website*. I will upgrade and update my web site (www.ummforat.com), with information about the book, including links to purchase *Maqluba*.
7. *Email lists*. My dedicated blog site, www.ummforat.com, has a list of 850 readers who registered to receive updates on new blog posts, with an email open rate of 65 percent on average, indicating a small but loyal following.
8. *Institutional and bulk sales, additions to school and university curricula*. With permission from the publisher, I will approach institutions that teach about tolerance and Israel/Palestine, such as Reframing Israel, Americans for Peace Now, Meretz-USA, the

New Israel Fund, ALLMEP, If Not Now, J Street, Encounter and others, and offer them bulk deals to buy the books for their members, supporters, participants in trips and programs, and other stakeholders. I will also approach some of the many academics I know teaching about Israel/Palestine in universities, to suggest including the book in their reading lists. I will write to university libraries, either through scholars whom I know at each institution or independently, and invite them to purchase the book for their Israel/Palestine or Near East collections.

9. *Book Clubs*. A number of nonprofit organizations, churches, synagogues and Jewish community institutions have book clubs, including those focusing on Israel-related issues. For example, Telos, a peacemaking organization with a significant following among the progressive Evangelical Christian community in the United States, has a book club and access to leaders of large churches who run book clubs (as they did for Colm McCann's recently published book, *Apeirogon*), The leaders of Telos are close friends and colleagues.
10. *Film potential*. The book has strong potential to be made into a movie, and if so, the film would drive book sales tremendously.

A. Comparable books

Maqluba competes in the categories of love story, memoir, and historical or political books on Israel/Palestine. It has commonalities with a number of books that have sold well, including:

1. [All the Rivers](#), Dorit Rabinyan (Penguin Random House 2017). A novel about a love story between an Israeli woman and a Palestinian man who meet in New York City, translated from Hebrew. *Maqluba* also tells a story of forbidden love, but its plot takes place inside the pressure cooker of Israel/Palestine, heightening the tension for the characters, and the events described in it are true.
2. [Apeirogon, A Novel](#), Colum McCann (Penguin Random House 2020). A novel based on the true story of a Palestinian father whose daughter was killed by Israelis and an Israeli father whose daughter was killed by Palestinians. It is written as a series of short chapters that weave in and out between the story of the two fathers and the broader story of the region. *Maqluba* also uses literary techniques to communicate a true story, but it uses direct narration by the characters, with the suspense regarding the fate of the forbidden relationship.
3. [Born a Crime: Stories from a South African Childhood](#): St, Trevor Noah (Penguin Random House 2016). A series of moving, funny and gripping autobiographical stories about a mixed race child growing up in Apartheid South Africa. *Maqluba* also uses humor and the language of absurdity to describe a love relationship that is outlawed in Israel-Palestine.

4. [Self-Portrait in Black and White: Unlearning Race](#), Thomas Chatterton Williams (Norton 2019). A series of essays that use memoir to explore identity and racial categories. *Maqluba* also uses memoir to explore identity, but it does so through the vehicle of a love story, in two voices that serve as a dual memoir.
5. [The Color of Water](#), James McBride (Penguin Random House 2006). A memoir about a black man's love for his white mother and his struggle to understand the worlds she inhabited. *Maqluba* is a two-person memoir from a different context that, like *The Color of Water*, tells the story of deep love and explores broader issues of mixed identities, conflict and belonging.
6. [Palestinian Walks, Forays into a Vanishing Landscape](#), Raja Shehada (Scribner 2008). Essays describing the author's experience walking in Palestine to describe the changing landscape of the West Bank. *Maqluba's* descriptions of long runs through the West Bank and the personal stories of the characters give readers a window into the conflict there, as well as the situation of Palestinians living in Gaza.
7. [My Promised Land: The Triumph and Tragedy of Israel](#), Ari Shavit (Penguin Random House 2013) A personal narrative and family history are vehicles for telling a broader historical story about Israel. *Maqlouba* also uses personal narrative and family history, but of two characters – Israeli and Palestinian – to tell a dual history, woven into the love story.
8. [When We Were Arabs: A Jewish Family's Forgotten History](#), Massoud Hayoun (The New Press 2019). A memoir that uses the author's family history to tell a broader story of Jewish-Arab identity. *Maqluba* uses a love story to tell a broader story about the situation in Israel-Palestine and also weaves in struggles over how Arab Jews view their identities.
9. [Beyond the Wall: A Love Story](#), Mya Guarnieri (forthcoming, Indiana University Press 2025). A memoir about a relationship between an Israeli-American Jewish woman and a Palestinian Muslim man that ends in divorce. The factual basis for this story, which will presumably be written from a single, rather than double, perspective, has similarities with *Maqluba*, and there could be interesting synergies between the two books.

B. Potential Endorsers

1. Colum McCann (bestselling author of *Let the Great World Spin* and *Apeirogon*, colleague)
2. Nick Kristof (New York Times columnist, colleague)
3. Chris Hayes (MSNBC presenter, colleague)
4. Ethan Bronner, (Bloomberg News Senior Editor and former New York Times Jerusalem bureau chief, colleague)
5. Peter Beinart (prominent American Jewish writer and journalist, colleague)

6. Raja Shehada (prominent Palestinian author and human rights lawyer, colleague)
7. Aharon Barak (former Israeli Supreme Court President, professor, friend)
8. Omar Dajani (Palestinian law professor and activist, friend)
9. Daniel Levy (former Israeli negotiator, president of US Middle East Project, friend)
10. Naomi Chazan (former Israeli Member of Knesset, former president, New Israel Fund, colleague)
11. Lara Friedman (President, Foundation for Middle East Peace, colleague)
12. Daoud Kattib (prominent Palestinian journalist and author, colleague)
13. Jeremy Ben-Ami (President of J Street, colleague)
14. Ken Roth (former executive director of Human Rights Watch, colleague)

V. Structure and Synopsis

The book is composed of alternating chapters written by and in the voices of the two main characters, Sari and Osama, in dialogue with each other. Through the interaction between the “Sari” chapters, originally written in Hebrew, and the “Osama” chapters, originally written in Arabic, readers embark on a journey into the budding relationship between the characters and their experiences in Tel Aviv, Ramallah, London and Gaza. The book begins with the characters introducing themselves, each other and their situations: Sari, an Israeli-American Jewish human rights lawyer has fallen into forbidden love with her client, Osama, a Palestinian professor of science education from a Muslim family, who grew up in a refugee camp in the Gaza Strip. Osama is trapped in the West Bank city of Ramallah, because the Israeli authorities do not recognize his right to live in Ramallah, and so if he leaves, he will not be able to return. There is no space for their relationship to exist – Osama cannot enter Israel to see Sari in Tel Aviv, and it is illegal for Sari to visit Osama in Ramallah – so the characters create a non-space space in which they can love each other.

Through Sari, Osama re-discovers the Hebrew he learned as a young man, as a prisoner, jailed in Israel for resisting the military occupation and as a worker at Israeli construction sites, where he earned money for his family beginning in his teen years. Sari’s association with Israel, the country preventing him from leaving Ramallah, from visiting his mother and from seeing the sea, strains his feelings for her and imports an unequal power dynamic into the relationship: Sari can travel whenever she wants. Sari chooses when to visit him in Ramallah. Sari can visit her mother whenever she wants. Osama cannot enter Israel to visit Sari. He has never met her friends nor seen her apartment. He has never met most of his nieces and nephews in Gaza. He has not seen his childhood home in 17 years.

A hike to a West Bank spring in which Sari speaks Hebrew to gun-toting Israeli hikers; a conversation with Sari’s close friend who does reserve duty at Israeli military checkpoints; Osama’s guilt over his failed first marriage – break the pair apart.

But they are drawn back to each other and try again, this time experimenting with the possibility of living together. Sari buys a car and begins spending more time with Osama in Ramallah, using back roads to enter the areas off-limits to Israeli Jews. A long-distance runner, she navigates the scarred landscape of the West Bank in her morning runs, evading Israeli soldiers who block her path, Israeli settlers who trail her, and Palestinian village residents who suspect her of being a settler. She begins to learn Arabic, the mother-tongue of her father, who left Iraq as a child in the 1950s and cast off his Arab identity to become Israeli. She wants to have children. She continues to petition the Israeli military to allow Osama to live in Ramallah.

Osama experiments with the consequences of having Sari as a partner. He worries what colleagues and friends will say. He is trying to advance professionally but is frustrated by the limitations of the university where he works and Israel's refusal to allow him to travel to conferences and meetings abroad. His mother gets a rare permit to visit the West Bank, and he is thrilled, but also saddened at the years he missed and the changes time has wrought on her. He fears the strength of his love for Sari and the implications of having children with an Israeli Jewish woman. He is granted a "humanitarian" permit to leave the West Bank for a vacation in Jordan with Sari, but tensions between the two grow. They break up.

Sari returns to Tel Aviv, and Osama plans to leave Palestine for work abroad. They describe their grief in alternating chapters, which diverge as Osama regrets the break-up, and Sari struggles to put the relationship behind her. Sari tries to re-find her place in Israeli society, where her political views make her an outsider. Osama reconnects to the things he loves about the West Bank and decides to try to win Sari back. Unable to go to see her, he sends emissaries and hatches a plan to buy a fake medical report, in order to get a permit to enter Israel for medical care, so that he can apologize to Sari. Sari eventually agrees to try again, and the couple reconciles.

Soon after, Osama is granted a rare permit to visit Gaza, following the death of his sister there. He re-acquaints with family and friends and also notices how much he has changed since he lived there as a child. Upon his return from Gaza, he accompanies Sari to Tel Aviv and sees her apartment, her surroundings. The two resume trying to build a life together in Ramallah. Osama gets a permit to travel to a conference in London and manages to visit Gaza on the way back.

The vibrancy of life among his family and friends there, together with the travel restrictions and economic hardship they face, make him realize how different his life in the West Bank has become. As he packs to leave, the crossings are closed, and he struggles with the Hamas, Egyptian, Jordanian and Israeli authorities to return to the West Bank. He finally arrives in Ramallah, but vows to leave the West Bank. Big and small events strain the relationship: Sari loses her car key on a run in an Israeli forest, and Osama cannot come to her to bring the spare key; war breaks out in Gaza, and Osama worries for his family; Osama is denied re-entry into the West Bank, following another professional trip to London. The couple seems on the verge of breaking up again, this time over the issue of whether or not to have children.

Sari gets pregnant. Osama is terrified. Their daughter is born in a Tel Aviv hospital, two months premature, and Osama is not able to attend the birth nor visit his newborn daughter during her extended hospital stay. But the two maintain their love and stay together, as readers learn from the book's epilogue.

An appendix to the book includes a recipe for Maqluba, the upside-down chicken-and-rice dish described in the story.

Woven into the personal story are descriptions of life in Israel/Palestine: court battles on behalf of Palestinian clients seeking to travel; the bombing of Gaza; Israeli soldiers at checkpoints; and the points of connection between Israeli and Palestinian societies, as expressed through language, food, customs and shared history.

The manuscript chronicles true events that took place in the West Bank, Gaza and Israel, primarily between 2010 and 2014. Some details and most names have been changed to protect privacy and minimize the risks of retribution. It is composed of approximately 140 chapters, each ranging in length from 100 to 2,000 words. The English translation is 93,000 words.

