

## **Mapping Spaces, Identities, and Ideologies in *The Parisian* (2019)**

Fadwa Kamal Abdel Rahman  
Ain Shams University, Egypt

### Abstract

*The Parisian* (2019) is Isabella Hammad's debut novel. It provides a dynamic spatial representation of a transitional era and a history that was unfolding and changing the face of the earth at the critical time between the two World Wars. Adopting the realistic tradition of nineteenth-century novelists, Isabella Hammad manages to provide a textual cartography of the places she dealt with in the Levantine and in France, mapping alongside the evolving sense of identity in the wake of drastic political, social, and cultural changes. By depicting those parallel worlds, the text dissects the Nabulsi society and reveals the heterogeneity that underlies its superficial homogeneity. It also introduces those spaces, specially Nablus, discursively bringing out their many facets through multifocalization. This paper aims at showing how the text underscores both the subjective experiential sense of place and the objective analytical and ideological sense of how place materializes the fabric of immanent relations of power. This is done through a geocritical approach that links together the literary representation with the lived spatial referent in ways that help readers understand a lot about the past and the present of this part of the world.

*Keywords:* Isabella Hammad, geocriticism, history, postcolonial literature, identity, Nablus

*The space in which we live, which draws us out of ourselves, in which the erosion of our lives, our time and our history occurs, the space that claws and gnaws at us, is also, in itself, a heterogeneous space...we live inside a set of relations.*

(Foucault, 1986, p. 23).

### **Introduction and Literature Review**

Literature Plays a very important role as a treasure box of culture. By the sheer power of narrative, identities are (re)formed, spaces are (re)defined and ideologies are (re)shaped. Edward Said (1994) once said that “the main battle in imperialism is over land, of course; but when it came to who owned the land, who had the right to settle and work on it, who kept it going, who won it back, and who plans its future – these issues were reflected, contested and even for a time decided in narrative” (p. xiii). Accordingly, Said lamented that “the Palestinian narrative was lacking in literature” (Abulhawa, 2010, p. xi). It is evident that some important writers wrote about the Palestinian issue and highlighted its history. Among those are Ghassan Kanafani, Mourid Barghouti, Radwa Ashour, and Elias Hoary. However, all their great works were written in Arabic and were not widely read outside the Arab World. A new trend of writers from Arab origins and Western nationalities began to address this lack and provide texts written in English and gaining recognition and acclaim in the English-speaking world and elsewhere. Among those are Suzan Abulhawa’s *Mornings in Jenin* (2010), which is an international bestseller published in twenty-six languages. Isabella Hammad’s debut novel *The Parisian* (2019) is another very important instance of those novels. Not only is it deemed “one of the most ambitious first novels to have appeared in years” (Thomas-Corr, 2019, para. 3), but is also described as “a sprawling, sweeping historical epic” (Williams, 2019, para. 1). It has the additional merit of going back further in history than most of the other Palestinian novels. While the majority of texts deal with the period from the 1940s onward, *The Parisian* chooses to examine the roots of the Palestinian issue as it began to materialize from 1914 until 1936 and how this affected the society’s march towards modernity.

With the growing interest in the spatial turn, which “associates both geometric and philosophical coordinates of life—time and space—in a spatiotemporal scheme. A geo-critical analysis locates places in a temporal depth in order to uncover or discover multilayered identities, and it highlights the temporal variability of heterogeneous spaces” (Westphal, 2011b, p. xiv). Within the framework of this analysis, it has become possible to explore real geographical spaces as they are mapped through narrative and to uncover the ideological messages that go into identity formation therein. This analysis emanates from a postmodern belief in the decentered subject. At the top of the pioneers of this approach are Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, who managed through their collaborative work to rethink the relation between place, space, culture and ethics. Their examination of human, animal and even inanimate bodies within their livable territories aims at "reconnecting theory with daily practices of resistance. Foremost among Deleuze's concerns is the idea that the philosophy and politics of difference must take into account the experiences of oppression, exclusion, and marginality” (Braidotti, 1994, p. 164). The vitality of this kind of thought lies, not in its total dissolution of collective identity in any nihilistic or negative way, but rather in its “affirmation of a new kind of bonding, a collectivity resting on the recognition of difference, in an inclusive, i.e., non-exclusionary manner” (Braidotti, 1994, p. 162). Their work opened the door for the spatial turn that took the study of places and spaces to new horizons and paved the way for many important names like Bertrand Westphal, Robert T Tally Jr. and Yi-Fu Tuan among others to develop the geocritical approach to literature, history, culture and society. This paper

will use geocritical mapping and analysis to foreground the dialogue between geographical terrains and their cultural and ideological manifestations.

In this context, the merits of the novel are best represented through the spatial networks that bring together the personal and the social within the framework of the political and the global negotiations and transgressions of intersecting worlds and characters. Nablus, Cairo, Constantinople, Montpellier, Paris, Jerusalem, and Damascus are represented as socially constructed spaces implicated in racial, religious, ethnic, and gender-related constrictions. These milieus are far more than just settings, or background to the story line as they become crucial means of plot construction and tools that help unfold the underlying meaning of the text. Intertwined with this focus on space comes the equal focus on temporality. Within the scope of this paper, spatiotemporal analysis becomes a way to examine “the silenced spatiality of historicism” (Soja, 1989, p. 13). By focusing on spatialized time, light is shed on how the dynamics of linear time intersects with the resonant spaces to produce an intricate narrative that represents in a spatially molded way the history of Europe and the Middle East during the first part of the 20th century: from World War I until about 1936.

On a micro level, the novel tells the story of Midhat Kamal who is born in Nablus. His mother dies when he is two years old. His father moves to Cairo which was the center of trade at that time. Midhat visits his father in Cairo, then is sent to Constantinople for his high school education, then to Montpellier to study medicine at the university there. After a painful personal experience, he leaves Montpellier and moves to Paris to study history. Eventually, he comes home to Nablus to get married and start a family of his own.

On the macro level of national and global concerns, the Middle East (a term that was not yet coined then) was at that time in a very important transitional period of its history. It was part of the Ottoman Empire and as thus it was, politically and economically, one block of land. The writer aims at highlighting the realities of the area and the major historical changes that ultimately lead to the change of geography and history. This can be detected in the novel in the ease and simplicity of traveling and commercial movement of individuals and merchandise in and between Egypt, Palestine, Syria, etc. The protagonist’s father would bring high quality silk from the Golan heights to “Muski St.” in Cairo where his store is. He would take the route from the Golan to Cairo passing by Nablus several times a year to check on his store there and to see his son and family. This ease of movement is also highlighted in the story of Haj Hassan, who is a fugitive wanted for being a nationalist. He spends his time between the Galilee district, the Druze Mountain area, and Damascus without any boundaries keeping him.

### **Nablus’ Segmentarity**

According to Deleuze and Guattari, there are lines of rigid segmentarity that divide society using classifications of class, sex, religion, among others. However, there are also flexible lines and lines of flight that help transcend classificatory opposites and retain the fluidity that helps deterritorialize and reterritorialize these strata. Nablus is a perfect embodiment of the constant interaction between those contending forces, between rigidity and fluidity. The city is the corner stone of the novel. Both spatially and temporally, it represents the origins and transformations of a traditional Palestinian society, simultaneously stressing its segmentarity and its heterogeneity under the surface of unity. It is where Midhat grows up, it is his point of reference to which he constantly compares other places he visits and lives in. Nablus is a trade center “merchants were the glue that bound Nablus to the surrounding villages: for the village people they functioned as credit lines, patrons, employers, even friends; for city dwellers they

were both harbingers of novelty and pillars of tradition” (Hammad, 2019, p. 177). As “far as living memory could reach the foundation stones of Nabulsi society had been the mosque, the city gates and the central marketplace, Khan al-Tujjar” (Hammad, 2019, p. 177). It is clear here that the first pillar of authority in Nablus is religion, represented through the space of the mosque. Despite or even because of the Christian and Samaritan elements, Nablus was a perfect specimen of the Islamic city” (Hammad, 2019, p. 276). At “the twilight years of the [Ottoman] empire, keeping time had become a problem. The official year still began in March. ... But the Christians followed the “Georgian calendar, led by January..., while the Jews adjusted their terms to accommodate the cycle of the earth, [but] the Muslims followed the lunar Hijri” (Hammad, 2019, p. 18). Eventually, everyone “even non-Muslims followed the moon” (Hammad, 2019, p. 18). This uniformity of time despite religious and cultural differences becomes metonymic of the seamless surface of life in Nablus that hides beneath a great diversity. The Muslims comprise the majority of the population. However, the Christian and the Jewish parts give Nablus its special character.

The coexistence of society’s different segments is stressed by shedding light on religious difference and its ramification. At the age of seven or eight, Midhat develops feelings for his little Christian friend, Hala. By the age of eleven, “just like the Muslim girls, Hala donned a veil and stayed indoors” (Hammad, 2019, p. 88). Thus, Midhat could not see her anymore as part of the Nabulsi cultural practice that assigns separate spheres for the two genders and forbids any kind of mingling between them. However, crossing the religious line is not foreign to that society as it is represented in the novel through the love story of Abu Islam, who “had married a Christian woman from the east of Nablus” (Hammad, 2019, p. 229).

The Samaritans form an important portion of the Nabulsi religious texture. They consider themselves “the original Israelites and consider Mount Gerizim the sacred summit upon which Ibrahim was called to sacrifice his son” (Hammad, 2019, p. 206). However, they do not live within the community of Nabulsi people but rather seclude themselves in the Samaritan quarter at the outskirts of Nablus. The synagogue lies at the heart of their quarter. Like most minorities, the Samaritans are “objectively definable states, states of language, ethnicity, or sex with their own ghetto territorialities” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 106). It is “by regionalizing or ghettoizing, that one becomes revolutionary; rather, by using a number of minority elements, by connecting, conjugating them, one invents a specific, unforeseen, autonomous becoming” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 127). In this context, the Samaritans’ difference is underlined, not only through their separate space but also through their different cultural practices, the minority elements that distinguish them from the rest of the Nabulsi population. Clothes become the first sign of difference. When Midhat and his grandmother are on their way to meet the Samaritan high priest, Yitzhak, they run into a woman “dressed in pantaloons and unveiled but of a scarf over her hair” (Hammad, 2019, p. 221), an unthought of attire for an ordinary Muslim or Christian Nabulsi woman.

The Samaritans are famous for two things, two elements that make them stand out in Nablus. The first element is magic. While the whole of the Nabulsi community is remarkably superstitious, the active party, the ones who actually do magic are the Samaritans. It is noteworthy that Islam prohibits magic and deems those working with magic as heretic and unbelievers. The Muslims visit the Samaritan priests to “set the evil eye on someone, [...] to prophesy” or to make a charm for love (Hammad, 2019, p. 222). The Samaritans retain an enigmatic air and their “religious texts written in their language” trigger in Midhat a “fearful curiosity, so that his heart still turned a little at a mention of the infamous book and its occult runes” (Hammad, 2019, p. 225). The second element is their role as harbingers of modernity.

In the field of clothes-making, the local stores, including the Kamal store provided bed linens and clothes for “clients in the hinterlands, so there was limitation in type and style” (Hammad, 2019, p. 244). The Samaritans, on the other hand, provided for an “upper-class market” (Hammad, 2019, p. 244). These clients aimed to imitate the European patterns but with a local flavor. Not belonging to the mainstream culture makes them more liable to open up for foreign influence and to deterritorialize that foreignness and reterritorialize it into the local environment, thus bringing into it seeds of change and evolution. The two elements seem in binary opposition to one another, as one is expressive of the primitive mind while the other is tied to innovation and development. However antithetical they may seem, they remain complementary characteristics of the function of the outsider as the site of what is abject, what is foreign and thus does not have to abide by the norms of the mainstream group. The Samaritans represent the nomadic and differential trait, a kind of energy which overflows every restriction.

In a similar vein, the hybrid spatiotemporal dimension of the story is underlined through “Nouveautés Ghada”, Midhat’s new shop in Nablus. The French name stands out as a signifier of the cultural allegiance of Midhat, the Parisian. However, the shop still helps in mapping the layers of identity that make up the Nabulsi society, stand witness to its diversity, and underline its evolution into a modern capitalist society. The shop becomes a microcosmic representation of a more inclusive Nablus where a Muslim merchant with a French education, becomes partners with Eli, the Samaritan and both rely on Butrus, the Christian tailor. Westphal (2011) quotes Homi Bhabha as he explains this phenomenon as producing a cultural third space that includes “the interstitial passages and processes of cultural difference that are inscribed in the ‘in-between,’” (Westphal, 2011a, p. 71). Eli’s desire to give up his separateness and to become partners with Midhat is interpreted by the text as “the inveterate caution of a member of an endangered sect trying to survive in another culture” (Hammad, 2019, p. 403). The dressmaker cannot confine himself to the ghetto for want of clients, especially high-class ones. Out of the ghetto, he becomes threatened by the encroachment of a hostile mainstream culture on his peculiar cultural entity. Thus, the way out is to take refuge in a hybrid “third space” where he, Midhat and Butrus can unite.

Their trade in women’s fashion is in vogue as the city evolves into a westernized modern city. Traditionally, “the standard garment of the Nabulsiyyat [was]... a cloak and above that her veil, and then a shawl” (Hammad, 2019, p. 219). The “rural fellaha women selling vegetables ... did not wear the black veil” (Hammad, 2019, p. 219). By the 1930s, “veils, though not gone entirely, had thinned into vapours of chiffon...; skirts concluded at the knee, and the black stockings on the shelves of Nouveautés disappeared almost as soon as they were laid there” (Hammad, 2019, p. 397). Clothes become a synecdoche for an overall change in the status of women represented by Sahar, Hani Murad’s wife, who “worked as an activist both for the national movement and for women’s rights across the Arab world, including raising the marriage age and removing the veil. ... The women she associated with came from all parts of society, including the fellahin; all classes, all religions” (Hammad, 2019, p. 405). However, things change with the development of the resistance movement, led mainly by peasants or Fellahin. Though peasant women had not worn the face veil before, now their men took Western clothes as signs of Western hegemony and they “sang about the whores who wore Western clothes” (Hammad, 2019, p. 491). Even Sahar, the leading feminist, has no problem in putting on the face veil she long fought against. She believes that “they were here to fight on their behalf, ready where the ulema [religious scholars] and politicians had failed. ... Was that such a heavy price to pay, though, for their freedom?” (Hammad, 2019, p. 491). Gender freedom is thus sacrificed for the bigger and more pressing need for nationalist freedom.

Accordingly, in times of communal danger, the people are propelled towards a rigid segmentarity that negates the religious other, i.e. the Samaritan, and essentializes him/her. Desire<sup>1</sup> “is never an undifferentiated instinctual energy, but itself results from a highly developed, engineered setup rich in interactions: a whole supple segmentarity that processes molecular energies and potentially gives desire a fascist determination.” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1978, p. 215). The apparent march towards modernity is interrupted by the new circumstances in Palestine as waves of Jewish immigrants arriving there as a consequence of the circumstances in Europe, result in the emergence of anti-British resistance groups such as the Qassam group. In a time when “Jewish immigration swelled with refugees” (Hammad, 2019, p. 398) and the Jewish National Fund was trying to acquire land by any means and at any price, the Nabulsiyyat “took to the podium before the post office to point at the sky and unleash their fury at British hypocrisy, and at every local person too weak for the cause” (Hammad, 2019, p. 398). Midhat was stigmatized for not being “a political activist [who] had gone into business with a Samaritan” (Hammad, 2019, p. 398). The Samaritans who had always lived as part and parcel of the Nabulsi society “had woken to the sound of rocks showering their houses. ‘We are not even Jews!’” protested Eli but “to a dispossessed farmer they were all the same, all ‘Jews’” (Hammad, 2019, p. 403).

When “one people in need, [is] trespassing on the rights of another” (Hammad, 2019, p. 455), it becomes difficult for the latter party to retain any degree of inclusiveness or tolerance. In such dire circumstances, the voice of the liberal democratic group in Palestine seems to recede to the background and the majority of the people, the poor Muslim farmers, do not understand what nationalism is. The word “nation” is an empty word for them “they never had one before [...] you have your land, your livelihood, and your religion” What Qassam is doing is “appealing directly to their faith” (Hammad, 2019, p. 412). The English have a manhunt for Qassam which finally results in his death. But Qassam’s death does not put an end to his ideas, the “Brits had accidentally made Qassam into a martyr”<sup>2</sup> (Hammad, 2019, p. 447). Eventually, “Qassam-inspired armed bands continued to roam the countryside. Attacks on Jewish civilians were followed by retaliations against Arabs” (Hammad, 2019, p. 447) and the vicious circle of violence and counterviolence never ceases to continue and to claim more lives till our present day.

### **Nablus’ Insularity**

The second “foundation stone” of Nablus is “the city gates” (Hammad, 2019, p. 177). According to Deleuze & Guattari, “the gates of the city [...] are barriers, filters against the fluidity of the masses, against the penetration power of migratory packs, people, animals, and goods” (Hammad, 2019, p. 368). The emphasis on the importance of the gate underscores the insular nature of Nablus, which makes it “practically impenetrable to outsiders” (Hammad, 2019, p. 280). Despite its biblical significance as it has Jacob’s Well in its valley, Nablus never adapts itself to the role of a tourist attraction. On the one hand, nearby cities like Jerusalem

---

<sup>1</sup> Desire, for Deleuze & Guattari, is not a component of the psyche that overwhelms the more rational part of the human self. It is rather a vital force, a productive and positive conception of material flow as it actualizes through real life situations.

<sup>2</sup> Qassam Izz ad-Din al-Qassamia a Syrian Muslim preacher who was educated in Al-Azhar religious University in Egypt and was one of the leaders of the Islamic Revivalist Movement. He led the resistance against British and French Mandatory rule in the Levant in the 1920s and 1930s. He was also a key-player in the anti-Zionism militant struggle there. In the 1930s, he founded local resistance groups that targeted British and Jewish groups. He was killed in a manhunt as a retaliation for the killing of a British policeman. He was declared a martyr by the Palestinian locals and has since been the inspiring figure of all Islamist resistance groups in Palestine.

“were forming whole quarters for pilgrims and artefact seekers” (Hammad, 2019, p. 276). Nablus, on the other hand, “had not a single hotel for foreigners” (Hammad, 2019, p. 276). No Nabulsi “cared for European tourists at all” (Hammad, 2019, p. 276). This seclusion and special nature make it almost impossible for the British forces to recruit any native informants. One of the British officers complains in 1920 that “we’ve not got any [...] intelligence [...] from there since about nineteen seventeen or thereabouts” (Hammad, 2019, p. 310). For the British occupation forces, Nablus is “a town of fanatics. Lot of troublemakers” (Hammad, 2019, p. 310); it is “one of the more organized in terms of, well activities, as well as ... more unruly” (Hammad, 2019, p. 311). But this insularity had its economic repercussions. Nablus

Pinned in by her two mountains, was not [...] growing at the rate of other towns. Compared with Jaffa and Jerusalem and Haifa and Akka – all open to the sea, to Christian Pilgrimage routes and tourism, electrified and full of cinemas – this town was decaying in her provincial backwaters, subsisting on memories of former glory, her inhabitants recalling [...] the days when she used to be called “the little Damascus” (Hammad, 2019, p. 399).

The city could not compete even with its famous Nabulsi soap as the “Jews set up their own factories for export, selling “Nabulsi-style soap”, but using castor oil, instead of olive, which was far cheaper” (Hammad, 2019, p. 398). Thus the city gates, being too tightly locked, badly affect the third “foundation stone” which is “the central marketplace, Khan al-Tujjar” (Hammad, 2019, p. 171). What happens is that Nablus ceases to be “isomorphic”. According to Deleuze & Guattari (1987), “all States and all social formations tend to become isomorphic in their capacity as models of realization: there is but one centered world market, the capitalist one, in which even the so-called socialist countries participate” (Hammad, 2019, p. 436). While capitalism leaves space for heterogeneity, it necessitates that “the domestic market is developing and expanding [...] in the center” (Hammad, 2019, p. 436). Being at the heart of the old world, Nablus must suffer as no place is permitted to meet “capitalist demands with too much resistance and inertia” (Hammad, 2019, p. 436).

However, Nablus’s history negates its insularity and examined from a spatiotemporal perspective it appears to be totally heterogeneous. It brings together many heterocosms, or separate worlds, palimpsestically arranged to ultimately form the current toponymy. Its present status rests on multiple strata whose temporal depths make it one of those polychronic spaces whose historical variations belie any attempt to homogenize its actuality. A “city does not become historic merely because it has occupied the same site for a long time” (Tuan, 1977, p. 174). In the same vein, our reaction to Nablus changes as the text reveals the layers of narrative, real, and imagined that have been “carried on the wind between the two mountains of Nablus [and] had settled over the years into legends” (Hammad, 2019, p. 139). The city has witnessed the passing and settlement of Canaanites, Romans, Jews, Christians, Muslims, European Crusaders, Ottomans, and English people. In addition to the Samaritans, it encompasses Jacobs Well where it is said that Jesus “met the woman of Samaria”, and he, according to the Bible “being wearied with his journey, sat thus on a well” (John 4.6). During the time of the crusades, Queen Melisende of Jerusalem was “banished from the Holy city ... [and] spent the rest of her life in a palace at the centre of Nablus” (Hammad, 2019, p. 139). During the Arab empire, “the Qaysi and the Yemeni clans” (Hammad, 2019, p. 200) settle and retain their rivalry in their new environment.



## Multifocalization

The image of Nablus is represented in its versatility through multifocalization where “the point of view is relative to the situation of the observer with respect to the space of reference” (Westphal, 2011, p. 128). The text involves, in its spatial representation, a “confrontation of several optics that correct, nourish, and mutually enrich each other. Writing of space may always be singular, but the geocritical representation emerges from a spectrum of individual representations as rich and varied as possible” (Hammad, 2019, p. 143). Through the lens of multiple focalizers, Nablus reveals its multi-faceted characteristics. Frederic Molineu represents the exogenous point of view which “reflects the vision of the traveler” (Westphal, 2011a, p. 128). For Molineu, Nablus becomes “a metonym of Orientalism, a metonym of exoticism” (Hammad, 2019, p. 147). He has never visited the orient, but he does the next best thing, which is bringing an oriental home as a native informant, a practice not foreign to orientalists of the time. Frederic Molineu is a university professor specialized in social anthropology. His research on “language and the progress of civilization” (Hammad, 2019, p. 82) starts off from the assumption that “the Muslim [is] a deviation from the onward progression”. He wants to prove [the extent to which one might actually recuperate a deviation ... [by teaching] them to conform ... [to] the value of liberty, for example. What isn't present in their religious texts” (Hammad, 2019, p. 83).

It is clear that Nablus for Molineu represents the stereotypical Arab space where Midhat is living “in a desert” (Hammad, 2019, p. 60). It is the land of superstition and backwardness. It is the land of primitive people using a primitive language: the title of one of the passages written by Frederic in his notes on Midhat is “The effect of a New Language Learned by a Primitive Brain” (Hammad, 2019, p. 130). So, Midhat in his naiveté “had thought his difference [from the French family he lives with] no difference” (Hammad, 2019, p. 131) and thought of himself as their guest, as their equal, to the extent of thinking to marry their daughter. The reality is that “he was [just] the father's subject” (Hammad, 2019, p. 131), Molineu defends himself that he was “attempting to humanize” Midhat (Hammad, 2019, p. 134). Thus, Molineu embodies all the traits of an orientalist with his ethnocentric way of thinking, his hypotheses being built on the binary opposition between the west and its other(s) and his uncontested belief in the superiority of the western/French culture.

Père Antoine represents another facet of the exogenous point of view. He is a professor of Oriental Studies at l'École Pratique d'Études Bibliques in Jerusalem” (Hammad, 2019, p. 276). The relation between knowledge and power, typical of orientalist discourse, is clear in his cooperation with the British Criminal Investigation Department who wants to benefit from his “special expertise in Nablus” (Hammad, 2019, p. 310). Antoine represents the stereotype of the missionary who is complicit with colonial authorities as the English officer suggests: “I know you are a holy man but it's quite common among your profession” (Hammad, 2019, p. 311). The text also represents this type through the example of the English missionary doctor who tried to “convert” (Hammad, 2019, p. 263) one of his patients. However, the text does not fall in the trap of generalization and represents the sisters, the nuns who run the municipal local hospital, as helping the Palestinian resistance fighters against the British. Père Antoine thought the nuns were complicit with the British and this assumption induces him to act the way he does. He then wondered “whether, had he known the truth earlier, he might have felt differently about Nablus” (Hammad, 2019, p. 446). Père Antoine's attitude also alludes to another very important orientalist feature, namely, “the pressures of conventions, predecessors, and rhetorical styles” (Said, 1978., p. 22), in short, of discourse. Père Antoine builds his initial reaction towards Nablus on the assumption that Sister Louise looks down upon the Arabs and

plots with the British against them. When he realizes the truth, he cannot but wonder how “his opinion of an entire people, could in the end be so mutable, so subject to the opinions of his peers” (Hammad, 2019, p. 446).

The allogeneous point of view is represented by Midhat Kamal, the Parisian. This point of view becomes the feature of a “cultural situation of the in-between (or of accelerated deterritorialization); [it] tends to transform the world into a purely liminal space” (Westphal, 2011, p. 129). Although Midhat is a native of Nablus and should thus be described as endogenous, he cannot possibly be described as such. The endogenous “point of view characterizes an autochthonic vision of space. Normally resistant to any exotic view, it limits itself to familiar space” (Westphal, 2011, p. 128). Midhat, with his cosmopolitan character and French education transcends this locality and takes on a glocal hybrid character that makes him more of an insider/outsider. From the beginning of the novel and since his stay in Constantinople, France is represented in his mind as “the pinnacle of Europe and exemplar of the modern age” (Hammad, 2019, p. 25). For him, to go to France is tantamount to going “straight to the heart of modernity” (Hammad, 2019, p. 25). In this “city of strangers” (Hammad, 2019, p. 157), Midhat is able to shed any manifestation of his oriental identity and to live as a libertine focusing on his sensuous pleasures than on ideas of belonging “with a freedom born of strangeness, he had bypassed the laws of family and dallied in the alleyways of chance and rapture” (Hammad, 2019, p. 190). After his major disillusionment in the Molineu who dehumanize him and treat him as an inferior, he becomes for the first time aware of the strength of the deeply entrenched stereotypical image of the people he comes from. His reaction is to try to escape being identified as an Arab.

Midhat’s description of all the spaces he goes through from Nablus to Constantinople, to Cairo to Montpellier, to Paris is “stereophonic... [and] promotes the emergence of the third space” (Westphal, 2011, p. 129). Midhat lives most of his life in cosmopolitan cities, in Constantinople, then in Paris. In both he enjoyed “a freedom born of strangeness, he had bypassed laws of family and dallied in the alleyways of chance and rupture” (Hammad, 2019, p. 190). He believes that “he did not belong in Nablus” (Hammad, 2019, p. 240). During his stay in Paris, he has learned “to dissemble and pass between spheres and to accommodate, morally, that dissemblance through an understanding of his own impermanence in each (Hammad, 2019, p. 166). In Paris and later on even in Nablus he shows “an embrace of otherness that at first he admired in Faruq but which now appeared in his mind a skewed, performed version of what it was really like to be in a place but not of it, not to know it truly” (Hammad, 2019, p. 161).

Appropriating his own inferiority, he thought that his French friend, Laurent, “exceeded him in virtue, as well as in intellect, and in manner and culture, and even in appearance” (Hammad, 2019, p. 119). In appearance, he was “closer already [...] to the pale Italian or Greek [...] than to the inhabitants of those apostatized subaltern continents who had so defected from civilization as they occurred in picture books and nursery rhymes and the imagination of French children” (Hammad, 2019, pp. 160-161). His “old fantasies of becoming French” having been ruined by the attitude of Molineu, “he still clung to a particular idea of cosmopolitan life” (Hammad, 2019, p. 189). He “was two men: one here, one there” (Hammad, 2019, p. 470). He learned “to dissemble and pass between spheres and to accommodate, morally, that dissemblance through an understanding of his own impermanence in each” (Hammad, 2019, p. 166). Midhat ultimately represents “the Levantine, with his mouchoir and new suit [...] the figure of the Parisian Oriental as he appeared on certain cigarette packs in corner stores” (Hammad, 2019, p. 160). During his time in Paris, his life “had become multiple” (Hammad, 2019, p. 166) and this sense of a divided self does not abandon him as he moves back home to

Nablus. For the freedom-seeking Midhat Kamal, Nablus is a place of restrictions, of “boredom, and deference to views not his own” (Hammad, 2019, p. 190).

It is noteworthy that Midhat’s relation to space is metonymically expressed through his relation to the female body. Through his amorous conquests “we enter into what John Douglas Porteous has called the bodyscape, which in this case is more geomorphic (body as landscape) than anthropomorphic (landscape as body). In the grand scheme of things, this bodyscape is feminine” (Westphal, 2011, p. 68). His initial relation to France is expressed through his infatuation with Jeannette Molineu’s body which he desired to own and acquire legitimately through marriage. After his humiliating disappointment with the Molineus, Midhat’s way of mastering the French space and of compensating for his sense of inferiority and marginalization is through conquering the female body beginning with Claire then lots of other women, paid or otherwise. It is worth noting that his first amorous expedition takes place in a five-storey building ripped off during an air-raid. The milieu of war, decay, and destruction negates any kind of elation or pleasure. Despite “this picture of manly achievement” (Hammad, 2019, p. 157) he tries to forge, the fact remains that she is the one who takes the lead, and the experience is at first “painful to recall” (Hammad, 2019, p. 157).

The experience with Claire must be reconstructed and many details must be added or removed to keep his sense of false mastery and cover up his inconsequentiality. Moreover, Midhat’s ideal of social/class mobility is constantly based on the female body. He tries to do this in a legitimate way through marriage first to the “superior” race (Jeannette), then when back to Nablus through marrying into the Hammad family who are considered among the city’s dignitaries. His courtship of Fatima is territorialized as it takes the shape of visiting the street where her house is. The house is represented as a fortress to be conquered. He goes around the house and can only see “the peaked windows that showed over the high wall” (Hammad, 2019, p. 257). He “began to feel the same blissful consolation of running to meet a lover. Except that all he was meeting was a house, and not even an entire house: only what segments of window and roof were visible over the wall” (Hammad, 2019, p. 257). There is a series of metonymic relations that govern Midhat’s love for Fatima. In this series, the house stands for the girl, Fatima, and the girl stands for a family, the Hammads, and the family stands for social status and upward mobility.

It is clear here how difficult it was for two young people to meet because of the totally separate spheres allocated for men and women in the Nabulsi society. The very rigid segmentarity on the basis of sex necessitated the existence of a parallel world inhabited exclusively by women. As Westphal (2013) remarks “If the Land of Women existed [...] it’s a safe bet that it would lie on the edge of the masculine world” (Westphal, 2013, p. 55). This parallel world, in which women could meet away from the eyes of men, is represented in the novel through the hammam (public bath) and the “Istiqbal” (the reception, a lady’s gathering). It is useful here to use Ray Oldenburg’s (1999) concept of the three places: “one is domestic, a second is gainful or productive, and the third is inclusively sociable, offering both the basis of community and the celebration of it” (Oldenburg, 1999, p. 14). In this sense, while the Istiqbal is domestic and restricted, the hammam, as a third place, is neutral, leveled, and accessible. The Istiqbal is usually held by women in private homes. When invited to an Istiqbal, a girl “would be covered in velvet and embroidered lace or whatever drapery best displayed her twin virtue of wealth and taste” (Hammad, 2019, p. 209). The “space is made up of an ensemble of local entities, whose limit is fixed by a homogenous perception of communal experience” (Westphal, 2013, p. 28). The Istiqbal is the space of social propriety and showing exemplary social behavior, or else the woman who fails to show respect for those norms would be shunned by the group. It

is a chance to show social class, through wearing the latest fashions and the finest jewelry. It is also a chance to show off the latest possessions, for example Madam Atwan hosts an “Istiqbal” in the courtyard of her palace to show the women a “Kodak” camera, an invention never seen before in Nablus.

The hammam (public bath) is a perfect example of the “third place ... where you relax in public, where you encounter familiar faces and make new acquaintances” (White, 2018, p. 6). The ladies, on their way to the hammam are totally covered up from head to toe, being just “figures in black muslin” (Hammad, 2019, p. 208). Once they enter, they shed off their clothes and be at ease. The hammam is “important for the health of the physical body, but even more important for a healthy social body” (Hammad, 2019, p. 209). While the “Istiqbal” is a private space and the host is free to invite or neglect anyone she wants, the “Hammam” is a leveler, which is “by its nature, an inclusive place” open for all (Oldenburg, 1999, p. 24). Stripped of their clothes, they become mere bodies without class or wealth, just “flesh shining with water and sweat, dimpled and variegated in the coloured light from the roof” (Hammad, 2019, p. 209). The “sustaining activity of third places everywhere.... is conversation” (Oldenburg, 1999, p. 26). Thus, in addition to being cleaned of impurities, the women “gossiped on benches around the walls, inhaling vapour as they picked at watermelon and cheese brought by the maids in cane trays” (Hammad, 2019, p. 210). In such a closed community as Nablus, gossip becomes a social interaction that helps women gain and exchange information. It also creates reciprocity and strengthens the social bonds between the teller and the hearer. Being excluded from the public sphere dominated exclusively by men, women find their power through the networks they create via their own spaces. Women’s claim on their own power shows clearly as they use these spaces to choose brides for their sons by inspecting the young ladies closely and putting them under scrutiny. They also used gossip as weapons to get at their opponents: the women “locked at last in their homes [...] divert their vigour into childbirth and playing music, and siphon what remained into promulgating rumours about their rivals” (Hammad, 2019, p. 201).

The masculine version of the third place is Café Sheikh Qassem where the men meet. Some of the “regulars” (Oldenburg, 1999, p. 33) are always there as it “was the most popular café in Nablus and could be relied upon for company at all hours” (Hammad, 2019, p. 199). The men gather to smoke the nargila pipe and drink tea. They also read the newspaper and talk about politics and the latest news of demonstrations against the British in other town and cities. At times, they host a rawi in the café. The rawi is an oral poet who recites and sings the stories of popular heroes such as elhelaly salama. It is noteworthy that while women are harbingers of modernity, or at least of a more westernized way of life, men seem more adherent to the old ways. In their Istiqbal, women celebrate the Kodak camera and treat the shooting session as a considerable event, while men celebrate the rawi at the expense of the more modern gramophone “a circle of lamps in one corner indicated the rawi, sitting beside a qanun player with a stage around them. ... Behind him stood an idle gramophone” (Hammad, 2019, p. 230). Here the intertextual reference to Abu Zayd al-Hilali<sup>3</sup> is highly significant. According to Westphal (2011), intertextuality is a very important element of geocriticism as it brings “fictional territories into relation with those of the referential world” (Westphal, 2011a, p. 97).

---

<sup>3</sup> This story is told through the epic “Taghribat Bani Hilal”. It narrates the story of Abu Zayd al-Hilali and his tribe from the middle of the 4th Hijri century till the middle of the 5th Hijri century (11th century of the Georgian calendar). Drought hits their land in the Hijaz area in the Arab Peninsula for eight consecutive years. The hero, Abu Zayd leads his people to Tunisia and goes through many adventures, wars, and conspiracies before he and his people come out victorious.

The story of al-Hilali and his heroic strife to save his people from the drought that hits their land and his attempts to settle them in a new land after defeating their enemies resonates well within the realm of the novel. The story summons the meanings of heroism, resistance, and the communal spirit that the Nabulsi society in particular and the Palestinian society at large were in need of at that critical time of their history. It also stresses the people's Arab identity and origins at a time when this identity is at stake. The story of al-Hilali whose people suffer and move to another place, Tunisia, which is already populated by another people ironically invites comparison with the Jewish people rather than the Palestinians who readily identify with them as it is clear in the people's reaction to the rawi.

### **Conclusion**

*The Parisian* ultimately provides a dynamic spatial representation of a transitional era and a history that was unfolding and changing the face of the earth at the critical time between the two World Wars. Adopting the realistic tradition of nineteenth-century novelists, Hammad manages to provide a textual cartography of the places she dealt with in the Levantine and in France, mapping alongside the evolving sense of identity in the wake of drastic political, social and cultural changes. By depicting those parallel worlds, the text dissects the Nabulsi society and reveals the heterogeneity that underlies its superficial homogeneity. It also introduces those spaces discursively bringing out their many facets through multifocalization. The text underscores both the subjective experiential sense of place and the objective analytical and ideological sense of how place materializes the fabric of immanent relations of power. This is beautifully done through combining sensory details and intertextual references that populate the world of the novel. It portrays a concretized picture of its places linking together the literary representation with the lived spatial referent in ways that help readers understand a lot about the past and the present of this part of the world.

## References

- Abulhawa, S. (2010). *Mornings in Jenin*. New York: Bloomsbury.
- Foucault, M. (1986). Of other spaces. *Diacritics*, 16(1), 22–27.  
<https://doi.org/10.2307/464648>
- Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1987). *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia*. Vol. 2. Trans. B. Massumi. Minnesota, University of Minnesota Press. (1980).
- Hammad, I. (2019). *The Parisian*. London: Grove Press.
- Oldenburg, R. (1999). *The great good place: Cafes, coffee shops, bookstores, bars, hair salons, and other hangouts at the heart of a community*. New York: Marlowe & Company.
- Said, E. W. (1978). *Orientalism*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Said, E. W. (1994). *Culture and imperialism*. New York: Vintage.
- Soja, E. W. (1989). *Postmodern geographies: The reassertion of space in critical social theory*. New York: Verso.
- Thomas-Corr, J. (2019, April 15). Middlemarch with Minarets. [Review of *The Parisian*, by Isabella Hammad]. *The Guardian*, Accessed July 10 2021, from <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/apr/15/the-parisian-isabella-hammad-review>
- Tuan, Y. (1977). *Space and place: The perspective of experience*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.
- Westphal, B. (2011, a). *Geocriticism: Real and fictional spaces*. Trans. R. T. Tally Jr. New York: Palgrave Macmillan (2007).
- Westphal, B. (2011, b). Foreword. In *Geocritical explorations: Space, place and mapping in literary and Cultural Studies*. Robert T Tally Jr., ed. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Westphal, B. (2013). *The plausible world: A geocritical approach to space, place, and maps*. Trans. A. D. Wells. New York: Palgrave Macmillan (2011).
- White, R. (2018). Editorial. In *A Third Place*. *New Zealand Geographic*, 152(6).
- Williams, H. (2019, April 13). Highly personal, often striking. Review of *The Parisian*, by Isabella Hammad. *Independent*. Accessed July 10, 2021 from <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/the-parisian-isabella-hammad-review-novel-book-themes-ottoman-empire-a8866871.html>

**Corresponding author:** Fadwa Kamal Abdel Rahman

**Email:** fabdelrahman@yahoo.com