Heterotopic (Dis)placement in Elias Khoury's *Awlad al-Ghetto: Ismi Adam*: Writing as Reclamation of Place
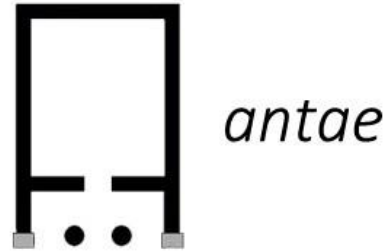
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Heterotopic (Dis)placement in Elias Khoury's *Awlad al-Ghetto: Ismi Adam*: Writing as Reclamation of Place

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My reading of Elias Khoury's *Awlad al Ghetto: Ismi Adam* (*The Children of the Ghetto: My Name is Adam*) (2016), undertakes a spatial exploration of the significant role of writing through an investigation of the spaces "of" and "in" the book (form and content, respectively).[1] Special attention is given to the performance and interplay of these two spaces, as enacted by the narrator, Adam. Being an act of resistance itself, writing is explored in light of it being a socio-spatial performance. Adam writes to reclaim a space that excludes him, to destroy a space that oppresses him, and to turn the space he inhabits into a place. I treat this book, with both its structuring and content, as bearing a heterotopic nature and function, one that seeks to affect the potentiality of change, transformation, and resistance. I will be using Michel Foucault's definition of heterotopia, as a space of juxtaposed differences and a space of otherness, and this shall also here be viewed as a space that allows for difference and change to occur. Space's fluidity and non-static nature will be investigated following Henri Lefebvre's exploration of it—in both its dimensions, the physical and the social—with emphasis placed on 'representational spaces' in Lefebvre's triadic conceptualisation of space. Finally, Margaret Kohn's work on heterotopias as sites of resistance inspire my investigation of the space of the book in Khoury's novel. Kevin Hetherington's reading of Foucault's heterotopia allows further understanding of heterotopic space as one that bears a subversive potential, contending that the subject is 'constituted spatially', thus allowing for a 'spatiality of resistance' to emerge around 'forms of subjectivity […] that are marginalised in space'.[2]

Khoury is an acclaimed Lebanese author whose novels are celebrated for their non-conformist and subversive literary niche. Writing on memory, war trauma, and post-war realities, in addition to their consequences on the everyday life of the average Lebanese and Palestinian, Khoury employs anti-hegemonic literary and stylistic techniques, such as polyvocality, narrative multiplicity, generic multiplicity, and fragmentation. As a result, he consciously attempts to create a new kind of writing both in his literary and critical body of work, as Gretchen Head asserts.[3] Writing on

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[1] Elias Khoury, *Awlad al-Ghetto: Ismi Adam* (Beirut: Dar al Adab, 2016). Henceforth cited in-text as (*AG*, page number). All reference made to Khoury's novel are my translation unless otherwise stated. The book is currently in translation to English and other languages; however, Khoury has not specified an exact date of publication of the English translation.

[2] Kevin Hetherington, *The Badlands of Modernity: Heterotopia and Social Ordering*, (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 21.

[3] See Gretchen Head, 'The Performative in Ilyas Khouri's *Bab al-Shams*', *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 42, (2011), 148-82.

issues pertaining to both Lebanon and Palestine, Khoury challenges the collective socio-political and spatial amnesia in the former, and the imposed language of silence and exclusion in the latter. Sonja Mecjher-Atassi in fact considers Khoury's novels to 'preserve and transmit what officially still seems to be unspeakable'.[4] According to her, Khoury collects the stories and memories of the marginalised, those excluded by the national memory and official history, in order to make them more visible.

In reference to his earlier *Bab al-Shams* (*Gate of the Sun*), a reference to which is made by Adam in *Awlad al-Ghetto*, Khoury claims that his novels within the context of the Palestinian narrative seek to break the language of silence they have been shrouded in.[5] If *Bab al-Shams* is an example of that attempt with its multiple narratives, testimonies, and voices, *Awlad al-Ghetto* is both an affirmation and a realisation of such an intention. Adam, protagonist and narrator, is a Palestinian refugee living in New York, assuming an identity other than his own as a coping mechanism directed towards breaking away from his traumatic past as someone who lived through the Palestinian Nakba in 1948 and the resulting displacement. As he tells his own story himself—a significance he highlights throughout the novel, Adam leads us on an internal creative reverie, of rage and loss, manifested in the stories he writes—and which he keeps interrupting (the significance of this shall be discussed in further detail later on).

Prior to a detailed analysis of the spaces of the novel, it is imperative to define a few terms and concepts pertinent to my exploration of said spaces. There are three main prevalent spaces in Khoury's novel: the ghetto/camp (in Lod, in Palestine), the movie theatre (situated in New York City), and the text or the book itself. In this paper, I will explore the latter as an embodied, performed, and practiced space, in addition to it being heterotopic in both nature and function. Michel Foucault defines heterotopia as space 'removed' or out of place, as 'other'. Such spaces are real, found in every culture and civilisation, in which contradictions and juxtapositions of various kinds of spaces are allowed. To Foucault, these spaces resemble counter-sites, and are enacted utopias in which 'the real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted'.[6] Possessing a malleable, fluid nature, these spaces are capable of changing over time and under different circumstances. They therefore hold disparate functions, even within the same culture/context which allows them to be appropriated through agentive practices of subjects within them, as Adam shall demonstrate. Most importantly to Foucault, such spaces, at all times, boast a system of opening and closing, 'whose function is to both isolate and make "penetrable"'.[7] They are also sites that are not necessarily accessible to the public, and if they are, possess certain critical points of entry. To Foucault, heterotopia possess

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[4] Sonja Mejcher-Atassi, 'On the Necessity of Writing in the Present: Elias Khoury and the "Birth of the Novel" in Lebanon', in *Arabic Literature: Postmodern Perspectives*, ed. by Angelika Neuwirth, Andreas Pflitsch, and Barbara Winckler (London: Saqi, 2010), pp. 87-96, p. 88.
[5] Sonja Mejcher-Atassi, 'The Necessity to Forget and Remember', *Banipal Magazine of Modern Arab Literature*, 12, (2014), 1-10, p. 5.
[6] Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias', trans. by Jay Miskoviec, in *Architecture/Mouvement/Continuité*, 5, (1984), 1-9, pp. 3-4
[7] Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p. 7.

either the function of creating an imagined space of illusion, or a space that is 'other,' an alternative real space.

Other theorists and scholars took Foucault's term in a different direction. Heterotopia is thus defined as sites of transgression, uncertainty, marginality, perfection, marginality and dominance, and subversion. Kevin Hetherington does not view heterotopia to be strictly spaces of "otherness" alone; they are, however, spaces that allow an alternate social ordering. Heterotopia, to him, organise 'a bit of the social world' in different ways to those surrounding them; therefore, such an alternate ordering marks them as 'other' and 'allows them to be seen as an example of an alternative way of doing things'.[8] He stresses their state of becoming, reminiscent of Deleuze, describing them as being in-process, or in-between. For Hetherington, it is this in-betweenness that dubs a space heterotopic. I consider this state of becoming, inherent in heterotopia, the main reason behind its power to be turned into a site of resistance. While he does not strictly 'define heterotopia as sites of resistance, sites of transgression or as marginal spaces but precisely as *spaces of an alternate ordering*', Hetherington asserts the subversive potential of heterotopic spaces intrinsic to the alternate ordering which it offers.[9] However, the realisation of this subversive potential is dependent upon the successful and efficient socio-political and spatial practices of agentive subjects within the concerned space.

In Lefebvrian terms, heterotopia's transformative powers lie in the process of production of space. In his triadic process of spatial production, Lefebvre highlights the third and final stage, that of representational space, as a stage through which acts of resistance or change can occur. For Lefebvre, space is socially constructed and its production contains the potential for change and resistance to dominant social relations or order. This resistance takes place through these representational spaces which, therefore, creates the opportunity to produce what I shall be referring to as "ruptures". Furthermore, these ruptures can either be completely produced or appropriated by taking advantage of a gap within a social dominant order in a particular space. Adam, for example, starts the novel by attempting, and failing, to write the story of the poet Waddah al-Yaman, whom he believes is underrepresented. However, he instigates a "rupture" referred to above, through his conscious and agentive decision to abandon his project in favour of writing his own narrative, which activates the representational potential of his heterotopic space, through the medium of writing. This shall be thoroughly explained, but through this resistance to the dominant order, one can already see how representational space can become more visible and make a potential for change and transformation more plausible.[10] However, Marco Cenzatti refuses to reduce heterotopia to a mere space of representation; according to him, the otherness of heterotopic spaces and their status as a counterspace to a dominant one are furthered by the fact

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[8] Hetherington, p. viii.
[9] Hetherington, p. 9.
[10] See Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (New Jersey: Wiley, 1992).

that they 'stem from an endless series of difference within the space of representation'.[11] They are therefore not reduced to one or the other.

In this paper, I propose that the social dynamic/relations and spatial practices of the people within a certain space, all of whom are marginalised and disempowered, determine its functions and give it meaning. It is therefore important to note that a site of resistance or one that holds an emancipatory potential does not necessarily imply that change is going to happen. There lies the importance of studying the spatial practices and habits of the side-lined in Khoury's novel, within this power dynamic, for they are the ones responsible for this change. For this reason, I emphasise Adam's spatial performance and his complete assumption of ownership over the spaces of and in the book. Him being an agentive and conscious subject is necessary for the process of turning the said space of the book into a resistance site through which he could unsettle the dominant structure that excludes him.

There are four different aspects through which the space of the book can be considered a heterotopia. Firstly, the book's structure, its distribution of chapters, and the juxtaposition of multiple narratives, as well as versions of stories, signify what Foucault terms 'incongruent juxtapositions', which he explains as a juxtaposition of things that do not usually go together.[12] Significantly, Adam deliberately chooses the titles of his sections and chapters, alluding to a generic multiplicity, only evident in the manner in which he names his chapters. The last few chapters, for example, interrupt the enumeration of the ones preceding them, to start the division of the ones that follow as is expected of plays, starting with Scene One, or 'First Scene'. The latter enumeration continues up to the seventh act, before yet another interruption, this time with two chapters bearing "normative" titles, namely: 'Sonder Kommando' and 'Threshold'. The book is divided into four parts, all of which are narrated by Adam. The first is Adam's attempt to re-tell and re-write the story of poet Waddah al-Yaman (with constant interruptions and comments in between brackets), while the remaining parts, on the other hand, show Adam's dismissal of the poet's story in favour of his own. The book mixes autobiographical accounts, quotes from poets, flashbacks, and literary criticism commentaries.

Secondly, the book maintains its own system of opening and closing which, following Foucault, is pertinent to heterotopic spaces. Both spaces of and in the text, that is, its structural form and content, respectively, flirt with a certain dynamic of either containment or segregation. Adam leads the reader into the fragmented, interrupted, and non-linear world that he creates on paper. Significantly, Adam does not intend on publishing the book; he has no wish to be read. However, what starts as a private, personal, and intimate space at the beginning of the novel, a sanctuary, is transformed as Adam writes on, into his own grave where he wishes to be buried, as he calls it. This transformation takes place once he dismisses the story he starts writing about al-Yaman.

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[11] Marco Cenzatti, 'Heterotopias of Difference', in *Heterotopia and the City: Public Space in a Postcivil Society*, ed. by Michiel Behaeine and Lieven De Cauter (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 75-86, pp. 81-2.
[12] Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p. 7.

Thirdly, the spaces of and in the book can be considered as spaces of otherness. Adam's decision to write was primarily a reaction and a challenge to those who are removed from his experience, yet still assume the responsibility of writing it down and representing it. Their attempts to represent him and those like him, and write the Palestinian narrative themselves, transform him into an "other" regardless of what they write. Writing is Adam's declaration that this is the space of the Other, the story of the Other, authored by the Other. Fourthly, the spaces of and in the book retain the promise or the imagination, for their author, primarily of a better "ordering", a more representative world, a world in which he is in control, to which he belongs and through which he identifies himself. Adam is provoked by those who take it upon themselves to represent others, by those who coming from a place of entitlement and privilege are gracious enough to lend their spaces and their voices to those deprived of any. It is in the same degree that he detests those who are capable of speaking up for themselves but do not.

As shall be demonstrated in further detail, Adam foregrounds the intensity of his need to break the silence that envelops his life, and revoke the lie he has been living through writing. Claiming both spaces of and in the book as his, and exercising his authority over them, by selection, omission, interpretation, interruption, and multiplicity, and fragmentation, is representative of such a need and intention. Writing becomes a performance of his self, an extension of himself outward. In such a manner, and through putting his story to words, Adam performs his spaces and is successful in shaking his reality in a subversive manner, and this through a number of points: since writing in itself is an act of resistance, being the narrator and writer of his own book, Adam is presented with the opportunity to reclaim his own voice, identity and space; Adam assumes full ownership over the form and content of his book, and is able to select what to include and exclude, breaking the structure, mutilating it, dividing, and interrupting its flow; finally, Adam makes the choice to hand his work over into the trust of a friend who ends up publishing it for him. In such a manner, the book enters the public sphere. Lefebvre contends that '[w]ords and signs facilitate […] metaphorisation—the transport, as it were, of the physical body outside itself'; most importantly, this operation allows for a 'strange interplay between (verbal) disembodiment and (empirical) re-embodiment, between uprooting and reimplantation, between spatialisation in an abstract expanse and localisation in determinate expanse'.[13]

Adam was still a baby during the encampment of the Lod citizens in Palestine by the Israeli authorities in 1948, and even though the camp was dismantled a year later, all its inhabitants, Adam included, internalise its crippling space. The residents' internalisation of the spaces of the ghetto, named as such by the Israelis, remains with them years after they leave them. Adam writes: 'It is true that when I grew conscious of the world around me, the barbed wire had already been dismantled, and the residents of the ghetto were no longer obliged to take the permission of the Israeli officer to get out, but the wires accompanied them all their lives; it even became more

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[13] Lefebvre, p. 203

pronounced' (*AG*, 134). Consequently, Adam, like all the other former residents of the camp, gets stuck in beginnings, constantly recreating himself by adopting a different story and identity each time. In fact, Adam changes his identity six times throughout his lifetime. He would leave one place for another, assuming a different character, a different story, and a different identity. When he reaches New York, for example, he claims to be the son of a Jewish survivor of the Warsaw camp. He thus denies his Arabness and his Palestinian identity. He even goes as far as to take the decision to change his name once he receives the citizenship. In other words, Adam is constantly trying to kill the Adam of the ghetto. His writing attempts so far are a collection of abandoned projects and shortcomings. Somehow, his own story, though he constantly tries to deny and suppress it, keeps interrupting what it is he is writing.

Living in denial in New York does not give Adam the peace of mind he is looking for. He still feels alienated, still an "other" despite his new identity and his intention of changing his name, to fully assimilate into life there. His frustration with his new space and his inability to get out of his old one are revealed in his preoccupation with space in general. This preoccupation with space and power is expressed firstly in the title of the book itself, from which the reader can gather two things: that he ghetto, as a spatial entity and experience, is going to play a major role in the novel; and that the story is written and claimed by Adam who, as the title suggests, belongs to the 'children' who lived through the experience of the ghetto in Lod. Most importantly, the reader understands that Adam will author his own story, instead of having someone else do it on his behalf. Thereby, the title alludes to the agency and subjectivity of Adam's "poetic-I". Ultimately, Adam is in charge. By not following any form or structure, by not explaining or justifying himself, by leaving his pen to reign free on paper, Adam consummates the liberating potential of the act of writing. 'I will leave myself to talk to its memory as it pleases, without any rules,' he writes, 'I will not change names to give the impression that what I am writing is literature. I will not invent a form' (*AG*, 98-9).

To accentuate this preoccupation with space, Adam opens his narrative with a scene that positions him in a room, in New York City, years after the ghetto experience. He is looking outside the window. The significance of this opening scene lies in the importance that Adam gives it—a symbol of hope and relief, inherent in the impression/illusion it gives the onlooker of gazing ahead, "out" of the room in which they are enclosed. However, for Adam, that is not the case, for he views this window more as a mirror, that instead of giving him opportunity to look outside of it (and of himself) reflects back on him and into the room he is in. He claims to see his soul through this window, but not in any positive light, for he sees it crashing against the glass. He declares that he has made the window his mirror because he is unable to look at his own reflection; he is 'removed' from himself and decides to look at people instead (*AG*, 21). This statement asserts Adam's feelings of otherness and alienation in New York and his removal from his true self, despite his self-acknowledged appropriation of an identity not his, as aforementioned. Adam's feelings of being removed from the spaces of the city around him extend to him being alienated from his own

body. In such a manner, his body itself becomes a heterotopia of juxtaposed contradictions, as feelings of belonging and non-belonging, of hope and resentment, intermingle.

The mirror is significantly referred to by Foucault as he explicates his concept of heterotopia. He considers it as a heterotopia itself, hosting myriad of contradictions and at the same time providing the onlooker with the illusion of a better place through his unreal reflection to the extent that his reality and reflection become blurred. Such is Adam's affliction. Safe in New York but unable to move forward, he mistakenly "recreates" himself, renouncing his old true self, and starting anew. Thoughts of displacement always accompany him, which tip the reader into the realisation—later clearly articulated by Adam as the story goes on—that even though he had left the ghetto a long time ago, the ghetto has not left him. Long after it is dismantled, Adam keeps identifying himself with the ghetto which has become 'his life', and which 'will be transformed into my secret narrative throughout more than fifty years'; furthermore, when asked to introduce himself while studying in the University of Haifa, Adam always replies with the word 'ghetto' instead of his name (*AG*, 124). The nagging and perpetual feeling of alienation, of being a character of fiction—and thus unreal—as he phrases it, every time he adopts a new identity, is reflective of how far removed from his true self he really is.

Adam's inability to write anything remotely close to a coherent text is expressed by him on several instances throughout the text. Interruptions take over his manuscript from beginning to end. However, the significance of these interruptions, along with their objective, takes a different turn once he starts writing his own narrative. They become intentional and agentive. Adam insists that his story defies narration, for 'how were I to tell her [his friend Dalia] a mute story? […] My mother used to ask me to wear this hat so I would disappear and no one would see me. We had to live invisible so that we do not get expelled from our land or killed' (*AG*, 98). This statement is an affirmation that the language of pain is nothing other than silence, as Khoury describes it.[14] It is also a clear reference to the exclusion of the Palestinians, on the one hand, and the silencing of their narrative on another, a point I will shortly be returning to.

Not being able to write deludes Adam into thinking that he can substitute living life by writing it. However, it also drives him to the realisation that he is unable to do either—neither write, nor live (see *AG*, 22). Towards the beginning of his manuscript, he details his writing process and how it shifts in purpose and content as he struggles through it. It first starts out as the story of the land from which he comes, to morph into writing about the circumstances of the birth of an idea once he realises the futility of "the metaphor". This leads him not only to strike out what he had previously written, but to rewrite the whole thing all together. The last metamorphosis of his writing comes when he gives up on symbols and sets out to write his memoire. He declares the failure of his initial plan, but admits that he has learned and remembered a lot about himself in the process. Adam states that '[i]nstead of killing memory through metaphor, as I had attempted to do through my aborted literary work on Waddah al-Yaman, I will write it and transform it into a

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[14] Farah Aridi, 'A Personal Interview with Elias Khoury—Writing the Silence in *Awlad al-Ghetto: Ismi Adam*', (Unpublished Interview, 2017), p. 5.

corpse made up of words' (*AG*, 96). He claims to remember everything and asserts that 'the flood of my memory has drowned the metaphor and erased the symbol'; therefore, he now feels compelled to write 'the truth, bare, shocking, contradictory, and brutal, just as I have lived it' (*AG*, 98).

Two prominent incidents break the flow of the narrative, allowing Adam to abandon all his created selves, reclaim his own, and start writing his story. The first is him learning the true circumstances surrounding his birth, and the second is his encounter with two celebrated intellectuals, namely, the Lebanese author Elias Khoury, and the Israeli director, Haim Zilberman. Learning that Manal is not his real mother and that no one knows his exact date of birth, let alone, his biological parents, shake Adam off course. He further breaks in rage following a conversation with Khoury and Zilberman; he accuses them of appropriating the Palestinian narrative and the right to represent them. He writes, 'No one has the right to turn memory into a corpse, to dissect and dismember it in front of people in order to make a film' (*AG*, 93). Sensing that both have appropriated the Palestinian experience and turned it into a symbol anger him. He is provoked by their sense of entitlement and air of intellectual superiority:

> I wrote anger and error. I said, that shall be my duty; I am compelled to end my life with a story, for we only live to be transformed into stories and nothing more. So I wrote a lot, only to discover that silence is more eloquent than words, and that I want these words to burn (AG, 24-5).

It is then that he sets out to write his story and reclaim his memory as his alone, along with his agency, voice, and identity. He writes: 'I now discover that I have lived all my life in the chest of fear, and now, to get out of that chest, I should not only write it, but break it as well' (*AG*, 97). It is also then that the interruptions in the second half of his manuscript adopt a different objective, becoming an anti-hegemonic literary tool. He uses them in order to affirm his control over his text, structurally and content-wise. The interjections include flashbacks, literary criticism, commentary, and memories. They form the "ruptures" required in his life to affect and enable a challenging and subversive action. Prior to both realisation of and commitment to writing, he acknowledges the interruptions and keeps them there, free to interrupt and interact with the poet's story and even to overlap by using some of its concepts and props as metaphors of his own life. At that point, he recognises his cowardice of writing other people's stories:

> I do not possess the courage to commit suicide; therefore, I am incapable of writing my story as heroes write theirs. What I have to do instead is to write their stories in order to get closer to myself, and while doing so console my incompetence at heroism by creating stories (AG, 41).

The lines of similarities which he draws with al-Yaman console him. But they are more of a drug that sedate his passions until they explode and he can no longer endure it. But now that he is writing his story, he writes for himself in the first degree: 'I write the story [his own] to retrieve my memory' (*AG*, 294).

As such, this break in the flow of the narrative ruptures the stagnant alienating space into interstices through which he can exercise his agency. This break also serves as an example of appropriating a heterotopic space, giving it new meaning and function. Hetherington views heterotopia as 'sites which rupture the order of things through their different mode of ordering to that which surrounds them.'[15] Such sites thus adopt the role of facilitators to acts of resistance and transgression and it is therefore the actions and practices of social agents within it that give a certain space its meaning and definition. By writing his own story himself, Adam creates a rupture within the dominant realm of representation of the Palestinian narrative and the muteness imposed on the Palestinians. Following Hetherington's logic, we can consider heterotopia to be performative in nature; ordering is not something we do, but rather something that we are in, to use his terms. He writes: 'Ordering is a performance context: social, technical, material, temporal and spatial, and this context is not fixed but open to infinite change and uncertain consequences.'[16] The book as heterotopia and writing as an act of resistance foreground what Lefebvre opines in that regard:

> For Lefebvre, it is the task of acts of resistance, in such spaces, to make space as a whole visible, and in so doing reveal the social relations of power that operate within society. In this account, activities associated with the production of representational spaces, are displaced, such that marginality is let free; marginal groups, marginal practices and marginal ways of thinking help produce the meaning of the sites that are used in the creation of representational space.[17]

Margaret Kohn defines the concept of heterotopia of resistance as a 'real countersite that inverts and contests existing economic and social hierarchies. Its function is social transformation rather than escapism, containment, or denial'.[18] In other words, such a concept constitutes a more socially aware or conscious action against a dominant order or system. For Kohn, and as all the disenfranchised characters in Khoury's novel demonstrate, no subject will be able to create or even appropriate a certain space without first assuming control over it.

Adam's authority over his manuscript extends to both its form and content. It is beyond the scope of this paper to investigate the significance of the titles that Adam chooses for his chapters, or the distinct manner in which he divides them. Suffice it to recall that Adam follows no clear system of enumerating and classifying his chapters and entries other than his own. He insists on narrating the events as he remembers them, and thus staying "true" to the story. 'I leave memory to speak as it pleases and to generate its imagery without any form', he writes. 'I am concerned with the ending which I will not write in any case. For like me, whoever wishes to tell his/her story, has to acknowledge that he/she shall not write its ending because he/she has no knowledge of it' (*AG*, 109). Additionally to the fact that the chapter titles are interrupted through their very naming, Adam breaks the narrative in another manner: he incessantly interrupts the flow of his narration

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[15] Hetherington, p. 46.
[16] Hetherington, p. 35.
[17] ibid., p. 23.
[18] Margaret Kohn, *Radical Space: Building the House of the People* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2003), p. 91.

on numerous occasions throughout the text in the form of commentaries, memories, explanations, thoughts, literary criticism, emotional outbursts, and other incidents, that he would include in between brackets. These bracketed interferences and interruptions also act as a means of "owning" the space in which he writes, the book. This therefore presents itself, along with the act of writing his own story himself, as a form of resistance and reclamation of agency. There are a total of 41 brackets across the four parts of the novel; Part One contains none, Part Two includes thirteen brackets, while Part Three only eight. As for Part four, it boasts twenty brackets. Such a multiplicity of fragmentation is a further affirmation of the text's heterotopic nature.

Being master of his own narrative, shaping it, forming it, and interrupting it as he pleases, is not the only subversive significance behind Adam's act of writing. Specific to this novel is the act of writing as a Palestinian, born during the Nakba (1948) and currently living in exile. It is a statement against enforced silence, on the one hand, and appropriation and (mis)representation on the other. In the case of the latter, stories are turned either to art or to sentimental fads that privileged people, the likes of Khoury and Zilberman, according to Adam, employ to prove they are making a difference. In an article titled 'Rethinking the *Nakba'*, Khoury states that the Palestinians on account of the Nakba lost 'four main aspects of their lives': their cities, their land, their Palestinian name, and their ability to tell their story.[19] Khoury claims that the Palestinians now speak a silent language. The muteness they face, according to him, is double-edged: one that was self-inflicted due to the gravity of the pain they suffer that cannot be contained by words, and the other through the representation of the Palestinians by scholars and the exclusion of the Palestinian narrative exercised by world and Arab politics alike. Rosemary Sayigh discusses how the Palestinian Nakba literature is even absented from the Trauma genre.[20]This fact drives Khoury to announce that the Nakba did not take place in 1948; rather, it started in 1948 and is still ongoing till this very day.[21] The muteness of literature, announces Khoury, is 'part of the muteness of history or, in other words, part of the inability of the victim to write the story'; it is a struggle, he claims, that Anton Shammas, a Palestinian novelist, brought back to it being a struggle related to the storyteller.22

In *Awlad al-Ghetto*, the act of narrating one's own story becomes more important than the story itself. This is significantly true in Adam's case when he claims that he is writing a story trapped inside of him; he is writing so that his manuscript becomes his grave, his final rest. This is the forte of Adam's manuscript; his story shall not be lost and shall not be written (or (mis)represented) by someone else. What is more detrimental than caging or imprisoning people's bodies, controlling their lives, and confiscating their freedom within the camp, is this enforced silence, of not allowing them to speak up or even cry. Maamoun, a blind man and a father figure to Adam throughout his

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[19] Elias Khoury, 'Rethinking the *Nakba'*, *Critical Inquiry*, 38(2), (2012), 250-66, p. 259.
[20] See Rosemary Sayigh, 'On the Exclusion of the Palestinian Nakba from the "Trauma Genre"', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 43(1), (2013), 51-60.
[21] See Aridi, p. 4.
[22] Khoury, 'Rethinking the *Nakba'*, p. 254.

childhood in Lod, gives a talk years later in New York City. Speaking about Palestine and Palestinian literature, he says:

> The issue does not only reside in the crime of displacing the Palestinians from their land, because a more atrocious crime followed; it is the crime of enforcing the silence on a whole people. Here, I do not speak of the silence that follows "trauma" in the language of psychologists. But I speak of the silence that the victor had imposed on the defeated utilising the discourse of the Jewish victim that permeated the world, as in the West, following the crimes of World War II and the brutality of the Nazi Holocaust (AG, 361).

Adam refuses to be turned into a symbol or to be captive within a world of the literary imaginary: 'I dislike this manipulation of life; we are not heroes in novels for our destinies and stories to be manipulated in such a manner' (AG, 144). He asserts his dislike of heroes and heroism by affirming his ordinariness:

> I am a mere man who tried to live, only to discover life's impossibility. I am not saying that life is meaningless, or that meaning does not concern me, or that seeking it seems boring and futile to me. I am a man who lived all his life in the postponed and the temporary (AG, 144).

Adam's manuscript is a compilation of stories of remembrance. They are varied, heterogeneous in their type and kind, of multiple versions, and follow no linear or chronological narration. He insists he is neither writing a novel nor a memoire, but unloading his memories on paper without any specific order. In a relevant reference to *Gate of the Sun*, Amos Goldberg addresses Khoury's stylistic preferences:

> [T]he open, polyphonic story that subverts every linear structure and closure, simultaneously fulfils two nearly opposing functions. On the one hand, it reflects the disintegrated and fragmented experience of the trauma and, on the other hand, it affords the possibility of politically and psychologically working through it.23

Adam's style of writing, then, can be said to be a heterotopic act of remembrance. His memories of the experience he narrates have mainly one source: his mother Manal. The narrative therefore is nothing more than 'the splatter of words and the shrapnel of memories' (*AG*, 311). The multiple stories of and about other people that he includes as part of his own narrative are necessary for otherwise his story would not be complete. However, he asserts that he is not trying to prove anything. Rather, '[w]hat I am trying to do is go with my story to its beginning', and the story starts at the Lod camp (*AG*, 306). As he writes his own story down, Adam refuses to be accused of invention; he is done with recreating himself. Even though he claims that we rarely remember the beginning of things, and more often than not end up creating them, this is not what he is doing. Instead, he is remembering the stories as he had heard and felt them. In addition, he asserts, 'I fill

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23 Amos Goldberg, 'Narrative, Testimony, and Trauma: The Nakba and the Holocaust in Elias Khoury's *Gate of the Sun*', *Interventions*, 18(3), (2016), 335-58, p. 345.

the many gaps [in my story] by rummaging through people's memories. I mix all that with my own words and a little bit of imagination, that highlights these gaps instead of erasing them' (*AG*, 293). His act of remembrance, expressed through writing, is an attempt to expose the gaps of his own memory:

> I am not writing a testimony, but a story taken from the heart of stories. I patch it up with the glue of pain and engulf it with probabilities of memory. For this is the ghetto I have been in; in my youth, I had thought it to be my excuse and passport to run away from my fate. But in the end, it [the ghetto] became both my fate and the origins and essence of my story (AG, 293).

The act of remembering, especially a traumatic event or experience, entails reformulating the past, remapping the memories. However, neither Adam nor Khoury make the mistake of extending Adam's writing to include a rewriting or representation of the Palestinian collective memory and consciousness. Adam reclaims his own story alone, and his writing challenges the exclusion and misrepresentation of the Palestinian narrative. In an interview with Atassi-Mejcher, Khoury says: 'Literature can provide a context for rethinking and contemplations but its role is not to recollect memory or the past. Literature can only question how things are put together and how they are seen'.[24] Adam's fragmented remapping of his own past does not surprise Goldberg. The latter writes how '[t]he victim's story cannot prettify itself, sew the torn pieces back together, pretend to be a tale of victory, and thus must be [and is] reflected in the structure of the narrative'.[25] Remapping the past is as agentive an action as that of remapping one's spaces to determine their own placeness within it, or, in other words, one's sense of belonging to and identification with a certain space. In a critical essay titled *al-Dhakirah*, Khoury states that 'the novelist has [recently] begun to resemble a historian or sociological analyst. But he writes his history outside the rigidity of history of power, he writes history for the communal consciousness, to form it'.[26] It is in such a manner that Adam writes in an attempt to drive people to reformulate their socio-political consciousness.

In this article, my analysis of Adam's book as a heterotopic space, both in its content and form, in addition to the active role of writing his own story himself, serves to provide an example of manipulating and appropriating a heterotopic space in favour of challenging and subverting a dominant narrative and discourse. It accentuates the agentive role a subject within a said space plays in changing the functions—of the already changeable—heterotopia, as Foucault maintains. In such a manner, and as demonstrated above, Adam 'produces a space', to use a Lefebvrian phrase, through which he is able to reclaim his memory and challenge the silencing and exclusion of the Palestinian narrative within dominant discourse. Creating the possibility of what

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[24] Atassi-Mejcher, 'Necessity to Forget', p. 5.
[25] Goldberg, p. 343.
[26] As quoted in Head, p. 181.

Hetherington refers to as an alternate social ordering, as well as utilising both the spaces of silence and the book as heterotopia, Adam succeeds in transforming both spaces into sites of resistance through his written narrative. Both the act of writing and Adam's stylistic and literary command over the book's form and content attest to such a success.

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