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"Words That Turn Mirrors of Words": Political Intertextualities in Elias Khoury's Children of the Ghetto[1]

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"When words are many, crime is not absent,
but he who holds his tongue is wise."
(Book of Proverbs 10:19)

Palestinian testimony is entrapped. Perhaps it is the most arduous, failed and exhausted performance of historical and literary speech in Western history, not only because the perpetrators are victims themselves but because they are the ultimate victims of the ethos of an entire civilization: the West in the aftermath of the Second World War (Goldberg and Hazan 2015). For this reason, even 74 years after the Nakba and more than hundred years since the Balfour Declaration's decision to tear their land apart, Palestinians are hard put to find addressees for their narrative. Elias Khoury is universally acclaimed for

his sweeping epos of the Palestinian Nakba in the country's northern regions in his novel *Gate of the Sun* (1998). The novel not only bases its multiple plots on testimonies to which Khoury served as a very attentive listener, but meticulously unravels the question of historical and literary narratives – fragmented, subjective– as he has done throughout his long and prolific career (Mejcher-Atassi 2010, 95).

In his latest project, a trilogy of novels (2016-), Khoury tackles his enduring goal of narrating the continuous Nakba from a different perspective: instead of the deprived Palestinians, he deals with the divided and tormented figure of the Palestinian Israeli, a convoluted identity that has many other formulations: "the Palestinians of 48," "Israeli Arabs" or "Palestinians with Israeli citizenship." The central protagonist of these novels was raised by Israeli Jews, Holocaust survivors no less, thus inextricably entangling the Nakba with the Holocaust. In this study, I argue that *Children of the Ghetto*, the first in the trilogy is a remarkable testimony not to trauma itself but to the inability of trauma to reach out and obtain a listener. I do so by comparing it with two fundamental intertexts- Khoury's *Gate of the Sun* and the symbol of the Palestinian narrative in Hebrew letters: the novel *Arabesques* (1986) by Anton Shammas to whom *Children of the Ghetto* is dedicated. I argue that Khoury's endeavor reflects the diminished possibility for testimonial discourse which runs parallel to the actual political reality of the Palestinian struggle for recognition.

Children of the Ghetto elucidates the condition of a trauma that lacks listeners: its immersion in narcissistic circles of literary mimesis, in excessive sophisticated formulations of storytelling, in descriptive speech (of telling rather than showing) which fails to reach out and act in the world, even results in the end in a difficulty to achieve and render the position of a witness. The figure of the witness – here a Palestinian Israeli who embodies the ordeals of Israeliness and the Holocaust – becomes merely a detached symbol, ungraspable through speech and something which Arab letters only describe from a distance. The frustration arising from the impossibility of reaching out and finding a listener or of acting politically in the world by way of giving witness, and the corresponding frustration over the difficulty in speaking for the witness that inhibits his development into a convincing literary figure, reveal the gap between narratives, languages and traumas. In the interests of full disclosure, my position as reader in some way mirrors Khoury's position as an Arab writer who writes about the erudite Arab-Israeli while lacking a sufficient knowledge of the Hebrew language: I am a Mizrahi-Israeli-Jew whose work focuses on Israeli and Holocaust literatures, and therefore although I speak Arabic, I am a neophyte and outsider in the world of Arab letters, but nevertheless I represent in many ways the precise object of Khoury's remarkable political endeavor.

Clichés: The Exhaustion of Trauma

The title of a book by the two French psychologists Françoise Davoine and Jean-Max Gaudillière reads *Whereof One Cannot Speak, Thereof One Cannot Stay Silent* which captures the contradiction inherent in the experience of trauma and its possible narration and recoveries (LaCapra 2013, 54). In his novel *Children of the Ghetto: My Name is Adam*, Elias Khoury's attempt to address the ongoing Palestinian catastrophe from 1948 onwards, is an extreme example of this circular argument that captures on the one hand literature's powerlessness to adequately confront catastrophe, and on the other, the effort to corroborate its aftermath with words. The circular endeavor around events that are not entirely graspable with words thus implies that every literary account of trauma is some form of excess.

The motivation of Khoury's novel, in a nutshell, is to address that which the West never addresses, which is Palestinian pain, but in so doing, it also reaches the inherent limits of literature's ability to adequately deliver pain and the empathetic testimony that might regenerate it (hence finding itself superfluous). In her work on testimony, Shoshanah Felman has shown that testimony is an act of communication which necessitates, more than any other, an addressee, someone who is willing not only to listen but also to interpret and decipher an expression which is challenging and inaccessible in form and

in content (Felman and Laub 1992, 42). In confronting a trauma with no addressee and no listener, whose victims and witnesses are cast aside, Khoury's novel bumps into excess alone, turning the process of narration into a series of unceasing and restless attempts to reach out, to talk, to explain, which quickly give way to a frustrated retreat into silence, oblivion and even destruction[2].

Also a literary critic, Khoury was one of the first to note that the Nakba is an ongoing trauma, of which 1948 only marks the beginning (Khoury 2012). Catastrophe, like any other type of collapse, is, by its nature, temporary and always suggests an equilibrium that precede and follow it. For this reason, traumas are normally single and frequently very short-lived. But what happens if the continuous murder of a people lasts several years? And what happens if sustained state violence against a people continues for decades? Moreover, what happens if the immense cost of the former in terms of time, number of victims, and its effect on successive generations, is the very basis that allows the existence of the latter? Understanding the existence of Jews and Palestinians in Israel-Palestine as mutually exclusive suggests that extinction is the latent fuel of the occupation[3], and what I believe lies behind *Children of the Ghetto* aporetic frustration of a constant process of reaching out by testimonies that never elicit reactions. Since the process of testifying is constant, the process of articulating trauma with words is bound by repetition and even clichés. In addition, since silencing one trauma is justified by the

articulation of another trauma, the same process of reaching out and of articulation is bound also by the latter's repetitions and clichés.[4] I believe that this is pertinent to the Palestinian struggle as a whole, and if Israel, Zionism and the Jewish Question (always a European question) are conceived as a continuous project, then the understanding of the Nakba as continuous must also partake in this cycle of exhaustions and clichés. Israeli-Jewish suffering is in itself more imaginary than real; it is based more on clichés than on the complexities of reality, which of course, in many cases, also involve the real suffering of Israelis and Jews. Therefore, Palestinian suffering also becomes trivial.

Children of the Ghetto is a reaction to Khoury's acclaimed *Gate of the Sun*, which was applauded by critics and academics and is still considered to be the most important and comprehensive depiction of the Nakba (Aljahdali 2019, 554). *Gate of the Sun* consciously tries to avoid mirroring the Holocaust, but due to its Scheherazadean form of retelling narratives of victimhood, also runs the risk of prolonging a counterproductive melancholia, the outcome of being confined to one narrative, in the way the Jews are confined to the Holocaust (Razinsky and Goldberg 2019, 63, 65)[5].

Children of the Ghetto returns to many of the themes of Gate of the Sun, the long shadow of which is apparent from the outset, in Khoury's preface where he addresses his protagonist Adam as a non-fictive man who him-

self challenges Khoury and his earlier work's reliability as fiction, by claiming that *Gate of the Sun* is part of reality. This inversion, with Khoury maintaining that *Gate of the Sun* is fictive while addressing Adam as real, and Adam claiming that *Gate of the Sun* is real while he himself is fictive, pits them against one another in a rivalry that escalates in their common pursuit after the young and beautiful Sarang Ligh, Adam's friend and Khoury's student at NYU. In the preface, Khoury clashes, almost violently, with Adam's troubled and tormented personality in his role as author. In what follows, I examine this conflict between a (fictive?) writer and his (fictive?) protagonist-writer against the backdrop of the frustration of writing a testimony which fails to produce addressees. I will elaborate on this question by exploring how continuous trauma becomes a cliché, and how it transforms colonial mimicry into appropriation. Both mimicry/appropriation and clichés are the outcome of the failure of victims and witnesses to gain attention, thereby losing the ability to use language as a means for human agency and recognition. I conclude with the question of aesthetics so as to expand the comparative study of Khoury's endeavor to write his work within the long, and perhaps over-burdened and exhaustive tradition of Hebrew literature about Palestinian citizens of Israel, the aim and frame of his novel and his (fictive? allegorical?) protagonist. But before delving to these intertextual readings, I wish to discuss excess.

Excess: The Telling of a Muted Thirst

Children of the Ghetto opens with a preface by Elias Khoury, the author himself, followed by the novel's protagonist and narrator Adam Dannoun's introductory testimony, which leads to another introduction (number one according to Khoury/Dannoun) to the novel Dannoun is attempting to write about the Omayyad poet Waddah al-Yaman. Then, a further six introductions are followed for the al-Yaman novel, which Dannoun abandons altogether. The failure to address the Omayyad poet and his trauma – itself a muted trauma – leads Adam to focus on the story of his own life, which constitutes the second major section of *Children of the Ghetto*. Having become fairly acquainted with Adam through his multiple introductions, his diary-like notes (edited by Khoury) now expose us to the complexities of his life: he is an attractive fifty-year old Palestinian of Israeli citizenship who lives in New York and sells falafel, a true connoisseur of both Arabic and Hebrew literature, and totally immersed in the history of Israel-Palestine. We begin to learn of his childhood in Lydda, during the military rule over Palestinians who resided within the 1948 borders of the newly-established state.

Adam's upbringing in what became the Palestinian ghetto in Lydda, is marked by manifold details of lineage and identities which also suggest excess. He has three alternative fathers: Hasan Dannoun, a hero of the Pal-

estinian resistance; the blind and well-versed Ma'moun who raised him together with his mother Manal, and the biological father about whom he knows nothing, having been found as a baby on his dead mother's breast during the war. From the very beginning of Adam's notes, it is clear that his story almost completely parallels the history of his people, as he himself asks "Am I the son of the story?" (Khoury 2016, 117). The excess of his identity, soon to be unraveled not only between the three possible fathers – all victims of the Nakba – but also between the purchased identity as a descendant of Holocaust survivors (the fourth father is the fictive Yitzhak Danoun), is the excess of the story of one trauma that was almost entirely silenced by another: the Holocaust that has become not only the bedrock of Israeli Jewish identity and the justification of state violence towards Arabs, but a mark of Western civilization. In his own words, he is the "satiated child of the story and of thirst. My story's water never runs dry and my thirst is never quenched" (Khoury 2019, 103; 2016, 118).

The final section of the novel, titled "The Ghetto Days," continues with Adam's notes, focusing this time on the retelling of testimonies related to him by witnesses, among them the American-Palestinian doctor Mikhail Samara, Khalil Ayoub (the protagonist of Khoury's novel *Gate of the Sun* who met Adam in Ramallah in 1997), Ma'moun, who became a scholar of Arabic literature in Cairo, his (adopted) mother Manal, and culminating with

the testimony of Murad al-Alami, whom Adam met by chance in his falafel shop. This last testimony becomes increasingly graphic and shocking, recalling the horrors familiar from the Holocaust, which are evoked with particular vividness in the sub-chapter entitled "Sonder-kommando" that describes the responsibility placed on the inmates of the Lydda ghetto to bury and burn the bodies of their own people.

To the excesses of the plot and its many contradictory possibilities (which are part and parcel of Adam's shattered identity) we must add the aesthetic of his language, which Adam himself frequently discusses in complex meta-lingual terms. If silence is a theme that Adam addresses both in his notes and in his incomplete novel on al-Yaman, then an aporia is self-evident not only in relation to trauma but in relation to words themselves that are never adequate for silence. The clearest example is provided in the discussion between Adam and his de-facto father Ma'moun about literature's ability to describe colors, with reference both to Ma'moun's congenital blindness and to his literary investigations of silence, in particular its crucial poetic function in the work of the Palestinian national poet Mahmoud Darwish. Here, M'amoun tells Adam that the Arabs are masters of description because of the Jahiliyyah poetry, and that he believes that description – where things become words – functions as a mechanism for dealing with the world. Although he fails to describe colors, he does not live in

darkness: "I don't live in the color black because I don't know what you mean by that word… history is blind, Naji, my beloved, and it takes a blind man like me to see it" (Ibid 2019, 148; 2016, 142-143), implying that trauma and history are not a void or an absence, but possess a latent presence which requires special sensitivities. In the same way, the Nakba, and more specifically in this context, the Lydda massacre, demands that its addressees and probably its witnesses as well, be in possession of exceptional qualities, since trauma, like colors, requires an unusual understanding. Although Adam repeatedly bemoans the impotence of language to match events, and eschews the abundance of descriptive and figurative speech, he nonetheless employs many metaphors that stretch the extremes of tautology and oxymoron, such as "there is nothing that could resemble love like (but) love."[6] When describing his Jewish lover Dalia, he expresses discomfort with his trope: "... she was as beautiful as silence (if that is the proper expression to describe a woman covered with her own shadow and a silence that spoke without words)" (2019, 111; 2016, 105). At other times, silence leads him to complete contradictions that signal again void and destruction, disabling any prospect of the accountability of words: "I shouldn't have been, in order to be."[7] Enumerating all his attempts to recreate himself – by leaving the ghetto, as a student at the university of Haifa, as a journalist, etc. – he ends at the seventh and current attempt (an echo of the number of his attempts to write al-Yaman's story): the writing of

these very notes, whose words resemble shrouds (2019, 118; 2016, 123). Writing precipitates his destruction.

This same simile of likening language to shrouds, will be elaborated further in the fourth section ("The Days of the Ghetto"), through excessive use of figurative language: "Language isn't formed of dust; it is the opposite of all other creature that die. The problem of language is its corpse, because it stays with us… we find ourselves chewing its corpse in our mouths… [I] found myself before the corpse of a language for which we can find no grave… I'm exhausted now. I feel as though words are no longer capable of saying anything…"[8] A metalinguistic discussion of figurative speech is interwoven here with figurative speech itself, where the simile – language as dust – is articulated in a visceral, graphic and again excessive way: although it is uneatable, we chew it nonetheless. Language's futility or deficiency is expressed through excessiveness, which leads to frustration and exhaustion; it is the generation of something that fails to generate.[9]

The Holocaust, the Nakba and the Limits of Comparison

While *Gate of the Sun* embodies most of the themes of *Children of the Ghetto*, it does not share its self-violence, excessiveness and frustration. It also never descends into the tautological formulation we have seen, which

I believe is the outcome of an over-indulgence in the many traits praised by critics in literary engagements with trauma: the fragmented nature of literature that escapes history's tendency towards teleological narratives of a unified and solid identity.[10] I believe that while critics tend to immerse themselves in these aesthetics to the point of self-indulgence, which is a natural outcome of the coupling of art and trauma, they also fail to see its exhaustion, which marks *Children of the Ghetto*'s potential to shed new light on this coupling. The limitations of Khoury's latest novel mark an important achievement (contradictory as this may seem), in its unraveling of many of the shortcomings in the understanding and articulation of trauma in mimetic representation.

Almost all of *Children of the Ghetto* 's themes are to be found in the earlier novel, which also discusses meta-poetical questions and deals with literary descriptions as such, or the ability to address historical truth through testimony (Khoury 1998, 203-204); literature or the "reliable" histories of documents and archives (a theme most overtly manifested in the conflict between Khoury and Adam). Moreover, the Nakba in *Gate of the Sun* was conceived also via the Holocaust, tellingly expressed by Edward Said in his classic phrase referring to the Palestinians as the victims of the victims, an observation that reverberates in Nahilah's words to an Israeli officer in 1948: "We are the Jews' Jews" (Khoury 2006, 365; 1998, 372). The narrator and principal protagonist, Khalil Ayoub, rejects the indiscriminate use of this epithet in

present day Lebanon because its relevance is restricted to the Palestinians in Israel who are subject to Jewish, that is, foreign rule (Ibid.). It is the massacre in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps that triggers the comparison between Jews and Palestinians in *Gate of the Sun* and as we see, Khalil stresses Arab sovereignty and culpability in this disaster, whose both perpetrators and victims are Arab. Adam refers specifically to Khalil's use of the famous metaphor from Isaiah (53:7) of sheep being led to the slaughter, one that he elaborates further in the story of the muted poet al-Yaman, but rebukes it for a different reason: he does not like these historical comparisons because they turn war crimes into predetermined events and the victims into anonymous numbers that obscure their own particular tragedy (Khoury 2016, 212-213).

While both reservations are pertinent and important, Khoury himself, in a specific reference to *Gate of the Sun* in his academic writing, appears to be leaning towards an affirmation of the equation:

> Twelve years after the publication of my book I see the Nakba as a process without an end. I tried to create mirrors instead of allegories and metaphors; the allegory pretends to reflect reality, while mirrors reflect other mirrors. My stories were mirrors of stories, and pain mirrored pain... the story betrayed my suppositions; the protagonists did not reveal their memories. On the contrary, they were living the present (Khoury 2012, 266).

It is difficult to pinpoint precisely what distinguishes mirroring from allegory, but it is clear that mirrors are Khoury's way of understanding the Nakba as a continuous trauma, the outcome of the fact that every story, and indeed every testimony, relates to the present but reverberates the past. On re-examining this excerpt now, after the publication of *Children of the Ghetto*, it seems that Khoury also accommodates the Holocaust into this cyclical mirroring of pain that has foreshadowed in the past and that (re)projects again from the present into the past. In the same article, he points out that "the western world found that washing its hands of Jewish blood with Palestinian blood was the easiest way to break with the atrocities of the Second World War" (Ibid., 261), calling into play the reciprocity that relates to Biblical and Christian victimhood and surrendering the Palestinian cause to this teleology. Finally, in spite of decrying the comparison between the Holocaust and the Nakba, Khoury juxtaposes them in all of the three confrontations (in the essay and the two novels) which is no doubt an important gesture, but one that cannot challenge the basic assumption of constant pain that mirrors pain and that even jeopardizes a melancholic self-indulgence in pain, exhaustion and despair.[12]

As intimated, apart from *Gate of the Sun* which manifests agency and responsibility among Arabs themselves (Lebanese and even Palestinians), nowhere in these analytical reflections about the pairing of the Holocaust and

the Nakba is there self-criticism. The comparisons at no time examine the nature of the victims, even though the difference between them is both so obvious and at the same time so fundamental to the Jewish perception of the Shoah as an exceptional occurrence. As an historical event, the Shoah must be perceived in comparative terms, as a genocide rooted in imperialism and racism. Ethnic cleansing is also a latent mark of Israeli state violence against Palestinians. The Jewish people, however, were not targeted by the Nazi machine out of expansionist or territorial ambitions, but because they were regarded as inherently evil. While Jews were victimized simply because they were Jews, Palestinian are victims of a national struggle (its settler-colonial ambitions notwithstanding) where both sides – and here one can almost talk of symmetry – seek self-determination (hence relies on mutually exclusion). This is a bitter pill to swallow, but is exactly what separates the Nakba from the Holocaust: both share many of the universal aspects of the Holocaust, but the belief that the Jews represent a global threat and should be annihilated from the earth is a peculiar and unique aspect of the Holocaust not shared by the Nakba. Only when one recognizes this can one fully grasp the underlying universal and hence comparable aspect of the two catastrophes which is the fundamental requirement for co-habitation: in Palestine/ Israel as in the rest of the earth. It seems that Khoury's formulations of mirroring traumas frequently collapse precisely into what Bashir and Goldberg have dubbed

"identification with the other," which, according to Dominique LaCapra's theory, might jeopardize the ability to process (*durcharbeiten*, work-through) catastrophe by recognizing the fundamental difference of the other (Bashir and Goldberg 2018, 22). Failing to recognize difference, identification risks narcissistic appropriation of one's other, or subjugation to it, both potentially violent (Ibid.).

"The gray zone," was a term coined by Primo Levi for cases in which the distinction between perpetrator and victims is not entirely feasible, as in the collaboration of Jews with their oppressors. *Gate of the Sun* consists almost entirely of the narrator Khalil's lengthy monologue addressed to the now comatose Yunes, a Palestinian resistance fighter of the generation expelled from the Galilee in 1948. Confronting the muted patriarch (a crucial theme in Children of the Ghetto) with stories of parents who abandoned their children under trees (a mythological story/testimony that parallels Adam Dannoun's own story) or even killed them for fear of being discovered by the Israelis, Khalil accuses Yunes: "You like things clear and simple. The murderer is a known quantity, and the victim, too, and it's up to us to see that justice is done. Unfortunately, my brother, it wasn't as simple as us and them. It was something else that's hard to defined" (Khoury 2006, 210; 1998, 211). This gray zone resembles many of the Holocaust testimonies that were recorded during the catastrophe in diaries, and oth-

er forms of confessions where extreme situations of deprivation have led to rivalry among family members. This "zone" also encompasses Jewish functionaries and collaborators, still a highly contentious issue in Holocaust memory. But this universal link to the Holocaust, which in fact renders every claim by an oppressed people more plausible and worthy of attention – indeed, those testimonies are exactly what de-sacralizes the Holocaust and makes the monstrous accessible – did not find its way to *Children of the Ghetto*. For this reason, even the term *Sonderkommando*, which became a type of proper name in Holocaust narratives, and here applies to Murad's horrendous testimony, fails to arouse the survivors' existential conflicts and sense of guilt which are so prevalent in Holocaust literary accounts (Khoury 2016, 379-380).

Contesting the Self: *Gate of the Sun*

Turning now to the question of authorship and testimony which is a principal theme in both novels, my analysis suggests that in this regard as well, Gate of the Sun is more daring and polyphonic than *Children of the Ghetto.*[13] I argued in an earlier paper that Khoury's depiction in Gate of the Sun of a Jewish Lebanese woman who dwells in the former house of a Palestinian women who now lives in Beirut, tends to symmetry and implies a sterile and monophonic equation according to which each women yearns for her lost origins (Ben Ye-

huda 2018, 261). On the other hand, I also claim that the novel's narration is polyphonic and that its narratological motivation is founded entirely on connections with the other. Like Shahrazad, Khalil recounts stories to Yunes so that he will stay alive, albeit in a coma. For this reason, his monologue, which provides the story's narratological thread, is suffused with expressions of appeal and entreaty (in most cases, Khalil's ability to recount is contingent on his asking Yunes: "Do you remember?"). Like Yalo's plea to his judges in Khoury's long narratological experiment with monologues in *Yalo* (2002), Khalil's monologue is a speech act which aspires to resurrect its interlocutor, and therefore the full consideration it shows its addressee informs its dialogical formulation. The monologue frequently contains responses and answers, and the speaker rebukes his mute partner for arguing with him – "Please, don't speak of betrayal – […] I'm not using your story to complete my own" (Khoury 2006, 137; 1998, 135) – and although sustaining all the while a syntactical clarity and an elevated linguistic register which descends into "telling" rather than "showing,"[14] it maintains conflictual emotions and self-reflection. Thus Khalil reproaches Yunes for failing to understand the Arab world and its penchant for civil war (Khoury 1998, 415), and for his and his generation's blindness to the Holocaust and to Jewish suffering (Bashir and Goldberg 2018, 20-22).

The narrative voice in the multiple stories/testimonies within other stories changes a number of times, shift-

ing between several first person storytellers who all ultimately derive from Khalil's own voice. This is most clearly exemplified in the story of Jamal, who recounts in the first person the story of his mother, a Palestinian Muslim woman of German-Jewish origin living in Gaza, and addresses Khalil, who then shifts to become the narrator himself, turning now, in the present, to his addressee, the French actress Catherine and then giving way to yet another narrator who addresses him (Khalil) in the third person ("said Khalil"; Khoury 1998, 437). Who is the narrator now?[15] Is it Khalil in the present, recounting to Yunes his meeting with Catherine and using the third person to refer to himself (in another time, after the Sabra and Shatila massacre)? Or is this, for the first time in the novel, the voice of the implied author, that is, Elias Khoury's voice?

Another dimension to the estrangement of Khalil's monologue from his mute interlocutor is revealed in the land of the Galilee that they are both forbidden to enter. Yunes' muteness converges with Palestine's absence both in terms of the restrictions imposed on the movement of Palestinian refugees, and historically, in the absence of a Palestine that existed in Yunes' lifetime but de facto ceased to exist in 1948. In one of the most powerful moments in the novel, where all these elements are channeled and merge into Khalil's speech, he relates this estrangement from the Galilee in contrast with the land's biblical dedication to all the nations by Jesus' virtue, a land made for foreigners (Khoury 1998, 412-413).

A significant theme in *Gate of the Sun* is literature's ability to adequately convey reality, a concern that also lies at the heart of *Children of the Ghetto*, as is apparent both in Adam's notes and even more noticeably in Elias Khoury's unsettling preface. Addressing Yunes as "my father," Khalil charges narration with blurring the self by its smudging of the boundaries between fiction and reality, also implying that the inability to differentiate between them characterizes the testimonies given by victims from Yunes' generation: "But, you see, I've been infected by Umm Hassan and have started talking about these people as though I knew them personally while I don't know them at all." This is precisely what provokes Khoury and Adam's violent conflict in the preface to *Children of the Ghetto*.

Here is an excerpt from Khalil's dialogical monologue to Yunes which foreshadows almost explicitly the violent exchange between Adam and Khoury. Not surprisingly, Khalil renders here a violent clash between himself and Yunes' doctor:

> "I'm doing my duty. There's no room for pity in our profession."
> "Pity! You're crazy. You don't know what Yunes represents."
> "Yunes! What does Yunes represent?"
> "He's a symbol."
> "And how can we cure symbols?" he asked. "There's no place for symbols in a hospital. The place for

> symbols is in books."
> "But he is a hero. This is impossible. A hero does not end his life in a cemetery of living people."
> "But he's finished."
> When I heard the word finished everything tipped over the edge. I don't remember exactly what spilled out of me – that you were the first, that you were Adam, that nobody was going to touch you, that I'd kill anyone who got near you.
> The doctor tried to calm me down, but I got more and more enraged. (Khoury 2006, 168-169)

Thus, this dialogical exchange with the doctor leads to Khalil's dialogical monologue that addresses an absent addressee who is in many ways a reflection of the self. Here, Khalil refers to Yunes as "*adam*," the patriarch, but foresees another adam, Adam Dannoun, at the same time.

A similar heated encounter takes place between Khoury and Adam at the screening of an Israeli film in New York, where Khoury rages at Adam for being an "idiot who doesn't understand a thing" because Khoury has written a fictional story unconnected to the writing of history, and thus he is unaware of the fate of his characters in reality: "I don't know why the guy insisted that he knew the characters in my novel [*Gate of the Sun*], but he started raving like a madman…" (Khoury 2019, 15-16; 2016, 14). For Adam, as for Khalil and Um Hassan (and her entire generation), the boundaries between fiction

and reality have become blurred, and they cannot distinguish between fictional characters and real people, or between stories and history. But while in *Gate of the Sun* a dialogue is always conveyed by "showing" (that is, by mimetically rendered speech acts, as a performative mean in the plot, keeping Yunes alive, an insistence on dialogical exchange), the brutal accusations in the preface to *Children of the Ghetto* are not "shown" but "told," with Khoury subjecting his interlocutors to his own point of view in his recounting of the events. Moreover, his position in the argument with Adam counters this heritage of storytelling by insisting that stories have nothing to do with reality or with history.

This is not, however, the entire picture. At the end of the preface, in an unusual literary occurrence, the names of the storyteller Elias Khoury and the author Elias Khoury merge completely in a signature. Appending a preface to a piece of fiction, in which the storyteller incorporates the fictitious into the real by drawing attention to writing and reading as performative acts, is a device used by novelists from the very beginnings of this literary form. The self-reflexive gesture becomes even more common in the twentieth century, in the work of Borges for example, who is a cardinal reference both in *Gate of the Sun* and *Children of the Ghetto*. But here, the author actually appends his signature to the end of the preface, indicating not only his name (along with many autobiographical details such as his occupation as a writ-

er and professor), but also his whereabouts and the time of writing: "Elias Khoury, New-York/Beirut, 12 July 2015" (Khoury 2016, 18). In Genette's discussion of the "fictive auctorial or authorial prefaces" this device can be traced back to Walter Scott who foreshadows Borges, Pessoa and others in this "unsettling masquerade" of an "It cannot be I, for it is I" (and even uses Shakespeare's historical plays as authoritative historical texts; Genette 1997, 287-288). But these paratextual elements are always humorous and carefully avoided by authors who try to achieve realistic transparency (Ibid, 293). It comes almost as no surprise that one of Genette's subtitles is none other than "Mirrors," as he stresses the narcissistic element of prefaces in autobiography and in fiction generally, where the self-conscious is so immersed in this cyclical "mirroring and mimicking," underlining the fact that in writing life is always secondary to the machinery of writing (292).

It is not necessary to scrutinize Khoury's gesture in light of the history of the novel, in order to discern its uniqueness as a fiction that pertains not only to reality, but more specifically to one of the most repressed traumas in the world. Considering *Gate of the Sun*'s reputation as one of the most important books about Palestinian history, trauma and quest for self-determination, Khoury's authorial act in *Children of the Ghetto* is startling. Genette himself points out that the preface is quintessentially literary, and like other paratextual activity, risks

usurping the focus of the text itself (293). In Khoury's case this becomes a political issue, not only because of the bold paratextual act – which itself demands our attention over the rest of the text, which is Adam's – but mainly because this act directly confronts questions of authorship, claims on reality and appropriation[17].

The idea of justice and justification resonates in the Arabic phrase *"la yahiqqu li*" (I don't have the right) that Khoury repeats thrice in the preface, the first time in his angry outburst against Adam at the Israeli film screening, where he says self-reflexively, "… I have no right to insinuate myself in the stories of the author of these notebooks," and even urges the reader to be "the judge between me and him,"[18] underlining the gravity of the literary accountability at stake: two contested testimonies in a latent trial where the reader is asked to be the judge. The second time occurs when Khoury tells his friend Chaim, the Israeli film director, that Adam is a liar, because he pretends to be Israeli when he is Palestinian, and that he believes that Khoury "had no right to write about Palestine just because I wasn't born of Palestinian parents!" (Khoury 2019, 16; 2016, 15). The speech act here – I do or do not have the right to write about Palestine – is very forceful (the paragraph closes with an exclamation mark) and suggests a genuine discomfort with the act of narrating testimonies. While signaling doubts (I don't have the right) it also establishes a bond with Adam by poetically referring to the theme

of patriarchy and authorship, where, as we saw, Adam's many possible fathers are an integral component of the national story.[19] Here, perhaps, Khoury becomes Adam.

Khoury discredits himself for the third time (by saying "I don't have the right") towards the end of the preface, where he points out that he does not have the right to turn Adam's notes into endnotes of any sort, which leads to the decision to publish them in the same format as the remainder of the text (Khoury 2016, 17). After all the doubts, which are the mark of a genuine confrontation with the entire endeavor of writing literature, writing history, and especially the right to speak for the subalterns, Khoury's signature at the end of the preface seems even more audacious. In order to understand this gesture politically we must contend that this Narcissus endeavor of mirroring (Khoury who is and is not Khoury) has a twofold purpose: on the one hand it provides reassurance and accepts complete accountability, but on the other hand it is filled with doubts and discredits his own authorship. This is patently a case of aporia. By dismantling the possibility of differentiating between cause and effect, Khoury dissolves authorship and the ability to write, indeed to bear witness, into a cyclical production of language which dismantles its ability to act in the world. His language of mirrors de-historicizes the Palestinian narrative, not only by rendering it a part of the cyclical mirror image of traumas (at the end of which, contrary to what Adam believes, the Pal-

estinian story continues to dissolve into the Holocaust and de facto is eradicated by it) but more fundamentally, by yielding to what J.L. Austin dubbed the "etiolated" aspect of literature. In his famous lecture series entitled "How to Do Things with Words," the great theoretician of speech-acts has outlined how literature does not participate in the world, and again, from the same reasons Genette understood paratextual activity, that is, the moment when words are completely immersed in reporting (telling) rather than "doing" (Hillis-Miller 2001, 47).

The dialogue and speech act in *Gate of the Sun*– addressing Yunes in order to keep him alive, insisting on language's ability to reach out – become in *Children of the Ghetto* a futile and perhaps narcissistic immersion in one's own words, in an endless paratext. Austin's basic differentiation between performative speech that acts in the world, and descriptive speech which reports about the world and can therefore be judged to be true or false, assumes here a poignancy in its reflection of the content, which is itself a debate about truthfulness in the applicability of literature to reality, and thus partakes again in a double and cyclical remoteness from the world. The appeal to the reader to be the judge in Adam and Khoury's altercation opens up the possibility for dialogue for the first time, but also reaffirms that this trial exhausts the substance of testimony and literature. The absence of a listener discredits the narrative, impairing the ability to bear witness, and underlies the entire failure

of this literary account. Again, the debate itself about the accuracy of testimony and literary accountability is less important for my argument, as Khoury has courageously confronted these issues in *Gate of the Sun*. It is not so much that the Elias Khoury of *Children of the Ghetto* sabotages the Palestinian narrative by questioning its truthfulness, but rather that he transforms the Nakba not only into mirrors, but more pervasively into clichés, by his excessive immersion in literature's etiolating and narcissistic inclinations.

Mimicry and Appropriation: Arabesques

This intertextual clash between Khoury of 1998 and Khoury of 2016 makes also the dense bulk of intertextual contiguities of the novel, which is the outcome of Khoury's conscious attempt to specifically address the identity of those 48 Palestinians who are Israeli citizens. Here I would like to add another layer in order to further elucidate my argument. The dispute between Adam and Khoury is, after all, a confrontation between two terms that are apparently analogous but which nonetheless differ significantly: mimicry and appropriation. Amos Goldberg has suggested that Adam masquerading as the child of Holocaust survivors is clearly an instance of colonial mimicry, and that the entire novel is in fact a courageous attempt to narrate the Nakba through the language of its perpetrators.[20] Goldberg seems to concur with me when he points out that this attempt might

jeopardize the Palestinian national narrative, whose consolidation is one of the great achievements of the Palestinian national struggle. One can sense that although he refers to the Holocaust as a meta-narrative gloom, Goldberg also addresses here the complex sentiments of resentment found in the novel's preface. For one has to be clear here: Adam blames Khoury for appropriating the Nakba, since he himself is not Palestinian.

In order to differentiate between the act of colonial mimicry and cultural appropriation, we can suggest that in the first the subject engenders and performs the language of his oppressor, whereas in the latter a privileged member of society appropriates attributes of an "inferior," either underprivileged or entirely excluded, member of that or another society. It follows from this that whereas Adam represents a clear example of mimicry, Elias Khoury (the fictive and real) appropriates the Nakba from the Palestinians (albeit for their benefit), an underprivileged group both within the Arab world and outside of it. In addition, Khoury's use of descriptive rather than performative speech hinders his ability to re-enact (*agieren*, act-out) the Palestinian trauma, which represents, according to Freud and LaCapra, an essential step towards its possible resolution (*durcharbeiten*, working-through; LaCapra 1994, 205). Rather than subjecting himself to the fractured ordeal of re-enacting the postcolonial condition, which Gayatri Spivak refers to in German as *darstellen* (acting), Khoury subjugates

the subaltern to representation (*vertreten*).[21] Whether as Khoury or as Adam, *Children of the Ghetto* avoids what Homi Bhabha defined as the return of the body: "The opacity of language fails to translate or break through his [the Turkish immigrant in Germany] silence and 'the body loses its mind in the gesture'. The gesture repeats and the body returns now, shrouded not in silence but eerily untranslated in the racist site of its enunciation" (Bhabha 2000, 163). This is why Raef Zreik draws our attention to a possible deficiency of *Children of the Ghetto*: the growing presence of the storyteller Khoury in the novel at the expense of the novel's aim, which is to render silence (Zreik 2018, 324-325). In colonial mimicry it is not silence, but rather the gestures of languages (and of the body) that cannot be accurately represented in translation.

This is even more apparent in the figure of Adam himself, which relates to the second main intertext of the novel, Anton Shammas' Hebrew-language novel *Arabesques* (1986). I argue that also Adam's case is not entirely one of colonial mimicry because mimicry's performance has to be re-enacted unwittingly, as in the many cases of Mizrahi literary accounts where poets stress their immersion in and inclination for Western canonical figures such as J.S. Bach (Ben Yehuda 2017). This is why appropriation could also apply to an underprivileged entity who knowingly addresses and partakes in the attributes of the privileged, of which there are

many clear examples in the manifestations of "Shoah envy" prevalent in Israeli literature (Ben Yehuda 2018, 263). The fact that the underprivileged is aware of his appropriation disqualifies his performance as mimicry. The case of *Arabesques* is one of the most provocative examples of colonial mimicry because its extraordinary sophistication seems to hint at self-awareness but is actually based on complete – and unwitting – immersion in the cultural gestures of the privileged. This is possible because *Arabesques* was a daring confrontation with postmodernism and paratextual structures within the almost formalistic discipline of Hebrew literature, which is a project devoted entirely to championing the new sophisticated, enlightened and secular Jew. Many of the critics discussed Shammas' literary achievement as the shaping of an Israeli identity and "un-Jewing the Hebrew language"[22] but did not pay attention to the simple fact that Shammas just participated in a grand (and very nationalistic) process of un-Jewing: the creation of the new secular Jew, whose merits are based on his ostensibly western sophistication[23].

Like *Gate of the Sun* and *Children of the Ghetto*, *Arabesques* shares many of the traits I examine here. It portrays the split identity of a narrator who shares the author's name and collides with the identity of an Israeli Jewish author in what seems to project the literary reception of a schizophrenic identity among the participants of a writers' workshop in Iowa City (Shammas 1986, 130).

Moreover, the identity of this narrator, Anton Shammas (hereafter "Anton 1"; unlike Khoury he never signs his full name), is fractured again into two additional figures: "Anton 2," a relative of the narrator who died in infancy a generation earlier (in the thirties; the narrator's birth, like Adam Dannoun and Elias Khoury, coincided with the Nakba: Dannoun and Khoury in 1948 and Shammas in 1950) and shares his name, and another possibly lost baby by the name of Michael (Michel) Abiad ("Anton 3"), born in Lebanon and raised first in Haifa and then in the United States[24]. The end of this convoluted genealogy in the very last pages of Arabesques, sets the stage, as it were, for what will become *Children of the Ghetto:* Michael Abiad meets the narrator in Iowa City, and gives him his notes for a sort of autobiography of himself as Anton ("Anton 3" who is being raised by Almza, the mother of the deceased Anton, "Anton 2"), merged with the elderly baby-Anton (same "Anton 2"), and together with details from the life of the younger Anton ("Anton 3," the narrator), following Abiad's decision to incorporate these three persona into one text (Ibid., 233-234). The narrator should now finish the work of preparing the text, just like Khoury will do with Adam's notes. Abiad/Shammas concludes with a complete rejection of a single authorship, endorsing instead the idea that the sole author of the story, the story of a people, is the people. He (they) first entitles it "my story," and then "the story," finally quoting Borges in a complete abandonment of the possibility of knowing whose story is it (234).

Like *Gate of the Sun, Arabesques* addresses the gray zone, where Palestinians took advantage of the 1948 war to rob their brethren (107), or in confronting power relations between Muslim and Christian communities (with again, special focus on Sabra and Shatila; 206-209). It also relates to the generation of the 1948 refugees themselves (like Yunes or Um Hassan) and their stories that bind many stories together "as refugees tend to do" (138). In fact, this very view of history, testimonies and stories, relates specifically to the book's narratological complexity, which stems from its main form, the arabesque. Hence the genealogies of stories, reliable and fictitious alike, stem from the narrator's uncle Youssef, who (like Michael Abiad) deposits them with him (203-204).

Children of the Ghetto mentions Arabesques explicitly in the context of Adam's most convoluted theorization of his approach to literature (Khoury 2016, 150-151, 161), which sums up many of the themes of authorship and identity: he confesses that when reading a "beautiful text" he immediately believes he is his author, and that while opposing the word "I" ("god forbid"), he always finds himself in other stories, as if a human being is a mirror for other human beings and a story for other stories (Ibid.). Careful scrutiny reveals that even the unfinished story of the mute poet al-Yaman which represents Adam's failed fictional attempt to address the Palestinian

cause, as well as Khoury's preoccupation with the issue of Palestinians with Israeli citizenship, was formed in *Arabesques*. Here is a prefiguration of al-Yaman's case/coffin:

> I'll write about the loneliness of the Palestinian Arab Israeli, which is the greatest loneliness of all… Now it's coming to me – a possible opening line for the first chapter: "Having come to Jerusalem from his village in the Galilee, he learned that, like the coffin, the loneliness of the Arab has room enough in it for only one person" (Shammas 1989, 93; Shammas 1986, 84).

Children of the Ghetto focuses on that particular identity which requires Hebrew alongside Arabic. In its dedication to Anton Shammas, the novel conflates his r*aison d'être* not only with the Holocaust (in the sub plot about Adam and his parents), but mainly with a writer whose single novel, Arabesques, exemplifies one of the greatest achievements in the Hebrew language in its amalgamation of all its registers, from Biblical Hebrew until the modern Hebrew current at the time of its publication.

The identity of Palestinian Israelis has been explored many times in Israeli literature, not only in A.B Yehoshua's *The Lover*, which *Arabesques* addresses directly while criticizing its patronizing standpoint (Gluzman 2004, 327-329), but also by two prominent Mizrahi writers, both born in Baghdad: Sami Michael's *Refuge* (Hassut,

1977) and Shimon Balas' *A Locked Room* (Heder Na'ul, 1980). Although both writers are Jews who immigrated to Palestine, they too, like Shammas and Adam Dannoun, relinquished their mother tongue Arabic for the Hebrew language, which they mastered as refugees within a dominant settler-colonial culture. Both novels depict the complex relationship of the Arab intellectual with the Israeli communist left, with its blindness and latent racism. In Michael's novel, that mimicry of the Palestinian intellectual (in this case the poet Fathi, based on the figure of Mahmoud Darwish) is juxtaposed with the figure of Murdoch, a tormented Mizrahi immigrant from Baghdad, in what becomes a confrontation between Israeli traumas. An array of identities informs the colonial mimicry of the novel which unravel the gray zone of the many intricacies within the Arab community, whether embodied in the figure of Fathi, who, according to his fellow Fuad (himself a Palestinian with Israeli citizenship and a member of the Communist Party), composes his national poems only in order to flatter the nations of the world and to attract left-wing Jewish women (Michael 1977, 174-177), or of Wassfi, another Palestinian Israeli who, together with Fathi, visits a Palestinian refugee camp under Israeli rule outside the 1967 border and chauvinistically regards the local Palestinians as inferiors who deserve to live under occupation (Ibid., 43). The common assumption they share is that their interlocutor is alienated from his own people, and perhaps even exploits their suffering. And then there is Murdoch, the

Arab-Jew, whose traumatic past in the Iraqi jail has left him with a repressed sexuality which fills him with feelings of shame, degradation and inferiority with regard to his Ashkenazi wife who is still in love with the Ashkenazi lover of her youth. Next to this theater of race and desires, Adam's colonial mimicry pales into insignificance, and indeed, his performance is unfailingly flawless, especially with his Jewish lover Dalia. While both *Refuge* and *A Locked Room* depict manifestations of physical violence towards Arabs in Israeli society, interactions with Israeli police and racial profiling (the other, and very dangerous component of mimicry) of encounters in everyday life (on the street, in the bus etc.; ibid., 268; Balas 1980, 66), Adam's story tells of great suffering, especially the suffering of his childhood and of the generation before him, but describes very little of his own ordeals as an adult.[25] Adam's mimicry therefore, is more of a formalistic symbol than the acting-out of trauma, and should be addressed as a form of appropriation.

Bialik's Mirrors and the Postcolonial Subject

As intimated, while I do read Khoury in the original, I readily acknowledge the limits of my acquaintance with Arabic letters, which undoubtedly inhibits my understanding of such a complex work. But the challenge presented by *Children of the Ghetto* requires serious consideration, and it should be examined from the point of view of its destination which is Hebrew, Israeli and, more

broadly, Holocaust literature.[26] *Arabesques* bears a daring intertextual relation to H.N. Bialik's famous ars-poetic poem "The Pool," in which an adult speaker confronts the world of artistic representation by returning to his youth, when walking alone in the midst of nature, he discovers the reflection of his face in a secluded, almost sacred pool. Here, "the riddle of two worlds" is presented: the world outside the pool and the world inside the pool (of mimesis), which shapes the speaker as a poet, the one who deciphers "the language of mirrors" (also translated as "the language of visions"). Gluzman shows how Shammas politicizes this moment by rendering the two worlds (of art and reality) synonymous with the worlds of Hebrew-Jewish culture and of Arab culture, because the pool in *Arabesques* is nothing other than Bialik's pool, the sanctity of Hebrew nationalism, which Shammas is able to enter (Gluzman 2004, 332).

Although Gluzman focuses on a scene towards the end of the novel, in which some of the writers in the writers' workshop in Iowa City take a trip into the countryside and encounter such a pool, *Arabesques* is suffused throughout with dense intertextual connections with Bialik's poetry right from the start of the novel, and especially with the mythological world of Bialik's youth and *zohar* (the glimmer of light and ecstasy, often depicted by zephyrs and crucial in Jewish mysticism). As with Bialik and Shaul Tchernichvsky, the two most prominent authors of the Hebrew revival period, Shammas' novel

is a political endeavor to achieve individuality and childhood for a new nation. Using similar methods, and in the same Hebrew language, Shammas not only depicts the world of his youth in the Galilee through the idyllic language of mirrors (Bialik's glittering Hebrew), but also draws a parallel between his and his ancestors' story during the second half of the nineteenth century with the story of the Hebrew patriarchs during the very same period, with one difference: he does not use this language to describe the willows of Eastern Europe, but to depict Palestine, that is, the Land of Israel itself, the object of Modern Hebrew's ardent longings in the literature of the Jewish-Zionist revival period. As I have intimated, Shammas's colonial mimicry corresponds directly to Jewish colonial mimicry as such: as with Bialik and Tchernihovsky, merely imagining the possibility that an individual may possess a unique psychology and realm of desires, is a means of westernizing, for both Jew and Arab. As a native, Shammas not only exposes the exilic condition that remain essential to Hebrew literature even after the establishment of the Israeli state (Ibid. 333), but delineates the prospect of fulfilling its primary promise: a vision of a new (sophisticated, secular, western) Jew(Arab) in the Land of Israel(Palestine) at the very moment of national revival.

If only the acting-out of trauma did not sabotage this imaginative vision of the assimilation of the Jew and the Arab into modern times, in rendering them "new." Paco,

the Palestinian writer in the Iowa workshop, shatters the idyll of the pool, shared by Shammas and Bar-On (respectively the Palestinian-Israeli and Israeli-Jewish participants in the workshop), and their Hebrew patriarchs, by throwing a can of drink into it. Gluzman interprets this gesture as a failure to speak and participate in the Hebrew language, something that Shammas himself (unlike Paco) clearly succeeded in doing (ibid., 327). But I believe that *Arabesques*' complexity lies precisely in the acting-out of trauma within the sanctuary of the narcissistic play of mimicry. We should keep in mind that Arabesques too is a political endeavor that tells the story of the Nakba, something that critics normally tend to overlook. Many critics have failed to draw attention to the fedayeen at the conclusion of the novel, who, like Yunes in *Gate of the Sun*, are regarded as infiltrators in their own homeland. It is precisely through these ruptures in the language of mirrors, a rapture in the national myth conveyed via Bialik in the depiction of the legendary youth with creatures like the rooster al Rassad, or the two babies who are not one and the same, that irony is able to convey history (Ginsburg 2006, 195).[27]

The mirrors of Shammas – his Hebrew and more importantly Zionist-like narrative – represent a remarkable act of reaching out to the other, and perhaps Khoury's signature at the end of his preface can be understood in the same light, notwithstanding its appropriation and decline into narcissistic exhaustion. Perhaps Khoury's

signature, like Paco's cane, like Adam's reincarnation of his self-annihilation with fire after the death of Bialik's Arabic translator Rashid Hussein, is precisely that: an ironic gesture (fractured, cramped, bodily, traumatic) of reaching out, reaching out to history, insisting on a listener. His overwhelming signature not only shatters his own narcissistic pool, but the entire burden of national narratives that have shaped the literary subject as such – Arab, Jew, but most importantly, sophisticated, secular, and "new." And there is another possibility underlying all this. In many ways, *Children of the Ghetto* fails from the outset: the most interesting symmetry of traumas is perhaps not the one between the Holocaust and the Nakba. Rather, the true mirror image is that of the erudite Jewish writer in Arab letters, which since the generation of Michael and Balas (one generation before Shammas and Khoury) has disappeared from the landscape of the Middle East. While there have certainly been many prominent Palestinians to master Hebrew, no Israeli Jew has mastered Arabic to an equivalent level, even after the renaissance in Mizrahi studies over the last thirty years, and no such figure can be expected in years to come. Perhaps, when Paco's cane smashes Bialik's pool, it also does so in the names of the Arab-Jews.

Conclusion

By providing an intertextual analysis, I have sought to shed light on Khoury's current political literary endeav-

or, and have delineated the collapse of his current effort in the face of the frustration felt by so many in attempting to render the Palestinian narrative of trauma. While his *Gate of the Sun* was able to formulate a plea to the outside, and critically convey Palestinian suffering, his *Children of the Ghetto* tends to descriptive speech which precludes the possibility of polyphonic prose. Children of the Ghetto's explicit intertext *Arabesques*, the definitive and already classic depiction of the Palestinian Israeli, overwhelmingly represents colonial mimicry, whereas the decorous and over-literary *Children of the Ghetto* sinks into appropriation. While both early novels are engaged with the gray zone, where victims and perpetrators collide, *Children of the Ghetto* succumbs to wonted differentiations. This movement from engagement to isolation reflects how performative speech diminishes, and thus allowing trauma to be unwittingly expressed in the excessive and superfluous, but perhaps also in the very bold act of a signature.

Notes:

1. The author wishes to thank Deema Draushee, Islam Dayeh and David Hadar.

2. Shammas outlines his particular perspective as a translator between Hebrew and Arabic and shows that along with the quintessential doubt that undergirds any rendering of pain with words, Hebrew has burdened Palestinian testimony with even more doubt, suspicion and denial which characterize the West's association of Palestinian pain with terrorism (Sham-

mas 2017, 121). . The general exclusion of the Nakba from the "Trauma Genre," which encompasses alongside the Holocaust also Hiroshima, the Armenian Aghed, South African Apartheid, Balkan civil wars, Ireland, Sri Lanka, Guatemala, Nigeria, and even AIDS, is probably the result of its continuation in the present (what Khoury dubs "mirroring"; Sayigh 2013, 55,57)). For a study of Gate of the Sun that renders excess (after Said) as part of a thorough historical account of the Arab novel that is anchored in loss see Sacks 2015, 190.

3. In a recent and very interesting discussion between two senior Holocaust scholars, Yehuda Bauer accused Daniel Blatman of antisemitism because of his refusal to condemn the BDS movement. For Bauer, the BDS is latently antisemitic because it advocates the Palestinian right of return, which for Bauer carries connotations of genocide for Israeli Jews (Bauer 2019). I believe that Bauer unwittingly uncovered here that mutual exclusiveness lies behind many of the Israeli left.).

4. I am not aware of a comprehensive study of Holocaust memory and clichés (other than a lecture held by Philippe Mesnard in Paris in the summer of 2011 entitled "La mémoire de la Shoah à l'épreuve de quelques clichés") but in terms of Israeli memory there are many critics who discuss the state's exploitation of many aspects of the Holocaust to serve its educational (or perhaps propagandist) and foreign policy ends. In his classic article "The need to Forget" Elkana (1988) was perhaps the first major critic to do so.

5. I shall return to Khoury's understanding of "mirroring." See also Paul's discussion of memory in Gate of the Sun, which also relates to continuous trauma as a futile form of

excess: Paul 2017, 185-186, 190, 193. Paul nonetheless concludes by arguing that the novel "offers a mode of engaging the past that is not paralyzed by it…" (198). That, I contend, was something that was lost in *Children of the Ghetto*.
6. Ibid.: 73. Translation amended, see Khoury, Children: 76.

7. Ibid.: 118. Translation amended, see Khoury, Children: 123.

8. Italics added. Khoury, Children: 269-270; Khoury, awlad: 260-262.

9. For "surplus of speech" in Gate of the Sun see Razinsky and Goldberg 2019, 69. Many of the themes of *Children of the Ghetto* were explored already in Yalo (2002): the tension between the narrator and his protagonist, who himself becomes the writer of his life in many attempts from many different naratological possibilities while elaborating many times of words as a mean of torture (something less direct in *Children of the Ghetto*), but without exhaustion and with a clear objective in writing: reaching out in order to get a decent verdict from his judges.

10. For a thorough reading of *Gate of the Sun* which emphasizes these aspects see Goldberg 2016, 335-358. For a similar reading of *Children of the Ghetto*, which places special emphasis on the relation between Eduard Said's understanding of history and Khoury, see Abu-Remaileh2018, 295-305. These are all important traits that were certainly timely twenty years ago when Gate of the Sun was published.

11. Referring to the Hebrew translation of Gate of the Sun, Khoury notes that he felt he wrote the novel in both Hebrew

and Arabic because he discovered that the other is the mirror of the self. See Adina Hoffman's critique of these formalistic expressions of comparisons between the victims: Hoffman 2006, 60.

12. The fascination with mirroring began with Khoury's admiration of S. Yizhar's khirbet khizeh (1949) for its depicting the Palestinians as a reflection of the Jews, as well as with his admiration for Shamma's Arabesques which is perhaps the main intertext for Adam as we shall see. See Levy2012, 20, 26. For Hever, this mirroring in Yizhar marks narcissism (Hever2018, 107). See also Sacks' interpretation of mirroring as part of the indebtedness of authorship Khoury's intertextuality manifests, something especially pertinent to Children of the Ghetto: Sacks 2015, 166.

13. See also Aghacy's critique of Khoury's monologism: Aghacy1996, 163-176.

14. On "telling" in Khoury see also Lebor 2008.

15. For more on the shifts to third person in Khalil's speech see Head 2011, 156.

16. Khoury 2006, 336, translation amended; Khoury 1998, 343.

17. For a discussion of *Gate of the Sun*'s antagonistic reception by historians see Goldberg 2016, 5.

18. Khoury 2016, 13. Translation amended, see Khoury 2019, 14.

19. It might also strike the reader that Adam uses here "abawayn," which uses the root for fathers, and not "walidayn" with a more neutral gender. The dual form of the Arabic language is something that Adam also explicitly addresses in his many literary discussions (Abu-Remaileh 2018, 299).

20. Amos Goldberg, "Whose Ghetto is This Anyhow? Some Thoughts on Binational Language," lecture in Ben Gurion University of the Negev, May 2, 2018.

21. In her reading of Marx, Spivak distinguishes between two functions of representation: the one made by a third party, like being represented by a lawyer (vertreten), and that which consists of representations on their own behalf, without a third and organizing party (darstellen). See Spivak1995, 30-31

22. The literature on this novel is vast. See Hochberg2007, 79. For a discussion of this against the backdrop of the Jewish state see Gluzman 2004, 322.

23. This suggests a crucial development of any study of the political implications of both *Arabesques* and *Children of the Ghetto* against the backdrop of Jewish assimilationism and self-hatred, matters that although very prevalent in Jewish Studies in North America, have not received sufficient attention in Israeli criticism. Because the main frame of these phenomena, which generally lead to shattered and tormented figures just like Adam (and perhaps Shammas himself) in Jewish history (like for example the abovementioned Celan), relates to adopting the views of a reference and majority group by a minority group, it seems that the Palestinian case, so interwoven with the Jewish one, also calls for this direction. See for

example Gilman 1986, 19.

24. *Arabesques* thus shares *Children of the Ghetto*'s excess in terms of plot, but not in terms of his language which seems less circular and figurative. As I argue, the former was able to reach out and even engage with the Israeli myth.

25. This has also to do with the fact that *Children of the Ghetto: My Name is Adam* is the first part of a trilogy, the second part of which, *Stella Maris*, deals more with Adam's upbringing in Haifa, but I believe, still immersed in telling and describing rather that acting-out.

26. Especially in light of *Stella Maris*, in which an extensive part of the plot takes place on Polish soil, it seems that a thorough investigation of Khoury's ambitious project will have to consist of in depth analysis in the wider frame of Holocaust literature.

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