

Title: Imagined motion in Haifa: Digitally reading space and time in *Ikhtayyi* by Emile Habibi

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Abstract:

Literary cartography is used to analyze space and spatial acts in literary texts. The visual outcomes, maps and networks, enable readers and scholars to ask diverse questions about the plot, the characters, the imagined geography and the interrelations between space and time. The literary map is not an explanation in-itself, but rather a way to identify patterns formed by spatial hierarchies. It suggests a spatial model of an otherwise spaceless narrative. The mapping in all its forms bridges between a “close reading” and a “distant reading” of the text.

This paper examines the spatial and temporal movement in a book that has a seemingly static narrative. *Ikhtayyi* by Emile Habibi tells a story of a traffic jam in the Israeli city of Haifa that stimulates the narrator’s search for his lost childhood memory, which faded after the establishment of the state of Israel. The book juxtaposes the narrator’s present (the 1970s and 1980s), the time before the establishment of the state of Israel (which he calls “the Days of the Arabs”), as well as legends, myths, and classic stories of Arab travelers. The complexity of this quest reflects Habibi’s undermined assurance “*in the possibility of the existence of a freedom of longing for this country within this country, the freedom of longing for Haifa within Haifa.*” The novel tells a story that stretches across past, present, and future, and is located in real as well as imagined geographical points across the globe; yet all this together form a single place, “Haifa” of the narrator.

Rather than using literary cartography as a way to describe the routes of the characters or the plot, it is used in this paper as a way to understand Emile Habibi’s city of Haifa in its broadest

definition; as a place that lies between the local and the global, between the real and mythical, between the past and the future.

Each geographical reference in the book is given two attributes: its physical coordinates, if such exists, and its textual location within the book, which serves as a pseudo temporal coordinate.

Using these attributes, we create a multitude of visualizations, which reflect temporal and spatial developments within *Ikhtayyi*. Two dimensional locational maps show the locations of the references (Figure 2), two dimensional flow maps manifest the textual movement within a seemingly static plot, and three dimensional maps show the flow of the whole plot (Figure 3). By analyzing these maps as functions of textual timelines, we depict a process, in which the narrator's memory gradually consolidates out of an original state of fragmentation. While the initial locational map stretches across the whole globe, the final chapter is concentrated on the narrator's neighborhood in Haifa. The city slowly converges back to its local self.

However, these maps falsely emphasize the significance of geographical proximity, which is not necessarily important for the author or the reader. This paper uses textual proximity within the book to recreate an alternative geography, visualized by a network (Figure 1). In this network, two locations are adjacent if they appear on the same page. This network represents a fuzzy geography, which does not always align itself with the "real world". In the resulting visualization, the city Haifa is perceived as a multiplicity, containing simultaneously past and present, Jews and Palestinians, reality and fiction.

Consequently, this paper suggests two spatial readings of a novel: the first one is anchored on the physical world, which structures a spatial narrative of a bildungsroman; the second reading is anchored on a networked geography, which does not have directionality but rather an accumulation of all the occurrences past, present and future. These interpretations complement each other and reflect the complexity of defining a "place". On the one hand, we might understand it as a singular point in time and space, which has a history that led to that unique point, but on the other hand, it is a cacophonous and multilayered experiential reality which is both its past and its

present. In short, this paper presents the affordances of literary cartographies, in all of their varieties, for the analysis of literature in particular, and textual documents in general.

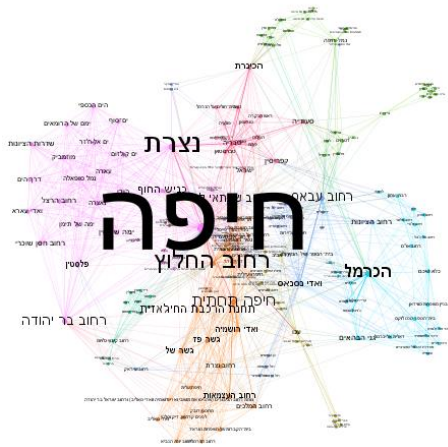


Figure 1: Textual proximity between places. Colors reflect clustering by modularity.

Figure 2: places in the city of Haifa that are mentioned in *Ikhtayyi*

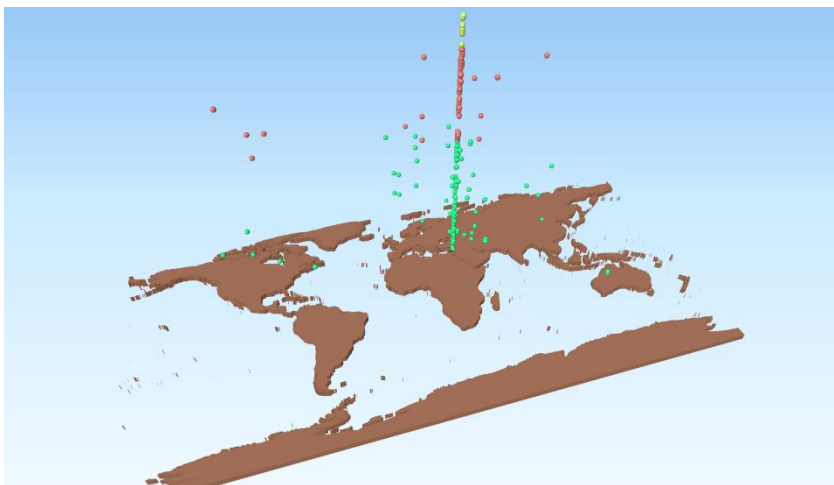


Figure 3: A 3D mapping of *Ikhtayyi*. The height reflects the textual timeline.

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