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Mapping the Literary: A Spatial Reading of Hilal Chouman's *Kāna Ghadan***

فضاءات النص الأدبي: قراءة مكانية في رواية "كان غداً" لهلال شومان

Abstract: This study highlights the significance of space as a narrative component capable of opening up a text to various possibilities. As such, the text is treated as a critical roadmap capable of producing meaning and knowledge. This study leans on spatial literary studies, with an emphasis on the relationality of spatiality and textuality, to offer a spatial reading of Hilal Chouman's *Kāna Ghadan*. A reconsideration of the concepts of spatiality and textuality is paramount, particularly amidst the recent conjectures in spatial-literary studies, which focus on the specificity of the Arab experience. It presents a literary geography, based on Chouman's literary map, specific to the experience of Beirut. This geography is not only shaped by how the protagonists see or understand the city, but also by how they experience and practice it on a daily basis. This practice and the way they converse about Beirut reflect a socio-spatial imaginary that challenges dominant narratives about the city.

Keywords: Spatial Literary Studies; Spatiality; Textuality; Literary Map; Hilal Chouman.

الملخص: تركز هذه الدراسة على المكان عنصرًا سرديًا أساسيًا لكشف النص الروائي وفهمه، معتبرةً إياه مساحةً تأويليةً مفتوحة؛ وتقاربه باعتباره خريطة طريق نقدية تسعى لإنتاج معرفة ومعنى، وذلك من خلال الاعتماد على الدراسات الأدبية المكانية التي تشدد على أهمية التفكير في النص مكانيًا؛ أي استنادًا إلى العلائقية المبنية بين نصية المكان ومكانية النص، من خلال مقارنة نص روائي عنوانه «كان غداً» لهلال شومان. إن إعادة النظر في مفهومَي المكانية والنصية أمرٌ بالغ الأهمية، لا سيما في خضمّ تطورات الدراسات المكانية-الأدبية، التي تركز على خصوصية التجربة العربية. وتقدم هذه الدراسة جغرافية أدبية، تستند إلى خريطة شومان الأدبية، الخاصة بتجربة بيروت. ولا تتشكل هذه الجغرافيا من خلال الطريقة التي ينظر بها أبطال الرواية المدينة أو يفهمون بها فحسب، بل من خلال تجربتهم وممارستهم لها على نحو يومي أيضًا. وتعكس هذه الممارسة والطريقة التي يتحدثون بها عن بيروت خيالًا مكانيًا اجتماعيًا يتحدى السائدات المتعلقة بالمدينة.

كلمات مفتاحية: الدراسات الأدبية المكانية؛ المكانية؛ النصية؛ الخريطة الأدبية؛ هلال شومان.

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** This study was originally published in Arabic in: Farah Z. Aridi, "Faḍā'āt al-Naṣṣ al-Adabī: Qirā'a Makāniyya fī Ruwāyat 'Kāna Ghadan' li-Hilāl Shūmān," *Omran*, vol. 13, no. 49 (Summer 2024), pp. 107-133.

Introduction

This paper explores the relationship between text and space, its role in narrative formation, and its contribution to socio-spatial knowledge. Positioned within the approaches of modern comparative literature and literary-spatial studies, the paper critiques both distant reading, which adopts a quantitative approach to literary works, as well as close reading, which overlooks material contexts. It proposes a comprehensive reading that synthesizes both approaches. In doing so, it serves as a foundation for a broader project to map the Arab novel spatially and textually, and to narrativize the Arab urban landscape.

The paper examines how spatial practices, including the processes of reading, interpretation, and knowledge production, give rise to multiple narratives that reflect a socio-spatial imaginary that confirms a spatial multiplicity often marginalized by monolithic narratives. This approach seeks to extend itself beyond and spill over readings that approach a text as a city or a city as text. Instead, it advocates for thinking spatially about the text and textually about a city in a manner that lends attention to their emplacement within a relational process. It therefore does not seek to approach the city merely in terms of the complex geographical or topographical dimensions of its spaces, nor by reducing it to what is merely narrated about it. Rather than objectifying the text and flattening its potential to a monolithic narrative and discourse (of, in this case, Beirut), the paper considers the text as both a producer and product of space, engaging with it as an active process of knowledge production.

The reasoning adopted here is grounded in the understanding that the textuality of a particular work (i.e., what makes it a text) and its spatiality (i.e., what makes it a space, rather than merely a vessel for events) are in a reciprocal relationship in which several factors continuously interact. Therefore, the paper does not suffice with the conventional view that the literary text, particularly the novel, is an urban product shaped by the city's architecture and prevailing discourse, with specific contextual determinants and conditions. Rather, it problematizes this by refusing to consider the relationship between text and space as conform. It centralizes space as a key narrative element within the text, thus opening it up to multiple critical interpretations and interactions that reflect the diversity of life experiences it embodies.

To this end, this paper approaches the novel as a critical roadmap, drawing on recent spatial approaches emerging within the New Comparative Literature studies, such as Gayatri Spivak's emphasis on the importance of considering the text as subject to multiple interpretations and reading as an ongoing ever-renewing critical act.¹ The paper leverages the relationality it builds between the textuality of space and the spatiality of the text as an analytical tool, highlighting the role of spatial reading of the novel. This spatial approach to a literary text is crucial for the re-examination, reassessment, and retheorization of both concepts of space and text. Consequently, it offers an alternative means through which to read not only such concepts as distinct, but also as formative and informative of their relationality and the ensuing connections, venues, and trajectories (or possibilities). Building upon developments in Western and Arab spatial theory,² this paper emphasizes the specificity of the Arab experience in this field. It considers the socio-spatial imaginary as a producer of narratives, and by extension, of socio-political existence. It demonstrates the importance of spatial practice in the act of reading, and the function of the text not only in producing meaning and knowledge but also in the process of (re-)theorization.

After discussing the issues of the relationality of text and space, the paper addresses the following questions: First, what does spatial-textual relationality mean, and how does it manifest? Second, how does

¹ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Megacity," *Grey Room*, no. 1 (2000), pp. 8-25.

² An interest in the concept of social space has emerged among some Arab writers relying on the Kantian concept of place, while many others have been influenced by the works of French Marxist theorist Henri Lefebvre, as well as Robert Ezra Park and Gaston Bachelard. Idris Maqbul studied the city and place from a sociolinguistic perspective. See: Idris Maqbul, *al-Insān, al-'Umrān, wa-l-Lisān: Risāla fī Tadāwur al-Ansāq fī al-Madīna al-'Arabīyya* (Doha/Beirut: ACRPS, 2020).

the multiplicity of spatial and textual narratives reflect our daily practices, and how are they reflected therein? Third, how does a text “open up”, and how do readers encounter it as an embodied experience that, in turn, embodies the text? Lastly, the study examines Hilal Chouman's novel, *Kāna Ghadan*,³ which offers a narrativization of Beirut's lived geography. The novel maps the city, enabling readers to visualize it by combining detailed descriptions of specific places, with a portrayal of the characters' intimate relationship with the city's daily rhythms, history, changing discourses and accessible practices, political-spatial and social conditions, landmarks, and street names.

Chouman's novel reveals the power structures that govern both spatial practices and narratives of space (inside and outside the novel). The focus here is on identifying the mechanisms by which these power relations are challenged in the novel, and how they manifest in daily practices that defy stereotypes and create socio-spatial knowledge. The paper does not draw parallels nor project a discourse analysis from one context onto another, but rather opens a dialogue with both processes under a relationality imposed by the spatiality of text and the textuality of space, overcoming the dialectical trap of reconciliation.

Spatial-Textual Relationality as an Analytical Tool

The Spatiality of Text and the Textuality of Space

Placing the spatiality of text and textuality of space⁴ at the centre of the critical interpretive process emphasizes their interrelatedness as two facets of an open, but not dialectical, relationship in which the possibilities and tensions inherent in the socio-spatial configurations and organizations coexist. These configurations and organizations are political, cultural, and ideological, manifesting in daily practices and in the public and official discourse that sets the rhythms of life and the narratives it engenders. Spatial and urban configurations impose certain social formations that determine which social classes inhabit them, their daily routines, and the nature of their lived narratives.⁵ These social formations, in turn, influence the evolution of space over time or reproduce the dominant or prevailing configuration.⁶

The existing order operates through power techniques and social control strategies to preserve these social relationships, while discourse is a space for these techniques. Hence, the perception and representation of space are linked to a specific discourse that maintains or reproduces it in ways that reinforce the power of the existing order. The material, spatial, social, and discursive components of this formation combine to shape the production of daily life and spatial and cognitive experience.⁷ These factors influence the process of meaning and knowledge production, within which literary and critical practices find their place. At worst, the prevalence of a single narrative at the expense of others leads to systemizing, normalizing, and the hegemony of a singular and monolithic spatial experience. Consequently, daily life becomes structured to accommodate a specific category of people while marginalizing others, often by imposing a particular discourse and system – whether through biopolitics or other forms of social control.⁸ Through varying

³ Hilal Chouman, *Kāna Ghadan* (Beirut: Dār al-Sāqī, 2017).

⁴ Robert Tally Jr., *Spatiality* (London: Routledge, 2013); Barney Ward & Santa Arias (eds.), *The Spatial Turn: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2009); Robert Tally Jr., *Geocritical Explorations: Space, Place, and Mapping in Literary and Cultural Studies* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Kevin R. McNamara (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to The City in Literature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Adam Hansen, “Introduction: Narrating Cities,” *Journal of Narrative Theory*, vol. 39, no. 3 (2009), pp. 271-279; Yasin al-Naşir, *Madkhal Ilā al-Naqd al-Makānī: al-Khiṭāb - al-Ḥudūd - al-Ma' lafa - al-Tafaddī - al-Mawḍa'a - al-Mābayn - al-Masāfa - al-Isti'āra - al-Kafā'a* (Damascus: Dār Nīnawā, 2015); Ali Abd al-Rauf, *Mudun al-'Arab fī Riwayātihim* (Cairo: Madārāt li-l-Abḥāth wa-l-Nashr, 2017).

⁵ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, Donald Nicholson-Smith (trans.) (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 1991).

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁷ Henri Lefebvre, *The Critique of Everyday Life: The One-Volume Edition* (London: Verso Books, 2014); Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, A. M. Sheridan Smith (trans.) (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972).

⁸ Vernon W. Cisney & Nicole Morar (eds.), *Biopower: Foucault and Beyond* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016).

degrees of obliteration and silencing, depending on the type of power in play, no opposing or alternative narrative that threatens the survival of this formation is allowed to emerge, further perpetuating erasure.

The Imaginary, Power, and Critical Practices Inside and Outside the Text

There is no such thing as a neutral or homogeneous space/text. Every socio-spatial configuration necessarily produces an “other” by which it measures its distinctiveness and difference. This relationality offers a better understanding of a given space as well as its functionality and ways of operating. Therefore, space cannot be studied in isolation from its connection to other spaces, be they similar or different.⁹ In other words, social configurations create “differences” and multiple narratives¹⁰ that fluctuate between revelation and concealment, depending on the policies enacted and the interests of the existing order.¹¹

Further, spatial experiences are manifested in the practices and performances of specific individual or collective biographies. How one inhabits or engages with a particular space frames and controls the quality of life that that space produces. Thus, understanding daily experiences as an adaptation to our spaces becomes an understanding of how to produce our own spaces, how we negotiate, confront, or oppose a particular configuration, and how we talk about our spaces.

Like space/city, text, discourse, and narrative are selective-exclusionary processes, capable of concealing or revealing what they choose, while excluding whatever and whoever conflicts with their desired image. As such, they are also producers of difference, which, in certain cases, is kept out of sight. The production of difference goes beyond the production of possibilities to what already exists; it also involves the production of possibilities that resist what is dominant and challenges its control. Thus, by focusing on the textuality of space, we can approach the city as we would an open text; that is, viewing it as inclusive of multiple, different narratives, in line with Doreen Massey’s concept of “throwntogetherness”,¹² a way of being that underscores the necessity of viewing space as a practice.¹³

In this sense, the text extends beyond the page containing it. From a literary-spatial perspective, we cannot consider the text as a static, abstract entity or a homogeneous place/space. Here, we can draw on Abdelfattah Kilito’s distinction between text and non-text,¹⁴ and his argument about the impossibility of defining the text. As a subject of research, the text resists fixed definitions, presenting itself as a flexible existence across different fields of knowledge, contexts, spaces, times, and cultures. Its characteristics, therefore, are subject to change and positionality. The text in this regard is like the city: a fertile ground for numerous cognitive possibilities, conceptual departures, and critical interpretations. Etienne Balibar described it as a space of ideological conflict,¹⁵ an idea reminiscent of Michel Foucault’s view on textuality and discourse. According to Foucault, “discourse” is concerned with the multiplicity within a text, as well as with history, power, knowledge, and society.¹⁶ From this standpoint, no text can be singular, just as no city can be the same for all its inhabitants.

Here, the act of reading is a selective process aimed at producing meaning, one that we engage in with both with our bodies and imaginaries alike. The processes of producing text and producing space are

⁹ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*.

¹⁰ Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage Publications Ltd., 2005).

¹¹ See: Ash Amin & Nigel Thrift, *Cities: Rethinking the Urban* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002); Ash Amin & Nigel Thrift, *Seeing Like a City* (Cambridge: Polity, 2017).

¹² Massey.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

¹⁴ Abdelfattah Kilito, *al-Adab wa-l-Gharāba* (Milano: Al-Mutawassit Books, 2022).

¹⁵ Verena Andermatt Conley, *Spatial Ecologies: Urban Sites, State, and World-Space in French Cultural Theory* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012).

¹⁶ Edward Said, “Introduction: Secular Criticism,” in: Edward Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983).

similar in that they arise from a certain perception or imaginary and are shaped by a guided practice. In the context of social space, Lefebvre refers to this constituent as “the spatial imaginary”,¹⁷ which eventually develops into a map or image before transitioning into the practical application of constructing the space, so that space becomes both a work of art and of politics – what Lefebvre calls an *œuvre*.¹⁸

The process of producing a text follows a similar path, departing from an imaginary, or from a containment and expression of a specific human experience, or a certain rhetorical and political functional aspect. Place and text are simultaneously products and processes of production.¹⁹ The walker, much like the reader, has a fundamental role in using this product, and in producing, or reproducing, the space and its discourse and meaning.

Space as an Active Participant in Mapping the Narrative

As a narrative element, space becomes a producer and determinant of events. The novel being a product of relationships interacting in the city, including the latter’s urbanization, lifestyle, human interaction, and openness to others. The city serves, on one hand, as an incubator for the novel, and on the other hand, a space for its neighborhoods, streets, and alleys, the dreams of its residents, their conditions of life, their camaraderie and harmony or their alienation in and from it, their attitudes toward it, and the way in which they reveal both its beauty and its ugliness – in short, a space that embraces spaces.²⁰

Thus, space produces social life, its forms, and its cultural, political, and performative representations. Ali Abd al-Ra’uf states that “spatial/temporal relationships also permeate the narrative framework of every literary work, as there are no events or characters outside the literary space, even if the characters and events are probable, imaginary, or belong to a purely metaphysical world”.²¹ Thus, the literary space may be viewed as a socio-spatial product which, even if it draws certain details from the external world, remains an integral social and political reality in itself.²²

Michel de Certeau believes that we can know a city and uncover its narratives through two approaches. The first is the perspective from above, which reveals the city’s structures and layout, and the second is the direct, embodied experience of the city from below. De Certeau considers the latter, gained through walking, to be the most effective way of truly knowing a city.²³ The corresponding approaches in comparative literature as instrumentalized here are distant and close reading approaches to a text.

Franco Moretti²⁴ views narration as a spatial practice, highlighting its representational aspects, a consideration on which this paper is based. However, it diverges from Moretti’s contribution, particularly his advocacy for a distant reading of the text. Moretti considers narration as an act of mapping which he instrumentalizes to serve a quantitative approach to literature and to produce a map that fits literary history trapped in canonical classifications. Moretti’s focus is on uncovering the system within which his selected literary works operate, classifications of literary genres, rhetorical considerations, literary innovations, and

¹⁷ In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre discusses in detail how this imaginary accompanies a conscious spatial practice capable of reading spatio-political laws and producing knowledge.

¹⁸ Work, or what Lefebvre calls *œuvre*, goes beyond being a material product and a production process to include a creative element. This production process relies on the intellectual and critical capital of its creator, and their ability to employ it in the creative moment. It is also a process subject to influence, impact, and change. Therefore, we can constantly rethink and alter it to suit the requirements of our daily lives and the demands of living in a given place. This idea in Lefebvre’s works constituted a starting point for another idea that he later expanded upon, namely, the right to the city.

¹⁹ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*.

²⁰ Abd al-Rauf, p. 55.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Edward Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reinsertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989).

²³ Michele de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

²⁴ Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, and Trees: Abstract Models for Literary History* (London: Verso, 2005); Franco Moretti, *Distant Reading* (London: Verso Books, 2013); Franco Moretti, “Conjectures on World Literature,” in: Christopher Prendergast (ed.), *Debating World Literature* (London: Verso, 2004), pp. 148-162.

the like. However, in his quantitative analysis, he neglects context, literariness, and textuality, prioritizing positionality, organization, and relational structures over the inherent possibilities within the text itself, thereby closing rather than opening the text.

On the other hand, proponents of close reading, such as Jacques Derrida, negate what exists outside the text, while scholars such as Edward Said and Spivak occupy a middle ground, viewing the text as a practice and extension of what is outside it, while accounting for the political-cultural positionality, condition, and context.²⁵ This paper aligns more with the latter approach, stepping back from the text to reveal its dominant system, and approaching it to reveal ruptures, differences, and variations that cannot be seen from afar. In doing so, it emphasizes the importance of context, so that reading becomes akin to walking: an ongoing social-political practice.

What is meant by “walking” here is more than movement through the city. De Certeau describes walking through the city as a long poem, one that “speaks” and elicits speech. He compares it to writing, emphasizing the walker’s ability to inscribe his narrative on the city’s streets, actively shaping daily life and producing knowledge.²⁶ Similarly, the text – whatever its form – takes on a material and social dimension, akin to social space. It unfolds through our daily practice and movement within it, or through our experience of it and our attempts to understand it.

Walking, Embodiment, and Mapping: Essentials for a Critical Reading

The reader/researcher embarks on a physical and mental experience through the text, engaging in an exercise of perception and knowledge production. Like a walker following a map, the reader navigates the text toward understanding. However, the process of spatial reading, like any critical endeavor, is not totally open. Rather, it is bound by the viewer/recipient’s personal “baggage” and attitudes. Similarly, it is influenced by the conditions under which the text was produced, in addition to the limitations inherent in the reality of the narrative world.

Reading as Action and Practice

Reading space requires awareness and knowledge of the built environment, its everyday use,²⁷ and the nature of inhabiting it.²⁸ Therefore, any spatial experience is an embodied socio-political practice, where the space’s discourse and system are either affirmed, negotiated, or rejected. This process is only possible when accompanied by spatial knowledge and political positionality, as the individual’s perspectives reflect his/her position within the socio-spatial formation to which he/she belongs.²⁹ In other words, the way we use and inhabit a space reflects our position within the network of social, economic, and political relations within which we move; and is reflected in how we talk about our cities. This network offers us a roadmap, guiding us to learn what these spaces are and how to use them, that is, the normative practices that are accepted and expected. A close reading of this map and the

²⁵ For more details on these two perspectives, see: Edward Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983); Kilito; Franco Moretti, “Conjectures on World Literature,” in: Prendegast (ed.), pp. 148-62; Jacques Derrida, *On Grammatology*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (trans.) (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

²⁶ De Certeau, p. 102.

²⁷ Lefebvre, *The Critique of Everyday Life*.

²⁸ The experience of space is viewed here as going beyond merely inhabiting a space in the sense of being in place and staying, to poetic, embodied and political considerations. For more on this topic, see: Martin Heidegger, “Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” in Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Albert Hofstadter (trans.) (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1981); Jeff Malpas, *Rethinking Dwelling: Heidegger, Place, Architecture* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021); Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Brian Massumi (trans.) (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987); Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, Maria Jolas (trans.), Richard Kearney (intro.), Mark Z. Danielewski (foreword) (New York: Penguin Books, 2014).

²⁹ Kevin Hetherington, *The Badlands of Modernity: Heterotopia and Social Ordering* (London: Routledge, 1997).

patterns it produces shows not only how our daily lives, their rhythms, and our production of meaning and knowledge are governed, but also the systems and relations these patterns conceal, in that they reveal differences, variations, ruptures, and possibilities for the emergence of different, though not necessarily opposing, narratives.

The act of reading can be seen as a kind of crossing into a new world through which we communicate, and sometimes identify, with its protagonists. This would be impossible had the writer been unable to present the familiar and make it relatable, drawing a world on paper that, if only for a brief time, we can trust is real. As Edward Soja has noted,³⁰ every literary world blends elements of reality and fiction, constructing a social reality in which we, as readers, temporarily inhabit during our journey across its pages.

Readers do not move within a text in a linear fashion. The contemporary novel, in particular,³¹ challenges the traditional structure of the genre, taking us in multiple directions and defying readers' expectations in terms of form, narration, or the navigation of temporality. Accordingly, reading becomes a process requiring constant movement across time and space like walking through a city, a physical/embodied experience.³² Indeed, we would lose our way without the guidance provided by the novelist, through spatial and temporal cues and codes that enable us to imagine the protagonists' circumstances and the social and political frames of their daily experiences. Without these guidelines, readers would struggle to keep pace with the text, understand it, follow its logic, or even analyse it accurately. Accordingly, it is these guidelines that make the text coherent and readable.

These directions determine the starting points for narrational events and spatiotemporal junctures and define the spatial landmarks that shape the context of events. They enable us to visualize these events in detail and interpret the literary text by understanding the social space in the context specified by the writer. The narrative places and spaces that make up the literary world – neighbourhoods, houses, streets, buildings, alleys, cities, and the like – take on a tangible presence in our imagination (differing from one reader to another), and accompany us on our journey through the text, functioning as actual lived spaces, allowing us to process them as real. Abd al-Ra'uf remarks:

The novel that evokes a place reflects its reality and its material and immaterial possibilities. In the creation of a novel, places constitute both the framework within which events come together, and the background against which they take place and reach completion.³³

Readers cannot be considered as mere passersby, forced to walk in one direction or toward one destination. They are not driven by an absolute force that precludes active participation in producing meaning and space (literary or beyond). Instead, they are guided. Readers play a crucial role in uncovering/understanding spatial laws and producing intellectual possibilities and critical reflections, in addition to their ability to produce the text itself (indeed, every act of interpretation through reading can be seen as an act of production). As such, spaces – here those of the novel – are open to critical and analytical possibilities and multiple uses, varying according to readers' experiences of, and within, them.

³⁰ Soja, *Postmodern Geographies*.

³¹ Robert Young, "Contemporary Literary Theory: Its Necessity and Impossibility," *The Newest Criticisms*, vol. 9, no. 3 (1982), pp. 165-173; Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1981); Mikhail Bakhtin et al., *Modern Genre Theory* (London: Routledge, 2016); Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, Anna Bostock (trans.) (London: The Merlin Press, 1971); Paul Dawson & Maria Mäkelä (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Narrative Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2022); Jeffrey R. Di Leo, *Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory: An Overview* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2023); Raman Selden, Peter Widdowson & Peter Brooker (eds.), *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* (London: Routledge, 2016).

³² Setha Low, "Embodied Space(s): Anthropological Theories of Body, Space, and Culture," *Space & Culture*, vol. 6, no. 1 (2003), pp. 9-18; de Certeau.

³³ Abd al-Rauf, p. 56.

This approach enables us to spatially read the literary text as a space in itself,³⁴ one that contains spaces and places that form the novel's world. Within this text and by virtue of it, the events of the novel take place. Thus, the relationship of "the novel to the city, and the relationship of the city to the novel" is one of communication and exchange; a "contradictory and ramified relationship going beyond its two sides to include a third party, the readers, the city's residents".³⁵

The Embodied Experience of Space

The body is our first, closest, and most intimate space; hence, our understanding of space or place cannot be isolated from our understanding of the body. Our experience of space is considered an extension of our relationship with our body (and our experience of it); no spatial experience is possible without or outside the body.³⁶ This demonstrates that social space cannot be viewed as a void, disconnected from its context, in which we move or which moves us absurdly, without purpose or consequence. Similarly, context cannot be viewed as absolute, denying its particularity that will never be repeated in its current/present form, even if its manifestations resemble or intersect with another's. No event takes place in a vacuum. Therefore, social space includes a set of relations, structures, and characteristics that make it distinct from other spaces. In this way, our spatial experience and daily social practices are linked to this particularity and simultaneously constrained by it.³⁷

Through a careful, learned reading of this particularity, we form an understanding of the potential and limitations of a space, as well as the challenges it presents in shaping the frameworks for our practices. This also includes the possibility of practices that resist or offer alternatives to the prevailing structure. Even as they define and frame our daily movement and understanding of the world, these spaces include areas of opportunity through which we can resist them if they become too confined or fail to meet our needs and desires as inhabitants.³⁸ According to Foucault, every prevailing social structure contains the conditions and circumstances to resist it, and the tools and means to do so, which individuals and groups can avail.³⁹

If we view the novel as a world and a social reality that expresses a specific human condition and social experience, encompassing multiple spaces, then reading the literary text as a map becomes key to understanding its characters, events, and developments from a spatial perspective. This approach leads to a similar result: revealing the system that defines and frames the social and spatial structures of the literary world (as if we were looking from above); and producing renewed meaning, knowledge, and relations open to new possibilities, experiences, and biographies (through close reading, as if we were looking from below). This process enables us to gain new insights into the characters, their experiences, and the events taking place in the novel. Herein lies the importance of being aware, as readers, of the writer's literary

³⁴ For more on textual components that fall outside the text yet produce it, see: Gerard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, Jane E. Lewin (trans.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, Jane E. Lewin (trans.) (New York: Cornell University Press, 1980); Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, Leon S. Roudiez (ed.), Homas Gora, Alice Jardine & Leon S. Roudiez (trans.) (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1969).

³⁵ Abd al-Rauf, p. 19.

³⁶ In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre touches on the relationality between body and place.

³⁷ For more on social and political organizations, including spatial policies, see: *ibid.*, as well as: Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," in Neil Leach (ed.), *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 330-336; S. Susan, "The Place of Space in Social and Cultural Theory," in: A. Elliott (ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Social and Cultural Theory* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), pp. 337-357; Edward Soja, "The Socio-Spatial Dialectic," *Annals of the Association of the American Geographers*, vol. 70, no. 2 (1980), pp. 207-225; Edward Soja, *The Political Organization of Space* (Washington: The Association of American Geographers, 1971).

³⁸ The following works offer helpful discussions of the right to the city: David Harvey, "The Right to the City," *Debates and Developments: International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, vol. 27, no. 4 (2003), pp. 939-941; Robert Park & Ernest W. Burgess, *The City* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2019); Phil Hubbard, *The City* (London: Routledge, 2018); Henri Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, Eleonore Kofman & Elizabeth Lebas (trans.) (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000); Lefebvre, *The Critique of Everyday Life*.

³⁹ Foucault, "Of Other Spaces."

cartography/map, so that we can play a prominent, conscious, and interactive role in producing our own literary geography, which in turn offers critical insight on the world of the novel, and the beginning of our cognitive and critical relationship with the text.

The Spatiality of the Literary Text: Mapping as Critical Reading

In their joint literary work, *‘Ālam bilā Kharā’iṭ* [A World Without Maps],⁴⁰ Abd al-Rahman Munif and Jabra Ibrahim Jabra write: “Give me a map, then let me see what is left for me to conquer the world”. This quote comes in the context of a conversation between Alaa Salloum, an author and the novel’s protagonist, and Riyadh Burhan, the protagonist of Alaa’s own novel. In this prolonged dialogue, which spans several pages, Riyadh blames Alaa for not giving him the space he needs to become and say what he wants; because Alaa, as Riyadh claims, did not give him the map to the novel, but rather threw him into it exposed and helpless instead. As a result, Riyadh feels lost and believes Alaa has wronged him.

This dialogue offers a glimpse into the labyrinthine world of writing, where confusion reigns, and we experience the acute pains of writing, and the need for defining lines and circles for building the structure of the novel and its spatiotemporal reference point. In the absence of a roadmap to the novel, the reader misses a specific order, i.e., configuration, that enables readers to traverse the novel in a way that is conducive and productive of knowledge.

Herein lies the importance of spatial reading. When we, as readers, approach the text as a social space in its own right, with spatial, social, and historical dimensions that produce the literary world and allow the characters to interact within based on power relations, we undertake an embodied experience. While reading, we share in the feelings and states of the novel’s protagonists, identifying with their actions, sensing, and savouring their experiences. We cannot arrive at meaning – that is, read the map, construct its geography, and identify its narratives – without the directions, guidelines, clues, frameworks, and contexts provided by the text. Accordingly, when we follow a protagonist down the streets of a city, sit with him in a cafe waiting for an important appointment, or withdraw with him to a corner of his new house, we make an unconditional commitment⁴¹ (sometimes, spontaneously and temporarily) that we have made to ourselves as readers. The fictional events and details that we read become possible and meaningful thanks to a map containing a tangible material space, its timeframe and boundaries, and its social and political conditions that provide us with the general context of the novel and organize the events in our minds and services our imaginaries.

The Textuality of Literary Space: Narrativization as Critical Reading

Peter Turchi, who draws a parallel between maps and works of fiction,⁴² suggests that when we enquire about a map, we often ask for a “story”, and that it is impossible for a single map to include all spatial uses and directions, and to serve all the daily socio-spatial destinations, goals, and desires. Every map is designed with a specific purpose and guides toward particular destinations. Thus, map-making and reading, like text writing and reading, are selective and exclusionary processes with clearly defined purposes. According to Turchi, we choose a specific map that matches our needs, aims, and the type of experiences we seek. Turchi states that a writer determines the text’s details, structure, and intensity based on the nature and

⁴⁰ Abdelrahman Munif & Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, *‘Ālam bilā Kharā’iṭ* (Beirut: Dār Al-Tanwīr, Arab Institute for Research & Publishing, 2018).

⁴¹ Kilito discusses “horizon of expectation” (*ufuq al-intizār*), which is a type of intellectual readiness on the part of the reader, formed by their knowledge of literary genres, their requirements, conditions and structures, on which they rely as a pillar of the map that will guide their reading. See: Kilito, p. 31.

⁴² Peter Turchi, *Maps of the Imagination: The Writer as Cartographer* (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 2004).

purpose of the work they wish to create. A novel, like a map, is defined by its purposes,⁴³ which guide us unambiguously toward a specific destination or goal and its possibilities.⁴⁴ This enables us to trust it as a source of information and knowledge and as a rational reference for open interpretive possibilities within these limits.

Viewing the text as a roadmap does not mean reducing its literary or textual nature, rather, it involves treating these components as narrative elements that organize the literary world. Robert Tally Jr. mentions that when the writer determines the elements of a novel/map, which ones will predominate, and which ones will perform background or secondary roles, and organizes them in a way that best influences the reader, they succeed in determining the type, function, and purpose of the novel.⁴⁵ If the writer engages in this mapping process to organize real and imagined spaces to create a map of their literary world, then the reader participates in it, according to Tally, by visualizing these spaces, following their directions, and identifying the shifting, transient meanings they find in the map, thereby giving it critical and analytical value. In so doing, the reader-critic transforms into a geographer, interpreting the literary map to produce a drawing (new arrangements of the coordinates of the drawn map), and subsequently, previously unexpected maps.⁴⁶ Tally refers to this as the “literary geography” produced by the reader through a reading process that follows the literary map of the text.⁴⁷

This paper interprets literary geography as encompassing specific narrative possibilities that are opened up by the reader. By following the literary map laid out by the writer, the reader colludes with the text to narrativize the literary geography that their reading has produced. The writer is not bound to follow a linear chronological timeline which, for example, as a divergence from traditional narration, became common in contemporary novels. This enables the writer to break the chronological flow, producing yet another dimension of mapping. In addition, the writer can use literary techniques that enable the execution of this breakage materially or spatially, including deconstruction, multiple narratives, intertextuality, and multiple-genericity, among others. Breaking the material form of the text makes it a tangible visual map, and not simply a mental or conceptual one.

The Literary Map in Chouman's Novel

This paper views the urban planning policy adopted in Beirut after the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990) as a manifestation of a militia-economic culture, as described by Najib Hourani,⁴⁸ and an extension of the violence that has gripped the country since the war and continues to the present day in forms such as explosions, assassinations, “little wars”, “military presence”, etc. Violence is also evident in the oppressive neoliberal actions, power dynamics, and social control strategies implemented by the Lebanese state, which control the daily lives and experiences of the population. Chouman's depiction of the city situates the novel within the framework of a war that has yet to end. As such, it can be seen as part of a collective literary narrative that adopts a similar approach, enabling us to trace the socio-political situation that brought it into being and provided a space through which it narrated this situation.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 69.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Tally Jr., *Spatiality*, p. 54.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 79.

⁴⁷ For more on literary geography, the literary map, and the reciprocal relationship between writer and reader, see: Tally Jr., *Spatiality*; Tally Jr. (ed.), *Geocritical Explorations*; Robert Tally Jr. (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Literature and Space* (New York: Routledge, 2017); Robert Tally Jr., *Literary Cartographies* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Salah Saleh, *Qaḍāyā al-Makān al-Riwā'ī fī al-Adab al-Mu'āṣir* (Cairo: Sharqiyāt Publishing House, 1997).

⁴⁸ Najib Hourani, “Transnational Pathways and Political-Economic Power: Globalization and the Lebanese Civil War,” *Geopolitics*, vol. 15, no. 2 (2010), pp. 290-311.

Beirut Outside the Novel, Beirut Inside the Novel

In his preface to *Kāna Ghadan*, Chouman alludes to the ongoing nature of the war, stating, “Despite rearranging general events in its own way, broadening the margin of the imaginary in some, and inventing others that never happened, it can be said that most of the accounts in this novel are based on events that actually took place in Lebanon in 2016 or earlier, or are likely to occur in 2017 or beyond”.⁴⁹

The events of the novel take place in the present narrative time, 27 years after the end of Lebanon’s civil war. Chouman’s depiction of the prevailing system in Beirut reflects the state’s strategic hegemony over history and geography, as it seeks to erase the war from the collective memory of the Lebanese people and distance them from their capital city, depriving them of their right to it. This novel illustrates this through several examples, such as the pervasive advertisements promoting excessive consumption of luxuries, entertainment and “decadent” music concerts, compositions that are heavily invested in, the undeterred military presence in the streets, and so on. The novel’s main characters frequently comment on these phenomena, remarking that things have always been this way, that there is nothing new under the sun, and that only superficial changes occur.

Outside the novel, and in various studies addressing Lebanon’s post-civil war conditions,⁵⁰ Beirut continues to grapple with a state of systematic-institutionalized, state-sponsored amnesia regarding its painful and bloody past. This amnesia is evident in the sectarian power structures, where authority remains concentrated in the hands of warlords who, by virtue of a general pardon issued in 1991, became the guardians of the new state. Further compounding this is the near-total absence of the civil war from official and political discourse and daily conversations. The Lebanese school curricula’s history textbooks, for example, fail to address the war, with the chapter on Lebanon concluding with its independence from the French mandate in 1943. Additionally, the city lacks memorials, museums, or official archives dedicated to that period of the country’s history. Thus, the normalization of forgetting has become a means of exercising social control over the population and the entire country. This is evident in systematic restrictions on movement and access to certain public spaces, as well as the marginalization of the city’s residents and their exclusion from decision-making. Through neoliberal strategies that include construction projects, marketing efforts, security plans, and permissive privatization regulations, Beirut’s residents find themselves in constant negotiation with their past and their space, unable to envision the future, accept the present, or confront their past.

The Beirut portrayed in Chouman’s novel resembles the one we encounter in reality. In *Kāna Ghadan*, expressions of violence permeate the lives and movements of the residents, alongside traffic accidents, crumbling infrastructure, the spread of crass racist political rhetoric, bogus appeasement, raucous concerts, and the like. The city’s contradictions are starkly evident, while at the same time, the hegemonic political system is laid bare in its frantic attempts to control the city’s residents by distracting them from its plans to restrict and control both space and time.

Walking as an Attempt to Rationalize the City

In his book, *The Poetics of Space*,⁵¹ Gaston Bachelard states, “Each one of us ... should speak of his roads, his crossroads, his roadside benches; each one of us should make a surveyor’s map of his lost

⁴⁹ Chouman, p. 6.

⁵⁰ Fawwaz Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, 2nd ed. (London: Pluto Press, 2012); Kamal Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions: The History of Lebanon Reconsidered* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005); Theodor Hanf, *Coexistence in Wartime Lebanon: Decline of a State and Rise of a Nation*, John Richardson (trans.) (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015); Samir Khalaf, *Heart of Beirut: Reclaiming the Bourj* (Beirut: Saqi, 2006); Aseel Sawalha, *Reconstructing Beirut: Memory and Space in a Postwar Arab City* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010); Hiba Bou Akar, *For the War Yet to Come: Planning Beirut’s Frontiers* (California: Stanford University Press, 2018); Ghenwa Hayek, *Beirut, Imagining the City: Space and Place in Lebanese Literature* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2015); Yasmine Khayyat, *War Remains: Ruination and Resistance in Lebanon* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2023).

⁵¹ When translating Bachelard’s *The Poetics of Space* to Arabic, Ghalib Halasa rendered its title as *Jamāliyyāt al-Makān* [The Esthetics of Space], which in my view is inaccurate. Poetics are a subcategory of Esthetics; however, the terms cannot be used synonymously.

fields and meadows”.⁵² In Chouman’s novel, this is what Khaled and Reem, the novel’s protagonists, attempt to do through walking. Khaled, with his alternative perception of the city, revealed in his constant questioning and daily quarrels as he strives to break the pattern of things, walks the city, knowledgeable of its urban, spatial, architectural, and political history, pays particular attention to the changes that have shaped it – whether against the backdrop of the civil war, controversial urban planning, or political and socio-economic developments that have altered the priorities of authorities and were manifested spatially.

Khaled anchors his challenge to spatial narratives and defeatist, oppressive practices in spatial awareness. In examining this alternative experience, the paper highlights the importance of reading the spatial connotations in the novel and the alternate way in which Khaled and Reem map the city’s spaces and places through walking. This reading also reveals the multiple (and sometime contradictory) narratives of the city held by the city’s residents – some of which affirm, while others oppose and conflict with, the dominant narrative. This approach aims to analyse the agency of walkers by examining the spaces produced by Khaled and Reem, which, if only temporarily, allow them, to achieve a spatial experience often excluded/suppressed by the system that governs socio-spatial productions and organizations. In doing so, a different spatial narrative emerges. As Abd al-Ra’uf states, the city is “an existing material context continuously recreated by its residents”.⁵³

“The Backyard”: Reading the City and Uncovering its Order Through Walking

Khaled and Reem’s relationship with the city is one marked by tension and anxiety, undergoing continuous negotiation, re-evaluation, and reinterpretation. This relationship determines the nature of their spatial practices, which manifest in their views and interactions with and within the city, their understanding of it, their perceptions of its systems, and their ability to define their positionalities within it as individuals, residents, and active users (rather than passive consumers). Each of them holds a unique view of the city, shaped by personal experiences, knowledge, and spatial, political, and social awareness, determined by this same positionality and knowledge, and the different daily practices this leads to. As a woman, for example, Reem feels unsafe in Beirut and avoids walking there, especially given the frequent spates of violence that afflict the city on daily basis.

Reem depicts this reality through her description of the city’s image in the minds of its residents, highlighting how these images influence individual identities, their sense of place and belonging, and their daily experiences and practices. In light of a dream that has left a powerful impression on her, Reem describes the people of her city as living in the “backyard”, as she refers to it, as if they’re banned from the interior of the house, living on the margins of the city rather than inside it. She says,

I see us all marching. I look, and I recognize everyone. We’re all walking, including the dead, those who passed and those who will. We step forward, while small explosions go off behind us. They only go off once things are behind and overcome. It is as if we’re the ones who set them off, then survive them. In the space behind us, confessions are made and left behind. I will call this place: the backyard. In it, all we think is great perishes.⁵⁴

Reem goes on to add that this situation is shared by all members of society. They all sense this contradiction, without concern, and are fully aware that this “backyard” could swallow them all up. “We don’t know when will the pattern break and everything change”, Reem adds, “when we become little explosions behind others marching ahead.”⁵⁵

⁵² Bachelard, p. 33.

⁵³ Abd al-Rauf, p. 32.

⁵⁴ Chouman, p. 133.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

To Reem, the “backyard” symbolizes a contradiction that the city’s residents experience every day. The city space, she mentions, encompasses everything that has happened, and everything that might happen in the future. As such, readers imagine an almost non-existent future. This picture is further deepened when Reem describes the city’s residents as onlookers waiting “tensely and anxiously” on the margins, as if their reality has turned them into spectators unable to move forward or change their reality, or even influence the decisions that shape their daily lives. This reality has thus become biopolitically normalized in their daily practices.⁵⁶ However, Reem’s perspective is not a defeatist one, as the city’s residents are not predetermined in their actions but have grown indifferent to phenomena and ways of life to which they have become accustomed. Despite her awareness of their affliction and indifference to the reality, Reem believes that the residents live in constant anxiety and fear that they themselves will become violent explosives chasing after others.

This sense of responsibility drives Khaled and Reem to resist marginalization, lethargy, apathy, and loitering (passive spatial experience). They strive to change the reality by differently experiencing their spaces via walking, and producing space (rather than reproducing it) by drawing an alternative map of their city based on a perception and spatial imaginary different from what has been normalized around them. They document the spaces and side streets, naming them by their real names that dropped out of the vernacular language and its daily and official discourse, and recording the personal, historical, and political events that these spaces have witnessed. This serves to produce a spatial memory and an urban experience that remembers what has been, or forced to become, forgotten, while paving the way for alternative narratives that are more faithful to the daily experiences of ordinary people.

Building on Reem’s observation, Khaled examines the sheer political impasse and the rampant violence embedded within the various classes of Lebanese society, like a state of “limbo”, a vicious cycle of irresponsible, indifferent *laissezfaire* that disrupts people’s daily lives. The conflict thus appears to be numb and suppressed, while the dominant system effective and sovereign. Khaled remarks, for example, in his recurrent walks, that nothing changes in this country, and the road is headed toward a point of “no return”, “flooded with boredom”.⁵⁷ None of this surprises him or the city’s other residents. He considers this deterioration to be expected, leading to a kind of “disconnection between their personal lives and what’s happening around them, as they take every public event out of the details of their daily lives and set it aside. They simply pass it by [...] and thus there’s no engagement ceases to exist”.⁵⁸ This lack of engagement worries both Khaled and Reem. It is from this very concern that they are able to uncover and analyse aspects of the city and produce this alternative map (not only spatially, but also cognitively and ideologically) as indicative of a different approach to understanding the city and practicing its daily life, while at the same time drafting one of Beirut’s multiple narratives.

The Alternative Roadmap: Negotiating and Circumventing City Structures

The residents of Beirut in *Kāna Ghadan*, much like the city itself, are experiencing a kind of detachment. Their condition is repeatedly described as “ennui” throughout the novel. The description is accurately reflected in the slackness and weariness that have afflicted most of the city’s residents, who have been compelled, sometimes unconsciously, to reproduce the system and its policies in their daily lives. Within this reality, people’s subjectivity and agency become problematic, as this process of reproducing violence and its consequences

⁵⁶ Vernon W. Cisney & Nicole Morar (eds.), *Biopower: Foucault and Beyond* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016); Thomas Lemke, *The Government of Things: Foucault and the New Materialists* (New York: New York University Press, 2021); Hubert L. Dreyfus & Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1986).

⁵⁷ Chouman, p. 214.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

mirrors the daily localization, normalization, and internalization of violence, and the firmness of its coercive techniques used to subjugate their daily lives.

Khaled continues his description of the situation by naming it an abject failure of the entire society, manifested in the daily defeatist living of the city's residents. "As they take every public event out of the details of their daily lives", as Khaled says, "and set it aside".⁵⁹ The separation from their surroundings is the result of the normalization of their reality, which cause them to seem as though they are living outside society, or on its margins, in denial of their socio-political context and reality. By "simply passing it by", they evade engagement and confrontation. Hence, most of those whom Khaled refers to can be seen as docile vagrants, passersby, and defeatist consumers, who ask no questions in an invented city, submissive to its systems and regulations. This image aligns closely with the one Reem paints in her memoirs, where she describes the city's residents as living in its backyard, far from its socio-political centre, on the edges of political life rather than within, easily controlled docile bodies.⁶⁰

In a brief section of the novel titled "Roadmap", the attempts of Reem and Khaled to negotiate space are seen through the map they invite readers to follow. They take off from a specific location, and walk the city down specified streets, enabling readers to follow their movements and recognize their destination, whether by visualizing the streets (if they are familiar with them) or by looking at an actual map of Beirut. Khaled and Reem do not walk aimlessly, nor do they follow the main routes, thus rebelling against the common modes of using space in Beirut.

This is done in three different ways: First, Khaled and Reem do not walk alone, violating the stereotypical definition of a walker (i.e., a *flâneur*),⁶¹ nor do they linger in one place, since their presence on the street is in constant motion. Second, Khaled does not walk aimlessly; rather, he carves out a path for himself and his friend despite the restrictions they face, which include closed streets, roads blocked by cement barriers or barbed wire, public property that has been privatized, and Beirut's ubiquitous security checkpoints. In doing so, they construct their own path, walking and crossing it as independent subjects fulfilling some of the city's potential despite the restrictions imposed on them and their awareness of it. It is through this act of walking itself, as de Certeau suggests, that these restrictions become visible.⁶² Third, aware of the spatial and sociopolitical topography of the streets, Khaled draws a pedestrian map rooted in his spatial memory, which he shares with Reem as they walk along. He insists on using the streets' original names, which have been swept out of collective memory and everyday usage over time. Khaled's insistence suggests that forgetting these names and replacing them with others, or rather with different means of identification and reference, is a coping mechanism for residents with their altered spatial reality, and the spread of a certain discourse that dominates daily life and defines (and limits) the experience of the city – and thus people's sense of place and belonging – while obscuring the control exerted by the existing system. As Edward Said says, power manifests clearly as a struggle over geography, that is, a struggle over place.⁶³

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Alan Sheridan (trans.) (London: Penguin Books, 1991); Michel Foucault, *Society Must be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France 1975-76*, David Macey (trans.) (London: Penguin Books, 1997); Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge*, vol. 1, Robert Hurley (trans.) (London: Penguin Books, 1976).

⁶¹ The word "walker" is not used here in the sense of *flâneur* due to the two words' differing contexts and experiences. The concept of "walker" is approached in this study in keeping with the experiences of Reem and Khalid in the city of Beirut, a city in the Global South, in a country with its own experience, extending over periods of wars, violence, and class struggles and contradictions. Neither Reem nor Khalid have class privileges that make them part of the elite, which is reflected in their spatial experience. For more information on *flâneur*, see: de Certeau; Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, Howard Eiland & Kevin McLaughlin (trans.) (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999); Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A Short History of Walking* (London: Granta Books, 2014); Lauren Elkin, *Flâneuse: Women Walk the City in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Venice, and London* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2016).

⁶² de Certeau, p. 100.

⁶³ See: Edward Said, "Reflections on Exile," in: Edward Said, *Reflections on Exile & Other Literary and Cultural Essays* (New York: Granta, 2000), pp. 173-197.

Reem acknowledges her indebtedness to Khaled for the new perspective of the city. She notes that absurdity has become a way of living in Beirut, saying that “we pass through things without noticing them, no more asking questions”.⁶⁴ This observation highlights the residents’ inability to break out of the spatial practices imposed upon them. Khaled comes here to shake Reem out of her stagnancy, urging her to reconsider the relationship with her spaces and the ways in which she uses them. He provides her with the opportunity to become acquainted with her city and, contrary to what she has been accustomed, to experience it in a way that she forges her own path within it.

Practicing and Narrativizing Khaled and Reem’s Spatial Imaginary

Through Reem’s digression and her analysis of walking through the city, we see a backlash against the stereotyping and prevailing rhythm imposed on the people of her city. She recognizes the potential for an alternative spatial experience with Khaled. Here, walking becomes an act that “affirms, tests, transcends, and respects paths”, as de Certeau suggests, an act capable of conveying meaning.⁶⁵ Reem and Khaled’s walks starkly contrast to the way Reem describes how people typically engage with the city on a daily basis, as if they were merely passing through it without wondering, questioning, doubting, or noticing the details. There are two main reasons for this marked contrast. The first is Khaled and Reem’s spatial perspective, which is grounded in intellectual insights drawn from their adherence to spatial, social, political, and historical narratives excluded from the dominant urban discourse. The second is their insistence on a practice-based experience of the city that breaks free from the restrictions inherent in the prevailing state of affairs, with their adherence to the original street names. In this regard, de Certeau says that official names can reveal hidden and familiar meanings, as naming lends meaning to a place and one’s experience of it, incentivizes movement, and transforms the non-place of public space into transit areas.⁶⁶ These areas, according to de Certeau, become a sphere to appropriate, become emancipated, and produce alternatives.

Lastly, Khaled continuously shares stories with Reem about the streets they walk, as if to evoke a forgotten history and narrative. In this way, he weaves his own experience of the city into a unique narrative that combines the personal and the collective at once. This narrative can be read as an attempt to activate an alternative spatial imaginary of the city, one that challenges the homogeneous and monolithic urban narrative promoted by both state and non-state actors in the collective consciousness and permitted socio-spatial practices, through neoliberal and biopolitical strategies that are rife in all of Beirut’s lifestyles and rhythms.

Conclusion

This paper emphasized the importance of spatial reading in unlocking the various interpretive and critical possibilities of a literary text. This is done through mapping the text and exploring its narratives driven by the relationality between textuality and spatiality that this mapping creates. The paper approached textuality⁶⁷ and spatiality as fluid concepts whose flexibility enables them to challenge traditional boundaries and controls that seek to standardize meaning, essentialize experience, and arrive at a single, monolithic, reductive narrative. The paper proceeded from the idea of the text as practice and process,⁶⁸ emphasizing the need to problematize the concept of space as a narrative tool, and reconsider literary narrative structures accordingly. This problematization was shown in three main starting points used to interpret the spatial practices of the characters in Hilal Chouman’s novel, *Kāna Ghadan*.

⁶⁴ Chouman, pp. 167-168.

⁶⁵ de Certeau, p. 100.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 105.

⁶⁷ For more on textuality, see: Hugh Silverman, “What is Textuality? Part II,” *Phenomenology + Pedagogy*, vol. 4, no. 2 (1986), pp. 54-61.

⁶⁸ For more detail on text/textuality as social practice, see: Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in the Poetic Language*, Margaret Waller (trans.), Leon S. Roudiez (intro.) (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), pp. 208-213; Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, pp. 17-102.

These starting points are: (1) Viewing the spatiality of text and the textuality of space in a novel as a critical process that seeks to read and interpret within a relational framework open to multiple possibilities and trajectories, all within the boundaries of the geographical map created by the author; (2) Approaching the text as a space reveals the conditions and frameworks for an integrated, narrated social reality, where multiple narratives and lives interact. This approach also makes it possible to map this text, then, instrumentally and analytically, narrativize this map; and (3) Recognizing the reader's active role in producing textuality and spatiality in a literary work through a critical-spatial reading enables the reader to engage with the geographical and intellectual map drawn by the writer. This reading becomes an exercise in both perception and the production of socio-spatial knowledge following a distant approach (from above) through mapping, and a close approach (from below) through narrativizing the map.

Khaled managed to map his city's spaces and places through an alternative, perceptive, and guided socio-spatial practice of walking. Armed with a critical questioning gaze and geographical and spatial knowledge grounded in history and practice, he walks with the intellectual and political aim of reclaiming his sense of place. He is thus an example of a space user, according to Lefebvre's definition, who resists all forms of spatial consumption that strips the space of its experience. Chouman's novel presents the violent daily lives of the common folk in the city of Beirut. Thus, day-to-day reality appears as a conflict zone, holding the potential of a purposeful act, as Lefebvre emphasized in his critique of daily life, that is at once politicized, resistant, and transcendent.⁶⁹ Khaled's insistence on his right to the city can be read as a defying counter-hegemonic act. Asef Bayat's assertion that "an active use challenges the authority of the state and those social groups that benefit from such order" is relevant here.⁷⁰ The reading adopts Bayat's analysis of Khaled's alternative practice in Beirut.

Based on the experiences of Khaled and Reem, this paper presented a literary geography, based on Chouman's literary map (to use Robert Tally Jr.'s term), specific to the experience of Beirut. This geography is not only shaped by how Khaled and Reem see or understand the city, but also by how they experience and practice it on a daily basis. This practice and the way they converse about Beirut reflect a socio-spatial imaginary that challenges the existing narrative. Therefore, the act of mapping alone is not sufficient for an understanding of the text and its narratives, nor for effective use of spatial-textual relationality. Accordingly, the process of closely analyzing the text came to be an experience of activating the spatial-textual relationality, manifested in the process of spatialization-narrativization followed here. Inspiration from the approaches of modern comparative literature that combine close and distant readings were underscored, in accordance with the approaches employed in literary-spatial studies.

The paper drew from de Certeau perspective, which includes two dimensions: (1) a view from above that reveals the city's layout and its socio-spatial structures (i.e. the order(ing) of space), and (2) a street-level view involving a direct practice of space on the daily level. The spatial approach proposed here combines form, content, and context spontaneously and relationally, while also recognizing the importance of constant critique and motion in the production of meaning and knowledge. The reader and the text enter a state of continuous positioning which reflects a critical, philosophical, and political stance, and a commitment to the text's ability to reveal and theorize.

Having established starting points for a project grounded in the narrativization of spatial experience and the spatialization of narrative experience, the following questions can be posed based on this relationality: How does this approach serve the literary text's ability to theorize for itself? How does this ability help transform the theory into practice? How can the reading presented here reveal the novel's socio-spatial

⁶⁹ Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*.

⁷⁰ Asef Bayat, *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), p. 63.

imaginary? What forms and types of knowledge does this imaginary produce? How can this knowledge be employed in a creative and productive manner? How can we benefit from this positioning of novels like Chouman's and the approach proposed here within a theoretical framework that builds on and mimics the Arab context? And what is the multiplicity possible for this context, that still accounts for its particularity?

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