

“As Much as I belong”: Space, Affect, and Identity in Isabella Hammad’s *The Parisian*

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Abstract

Atmosphere, as theorized by Gernot Böhme (1993), has both mental and physical connotations, connecting people and places in mutually constitutive and transformative relations. Investigated from the aspect of emotional geography’s concern with the spatiality of emotions (Davidson et al. 2007), the atmosphere of places and spaces may be inextricably linked to bodily experience, affect, and affective human relationships, and may play a vital part in one’s sense of belonging and self. With a specific focus on these interconnections, my paper offers a close reading of Isabella Hammad’s debut novel, *The Parisian or Al-Barisi: A Novel* (2019), mapping the protagonist, Midhat Kamal’s emotional geographies through his physical journey from Nablus to Montpellier, Paris, and back, as well as his concomitant journey of the self from immigrant to flâneur, tourist to “the Parisian.” I shall argue that the protagonist’s bodily and lived experience and the atmosphere of the places/spaces he inhabits greatly determines and is determined by his affective relationships, as well as his sense of home, belonging, and self, contributing to his identity (re-) construction as a transnational subject and creating the emotional geographies of his life.

Keywords: emotional geographies, atmosphere, affective relationships, belonging, identity construction

Introduction

In the introduction to their edited volume, *Emotional Geographies* (2007), Joyce Davidson, Liz Bondi, and Mick Smith point out that emotional geography has “a common concern with the spatiality and temporality of emotions, with the way they coalesce around and within certain places” (2007, p. 3). As a scientific field, emotional geography “attempts to understand emotion—experientially and conceptually—in terms of its socio-spatial

mediation and articulation rather than as entirely interiorized subjective mental states" (Davidson et al., 2007, p. 3). Drawing on theories and findings of emotional geography but somewhat in contradiction with this claim, I use the term emotional geographies defined as spatially mediated and articulated emotions and indeed as subjective mental states of individuals experienced in, via, and toward the places and spaces they inhabit. This approach enables an interdisciplinary and in-depth examination of how feelings generate and mediate our behaviors in and attitudes to places and spaces through bodily and lived experience and emotional associations, that is, the feelings which they inspire, and which determine their symbolic importance (Davidson et al., 2007, p. 3). In the case of immigrants, the study of such emotional associations and affective geographies may lead to a better understanding of the intricate ways in which an individual's sense of belonging and self is constructed or re-constructed owing to immigration.

A study of literary representations of the spatiality of emotions with regard to immigrants may thus be especially suitable for unraveling the interconnections of space, affect, and identity, and with its detailed, poetic portrayal of emotions through the main character, Midhat Kamal's physical and mental journey, bodily and lived experience, Hammad's novel may provide a particularly valuable insight. *The Parisian* instantly draws the readers into its unique atmosphere and the protagonist's inner world, taking them on an emotional journey along with Midhat, who experiences a wide array of sensations, feelings, and emotions while navigating through life and conflict-ridden France and Palestine in the 1910s–1930s.

Born and raised in Nablus, Palestine, Midhat embarks on his first journey at fourteen, when he starts his studies at a French boarding school in Constantinople, "Lycée Impérial." Although he does not experience it as immigration *per se*, because the city is then part of the Ottoman Empire like Nablus, he does get his "first taste of cosmopolitan life" (Hammad, 2019, p. 33) and experience of "his own separateness;" through the process of becoming aware of his own body and its peculiarity, he realizes that

no one else should be Midhat, or that Midhat should be no one else. [...] This realisation was like a tiny jolt of electricity that both locked him inside his body and alienated him from it. [... The] electric feeling of aloneness, victorious and agonising, unearthly. (2019, pp. 33–34)

Besides highlighting the protagonist's interiority, the quotation reveals an awareness of his body belonging to him and defining his self, with feelings of the lived body as "part of total body consciousness" (Denzin, 2017), and points to bodily experience as meaning-making (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1998), which gives the French school in Constantinople special importance as a place of difference and unbelonging, both spatially and physically.

Experienced as “victorious and agonising” at the same time, Midhat’s sense of self and separateness may thus be interpreted as a conflicted embodied emotion, “intricately connected to specific sites and contexts” (Davidson et al., 2005, p. 5)—in this case, a place other than home and the body/self perceived as both ‘I.’

An Immigrant in Montpellier

It is this bodily experience and embodied emotion—a yearning for belonging—that Midhat carries with him on his next journey in 1914 when his father sends him to France to study medicine and escape the war. Aboard the ship to Montpellier, the feeling of loneliness re-emerges, whereby he becomes aware of his body and feels that its outline “weighed on him as a hard, sore shape, and his heart beat very fast” (Hammad, 2019, p. 13). Midhat experiences sensible feelings, that is, unintentional bodily sensations in the lived body but also lived feelings, since loneliness as an emotion is “felt as an embodied state” and the body becomes “a sounding board for the emotion” (Denzin, 2017)—what he feels in his body echoes what he fears in his mind.

Struggling “to conjure a picture of France that was separate from” the French school (Hammad, 2019, p. 14), Midhat accepts the help of a fellow passenger Faruq, thus expanding his knowledge of the French language and culture until he feels “he managed, more or less, to soothe the hard outline of his body—which still at times oppressed him with its stinging clasp” (2019, p. 18). The gripping sense of loneliness and separateness seems to be triggered by immigration, projected onto the environment, and experienced in the body, foreshadowing “a new way of being-in-the-world” (Denzin, 2017): as a reluctant immigrant.

“Turk,” “Arabian man,” “the famous Oriental guest” (Hammad, 2019, pp. 70, 72)—these are but a few phrases used to refer to Midhat in Montpellier, at social events in the house of social anthropologist Frédéric Molineu, his host for the period of his studies. Interestingly, Midhat does not provide a self-identification at this point but feels that “something thawed in his chest” when Molineu’s daughter claims: “Monsieur Midhat would call himself a Palestinian Arab” (p. 39). This sense of warmth signals the beginning of an emotional relationship with Jeanette, which will serve as an important tool for achieving a certain degree or sense of belonging, despite the perceived impossibility thereof, and will prompt him to identify himself as “a Palestinian from Nablus who was a citizen of the enemy” and “the fool, the foreigner unable to control his own meanings” (pp. 87, 108) when he feels he lost her. Midhat’s “renewed sense of separateness and loneliness” (p. 109) triggers a yearning for belonging and becoming, much may be interpreted as a “desire for some sort of attachment, be it to other people, places or modes of being” (Probyn, 1996, p. 19).

At this point, however, Midhat is scared by instability as much as by yearning, and although he might not be fully aware of this emotion, it is definitely bodily felt whenever he finds himself in new circumstances and stressful situations, marking the unavoidable end and uncertain beginning of something.

Upon arriving in Montpellier to start a new chapter in his life, Midhat watches “the city rise and fall and thin into alleyways” and notes that it is similar to Nablus but bigger (Hammad, 2019, p. 20). Looking for similarities between his home, Nablus, his first emotional geography, and the French town signals that his relationship with the latter is just as complicated as his feelings for Jeanette, and likewise needs affirmative sensory and lived experience to make him feel he belongs: the joyful, familiar sight of olive trees in this strange place (p. 49), regular walks with a new friend, Laurent, and his growing affection toward Jeanette. Walking around Montpellier increases a sense of familiarity and enables Midhat to observe and imitate the locals for the sake of fitting in. The role of the sauntering observer evokes, on one hand, Walter Benjamin’s (1972/1999) notion of the nineteenth-century *flâneur*, a gentleman leisurely strolling the Parisian streets as a detached and unobserved observer, whose anonymity, in Baudelaire’s words, is “a play of masks” (1845/2010, p. 400) in the crowd. On the other hand, Midhat as the ‘Oriental flâneur’ also displays Bhabhaian colonial mimicry, which takes the form of imitation and repetition, and thereby becomes “a mask, a mockery” (2005, p. 120). In Midhat’s case, the mask signals both detachment and a yearning to belong, as well as otherness and mimicry.

Furthermore, when Midhat believes that his love for Jeanette is unrequited, the spatiality of his emotions is reduced mainly to his body, indicated by a recurring bodily awareness and the sensation that “he was locked inside his body” (Hammad, 2019, p. 109). What Midhat experiences is a painful sense of embodied fear; that is, a bodily reaction to a fearful situation or scenario, but it is his *mind* creating fear (Shapiro, 2014), prompting a bodily sensation that feels like locked-in syndrome or pseudocoma, a paralysis of the body. Midhat’s mental states and the rollercoaster of emotions he experiences with Jeanette are also spatially projected onto and symbolically manifested in his environment: his first description of the Molineu house—noting silver, crystal, iron, and the gloomy lawn (Hammad, 2019, p. 21)—resonates with the “hard shape of his body” and his sense of separateness and loneliness; the striped yellow walls of his room (p. 25)—an intertextual reference to Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1892/1997)—foreshadow his later mental breakdown; while the cream salon, “closed off with sheets thrown over the furniture, turning them into secret white ranges” (Hammad, 2019, p. 147), symbolizes the intimacy, between Midhat and Jeanette, kept as a secret.

In the joyful state of requited love, however, Midhat finds out that Jeanette's father has studied him all along, to write "The Effect of a New Language Learned by a *Primitive Brain*" (Hammad, p.154; my emphasis). The realization that he is viewed as an anthropological object, an inferior being, as the Other, triggers a series of sensible and lived feelings, and quasi-hallucinations, such as "the banister became a woman's arm, and the shadow in the far corner ... a black shoe ... He felt a cramp in his stomach. ... He looked at his reflection in the mirrored door of the armoire. He tried to see what Frédéric saw" (pp. 155–56). The shock of betrayal, the first in the line of many leading to the aforementioned mental breakdown some twenty years later, is narrated with a specific focus on his sensory, bodily, and lived experience—the shapes and shadows, the cramp in his stomach, the sense of estrangement and the intention to understand Molineu's view of him—and is highly spatialized: each sensation and feeling is localized, and both objects and places become spatial metaphors of bodily emotions; that is, bodily sensations associated with emotions, themselves embodied experiences (Denzin, 2017).

When he confronts Molineu about studying him, the doctor tries to defend himself by asserting he only wanted to humanize Midhat, to which he replies: "To humanise me? ... I am—really, I am amazed. Monsieur, I am a *person*. I am—no—" (Hammad, 2019, p. 159, my emphasis). Midhat's defiant claim of being a person may be interpreted in several ways. First, it may be read as his incapability or refusal of "positing his identity as a stable state" (Probyn, 1996, p. 19), highlighting the only fixed aspect of his identity instead: being human. Second, it could point to the notion of identity as transition, constructed through both being and becoming (Fortier, 2000, pp. 1–2), that is, a fluid identity, perpetually changing, and difficult to pinpoint or label. On the other hand, his inability to name what he is not might signal that Midhat is not yet aware of this fluidity and is ashamed of his perception as the Other, which may explain the masks he wears and roles he plays in Paris, where he flees after Jeanette does stand up for him and he feels their relationship is irreparably broken (Hammad, 2019, p. 161).

A Flâneur and Tourist in Paris

Midhat starts his new life in Paris with another defiant act, when he refuses to take off his tarbush (a flat-topped, brimless hat usually worn by Muslim men), even though it is a visible marker of his difference and viewed with distaste by the passers-by (Hammad, 2019, p. 179). Although it seems that Midhat owns up to his otherness, he soon resorts to mimicry again, in terms of appearance and behavior. Staying at Faruq's, Midhat engages in heated conversations about Palestine's and Syria's future with his Arab friends,

starts studying history at Sorbonne during the day, and spends his nights visiting bars and cafes, drinking alcohol and engaging in a series of sexual relationships with various women and prostitutes. Living the life of Parisian *bon vivants* seems to resonate with Probyn's claim of "using desires for belonging as threads that lead us into unforeseen places and connection" (1996, p. 20), and Midhat's mimicry, although frequently seen as a source or symptom of disempowerment, rootlessness or non-attachment, may also be understood—as in Bhabha's theory—as a conscious strategy of identity performance in the enabling atmosphere of the city as "a stage setting" (Pleske, 2014, p. 139).

Midhat's transformation from the Other to "a Parisian" goes hand in hand with changes in his perception of the French capital. Upon arriving he notices "the cluttered pavements," "the faceless rush," "the cry of a seagull," and "the earth [muttering] beneath his feet" (Hammad, 2019, p. 179), pointing back to the painful sense of being different and betrayed as a spatialized emotion. Later, however, he notes that "the city moved from her mood of wartime grief to one of revelry, Parisian nightlife began to thrive on the electric atmosphere of the home front" (p. 181), similarly to Midhat, whose anger and grief turn into the unbridled enjoyment of all that Paris has to offer, enabling him to experience "a pure thrill of Being. It lived in the body like a drug, this being alive in the jaws of the full, flying night" (p. 181). Besides an obvious change in Midhat's bodily and lived experience, the quotation reveals a vital connection between space and emotions: emotional participation being an integral part of one's experience of space (Hasse, 2011, p. 52), and inextricable links among space, emotions and the body. As Nora Pleske points out in her discussion of Gernot Böhme's article "Die Atmosphäre einer Stadt" (1998), "the metropolitan space is intrinsically bodily felt by urbanites because the urban atmosphere is scripted in emotional states of being" (2014, p. 139). In Böhme's theory, the atmosphere of place/space may be attributed just as much to the environment as to the individuals (1993, p. 114); that is, it both influences and is influenced by the people experiencing it. Midhat's sensory and bodily experience of Paris thus results in and is the result of the atmosphere of the metropolis, an embodied emotion per se, and forms an integral part of the embodied experience of the city.

The thrilling sense of being alive may also be attributed to what Tonino Griffero refers to as the atmospheric affordance of the city: an emotional tone, or the message that a city sends out about its possible uses and functions, to which people may respond to with certain behaviors but sometimes also with a specific objectivity, and "aesthetic distance" (2014, p. 4). Due to his objectivity yet apparent thrill, as well as his behavior and movement in the city, Midhat's character may also be read as a postmodern *flâneur*,

a detached observer like his modern counterpart, whom Zygmunt Bauman describes as a man of choices, who knows “how to enhance the adventure brought about by that under-determination of one’s own destination and itinerary” (1995, p. 127), leading to pleasure and a sense of freedom. Furthermore, the characteristics of detachment and pleasure-seeking also enable interpreting the protagonist’s figure as a tourist, whose practices “involve the notion of departure, of a limited breaking with established routines and practices of everyday life and allowing one’s senses to engage with a set of stimuli that contrast with the everyday and the mundane” (Urry, 1990, p. 2)—in Midhat’s case, both Montpellier and Nablus serve as points of departure and as symbols of the practices and the lived experience he longs to break with. His memories of Jeanette, however, he finds impossible to discard—they creep up on him in the arms of the women he meets, and each time “he would hear a high ringing sound and make love half in disgust ... yet he carried his longing with him ... and it gave him a gravity both real and performed” (Hammad, 2019, p. 184).

To unravel the possible symbolic meanings of the high ringing sound and the concomitant bodily and lived emotions, it is important to take a closer look at Midhat’s “performed gravity.” Hammad describes her protagonist’s “new urbanity” in the following way:

Midhat the Levantine ... now thoroughly estranged: the figure of the Parisian Oriental as he appeared on certain cigarette packets in corner stores ... He had fallen so easily into the compromise available in Paris, this type, by an embrace of otherness that at first he had admired in Faruq but which now appeared in his mind a skewed, performed version of what it was really like to be in a place but not of it, not to know it truly. (p. 187)

Midhat’s estrangement from his Levantine identity signals uprooting, his “Parisianness” suggests a certain degree of re-rooting or assimilating, while his “Orientalism” implies a stereotypical representation. Thus, the dichotomous figure of “the Parisian Oriental” may, on one hand, be interpreted as a hybrid entity *par excellence*, pointing to the unavoidable process of hybridization as a merging of cultures and identities but since Midhat seemingly consciously plays on the stereotypical nature of this (self-) representation, his hybridity may also be understood in the Bhabhaian sense as “camouflage,” “a contesting, antagonistic agency” (2005, p. 193), a subversion of his projected–perceived identity.

Furthermore, Midhat’s transformation in the cultural space of the metropolis indicates that his “place identity,” denoting a situatedness and rootedness through an emotional bonding with a place (Proshansky et al., 1983), is overshadowed by or, perhaps, even exchanged for a situational identity: he is playing different roles in different social settings, mimicking young Parisian men in terms of their appearance, behavior, and the places they visit.

However, while men truly belong in the city, Midhat seems to have given up all hopes for and attempts at creating a sense of belonging to places and people, and chosen the easier option of conforming to and even exaggerating the stereotype of the exotic Other, in hope of the fleeting sensation of bodily pleasures—hence his real or performed gravity attracting women. Thus, the role of the Parisian Oriental may also be interpreted as an identity performance, at the intersection of performance (role-play) and Butlerian (1988/2003) performativity (a construction and display of [a gendered] cultural identity), with the diasporan being both the subject and the agent of his or her performative actions.

With all this real and pretended transformation, his submission to alleged expectations, and his performative actions, Midhat's bodily reaction to the thought of Jeanette when in the arms of other women, the felt emotion of disgust, may be understood as the bodily emotion of guilt: he betrayed her just as she betrayed him. On the other hand, he was unfaithful not only to her but, in fact, to himself—his *self*—as well, which could mean that the ringing sound he hears is a bodily emotion a symbolic alarm, warning him that he is going in the wrong direction (and thereby foreshadowing his mental breakdown some 20 years later, signaled with the same painful sound) and reminding him that belonging to someone is more important than belonging somewhere.

Yet, Midhat would not listen. He continues with his identity performances until "his life [becomes] multiple": playing the roles of "the student of history," "the companion of women," "the mysterious lover," "the debater," and "the arguing Arab" makes him realize that "the divisions, though sometimes porous, were abiding," and, as Hammad so eloquently puts it, "Midhat was learning to dissemble and pass between spheres and to accommodate, morally, that dissemblance through an understanding of his own impermanence in each" (2019, p. 194). Midhat's changed attitude and new ability point to what Probyn refers to as "the inbetweenness of belonging": "belonging not in some deep authentic way but belonging in constant movement, modes of belonging as surface shifts" (1996, p. 19). On the other hand, it seems that although Midhat can move freely between these roles "as surface shifts," he cannot (or does not want to?) leave the space they confine him in. There is no return to his old self—a realization that leads to a crisis, bodily felt and spatially projected: "He felt that some great frame had cracked... the scene trembled through the quartered glass, the room appeared dislocated, the faces of his friends unfamiliar" (Hammad, 2019, p. 194). While multiplicity and "learning to dissemble and pass between spheres" entails the possibility of reconstructing and accepting his identity as multiple and fluid, it will prove to be a long and complicated process, which the above-quoted realization is but the first stage of.

At this point, however, Midhat bodily and emotional reaction to this multiplicity gives away a sense of rootlessness experienced as loss, since the longer he continues to play these parts the more distant his roots (symbolized by his friends) become and the less he can hold on to a (sense of) fixed, national identity, especially with the national movements and impending revolution back home, rewriting the borders and dislocating identities. Midhat's and Palestine's crisis seem to happen almost parallelly, making Hammad's narration of the triumphs and traumatic events, and especially the description of the places where they take place, feel like the spatial manifestations of her protagonist's complex-conflicting identity and turbulent emotions, that is, his embodied emotions and emotional geographies.

In his first year in France Midhat claimed: "even when you leave Nablus, you take it with you" (Hammad, 2019, p. 58), clearly positing it as an emotional geography he carried around in his memories, forming an integral part of his sense of self and belonging. When Midhat returns home in 1919, he feels somewhat similarly about France, the country he professes his love for because of "her lines of rationalism, the sciences that put a veil on the unknowable" (p. 194), as well as of the bodily and lived experience connected to love and "a freedom born of strangeness" (p. 221). Though offering and embodying strikingly different atmospheres and emotions, Midhat carries both Montpellier and Paris with him as emotional geographies, the former in terms of affective human relationships, the latter as the 'birthplace' of his 'Parisian self' (with its identity performances and hybridity). As he writes in a letter to Jeanette right before returning:

my experience with you has in fact become one of those primeval shapes of the mind, to an imprint that burdens everything that comes afterwards ... I became myself here, in this country, and for that reason I cannot represent anything. I belong here as much as I belong in Palestine" (pp. 203–4)

Interestingly, just like Nablus served as a point of reference in mapping France, his affective relationship with Jeanette and France will be his benchmark and compass in making sense of his lived experience in the decades spent in Nablus, the two forever intertwined in his memories as an embodied experience he can hold on to when losing ground and both lending themselves to a certain degree or form of belonging.

The Parisian of Nablus

On the ship back to Nablus, Midhat notes that although "his old fantasies of becoming French had expired, he still clung to a particular idea of cosmopolitan life" and so he feels anxiety about returning to Palestine, fearing that a "new era of prudence was upon him" (Hammad, 2019, p. 220). The Midhat that returns is thus not the native Nabulsi

but the Parisian *bon vivant*, a cosmopolite, who hopes to be able to live and work in or, at least, frequently visit Cairo, which was “not a part of him as Nablus was. Nablus was all smells and sounds, the rushing air between the mountains” (p. 208). These perceptions indicate not only the lasting effect of France on his sense of identity but also a considerably different approach to belonging. Although his description gives away a sense of nostalgia and an affective relationship with his hometown (the smells and sounds), Nablus appears to be a confining space (surrounded by mountains) where Midhat is a transnational subject, not confined by borders and national identities (the rushing air), and would not want to take roots again. In contrast, Cairo is perceived as a cosmopolitan place “rich with possibility” (p. 220), as freedom, offering him anonymity and bodily pleasures, and as a transitory place, where he could experience a Probynian belonging as becoming and belonging in movement.

Nevertheless, when Midhat first glimpses Nablus after being away for four years, he experiences “an unexpected state of high emotion” (p. 223), which soon turns into anger and bitterness when his father gives him an ultimatum: he must never return to Paris or will lose his inheritance, he has to marry, and work as a doctor or learn the family business in Nablus (and not his father’s store in Cairo). His father’s ultimatum is the second instance of betrayal in Midhat’s life, a traumatic experience that involves not being able to feel anything in/about his room but reliving memories of Montpellier through “uncontrollable sense-memories,” that is, the memory of sensory experiences and sensible feelings: “a treacherous yearning uncoiled, ... ugly and incoherent ... and so rich in pain” (p. 227). The recollection highlights the spatial arrangement of memory, consisting of “image and feeling, the event and the response to that event” (Jones, 2007, p. 210), through which Midhat’s mind equates the embodied emotions of his betrayal by Molineu and Jeanette with betrayal by his own father, which deprives him of the final morsel of a sense of being at ‘home,’ of wanting to belong.

Obedying his father but yearning for the freedom of choice and self embodied by Paris, Midhat continues his own identity performances as “The Parisian” and soon finds himself caught in a state of inbetweenness:

All these men and boys, five years grown, had an alternative narrative of Midhat. ... they surely saw aspects of him invisible to those he had met in France. At the sense of exposure Midhat grew hot. He could not conceal, nor even detect, the survival of his child-self in his mannerisms, or traces of his characteristics ... Midhat wished he could isolate those traces and remove them. Not because they were defects, but because they pinned him down. (Hammad, 2019, p. 235–6)

Midhat's identification as European appears to be the result of his wish to hide traces of his old self which, ironically, he feels he has already lost. His uprooting is an irreversible process, making him keep up appearances, as he considers performing the identity of a Parisian a safer and more liberating choice than having to return to his old, fixed identity. Realizing that he was "always marked by his difference," he plays a part "as a kind of inverse of his persona in Paris" with "some kernel hidden in the folds" (p. 389), a few remaining traits of who he used to be. Midhat, the Parisian of Nablus, or "Al-Barisi" can thus hide his sense of unbelonging and become the epitome of the inbetweenness of belonging, an admired, envied (and later hated) dichotomy on two feet.

Interestingly, Midhat's duality is spatially manifested in Nablus as well. While Père Antoine, a French Dominican priest and scholar residing in and conducting anthropological research on Nablus portrays the city as "untouched," "the perfect specimen of the Islamic city," "impenetrable to outsiders" (Hammad, 2019, pp. 321, 325),—which is quite similar to the stereotypical perception and performance of Midhat as an Oriental subject—the locals knowingly "described the city in terms of East and West, as two separate worlds," as an "ancient opposition," or "a natural division of geography," asserting that "the two sides possessed two different cultures, and that was the root of the division" (p. 233). Apparently, the atmosphere of the city is influenced by and is the spatial manifestation of defiance and division both in terms of the unfolding freedom fight and the duality of Midhat's emotions and self. Furthermore, though firmly rooted in ancient Palestinian history and culture, due to the opposition of ancient families, and of native inhabitants and immigrant Jews, Nablus—much like Midhat—is a hybrid entity divided by an identity crisis, experiencing its—his—belonging "situated as threshold," which, in Probyn's theory "designates a profoundly affective manner of being, always performed with the experience of being within and in-between sets of social relations" (1996, pp. 12–13).

It is this liminal and marginal experience that Midhat hopes to alleviate by marrying Fatima, daughter of the prestigious Hammad family, drawn to him for his refined Parisianness. Marriage, as Midhat notes, "was the foundations of a house. He had obeyed—and he had defied. He was of them, and he was his own. He with his strong body had laid the first stone [of] the edifice that would now arise" (Hammad, 2019, pp. 378–79). These words indicate that he firmly believes marriage would endow him with a sense or aura of belonging and a secure, elite position in Nablus's complex social relations.

The third shock and sense of betrayal occurs in Midhat's life during preparations for the wedding when he learns about his father's sudden death and is forced to face the fact that he did not inherit anything. His initial grief and then anger, a doubly painful feeling,

is yet again embodied in the “searing sensation” of the “outline of his body clamped down, burning his skin” (Hammad, 2019, pp. 415–6), and prompting him to contemplate running back to Paris, to Jeanette. However, being a penniless orphan and not having heard of Jeanette since leaving Montpellier—who likewise betrayed him—Midhat decides to stay and go through with the wedding, his only chance for compensation for all that he lost.

Some thirteen years later, in 1933, Hammad’s narrative portrays Midhat as an established man with his own business and four lovely children, enjoying a much-envied, comfortable life with Fatima in Nablus, and some well-deserved freedom on his frequent visits to Cairo. What has not changed is his perceived–performed identity as the Parisian, and the multiplicity of his roles played: “a man who had married above his station, a sybarite, an optimist, a success with women, a carefree lover of the West” (p. 458). Envy, however, soon turns into anger and malice towards the couple, whose wealth and aloofness towards the war is in sharp contrast with Nablus, existing in constant fear and “decaying in her provincial backwaters, subsisting on memories of former glory” (pp. 459–460)—though it must be noted, that the fossilized image of the Parisian has seemingly likewise lost much of its former glory. Thinking back on his youthful days, “caught up in the drama of ‘exile’ in Paris ..., drunk on the notion that to argue was important,” Midhat concludes: “That was not his life” (p. 61). It seems that he has forgotten the bodily and lived experience of both pain and thrill, and has played his part for so long that he has completely forgotten about who he was. There is no recognizable self behind the mask—Midhat is willingly reduced to a mere simulacrum of himself, “a real without origin or reality” (Baudrillard, 1981/2000, p. 1).

The shock of the fourth, final betrayal thus hits him even harder. After his shop is burnt down and as he is ransacking his father’s house for an object that might have brought a curse on them, Midhat finds Jeanette’s letter, sent in response to his, opened and then hidden by his father before Midhat’s return. Again, Midhat experiences a host of sensible feelings and hallucinatory sensations: “spasms of pain,” “a large translucent object, like a pool of water” on the wall, and the ringing sound reappears, feeling like “a sharp blade of silver being inserted into his eardrum. ... It was pretending to be benign, it pretended to be beautiful. But it was pain, ... interfering in there, it was doing things it shouldn’t” (Hammad, 2019, pp. 494–96). This time, however, pain takes over his entire body and mind, and Midhat is taken to hospital with the diagnosis of psychosis.

Throughout the months spent there, Midhat feels that “his mind stopped and he became a body,” while other times he thinks he is “locked up in his brain” (pp. 526, 539). The symptoms of his psychosis, generally defined as a loss of contact with reality, include hallucinations of sensible feelings (such as pain and disgust) and sensory experiences (of light,

color, sounds, and smells)—which, in fact, may also be detected in the previous accounts of his sense of separateness and thus be interpreted as early symptoms, and are closely connected to and worsened by the traumatic events of ‘betrayals’—as well as delusions, illogical thinking, an extreme preoccupation of thought, and an inability to move or properly interact with the world (Sadock & Sadock, 2008), as exemplified by Midhat’s recurring sensation of the hard shape, the sharp ringing sound, and being locked up in his body/mind.

What is even more intriguing about Midhat’s psychosis from the aspect of the present analysis is its spatial and emotional connotations. Apparently, the symptoms occur upon immigrating to Constantinople and France, and returning to Nablus, and are connected to a rupture in his emotional relationship with Jeanette and his father, which Hammad’s narrative portrays as spatially extended to his environment, whereby spaces and places become embodied emotions and—by extension—symptoms of his mental state as well.

When Midhat notes that he “danced between two, three, four ideas of himself, that is to say of Midhat Kamal, and these ideas overlapped like conflicting maps of the same place” (Hammad, 2019, pp. 526–27), his words point to both multiple identity disorder, and the multiplicity of identity performances and positions (Rutherford, 1990), and suggests that the protagonist’s mental condition is a metaphor of his (cultural) identity crisis generated by a sense of otherness and his decades-long identity performance. Whenever his ability to think returns for a shorter or longer period, Midhat tries to capture and make sense of his ‘real’ identity behind the performed ones but finds it “hard to cling onto himself when there were so many others, ... crowding him out. ... He was a likeness in reverse. He was a cameo” (Hammad, 2019, p. 529). His thoughts reveal a fear that his ‘true’ identity has forever disappeared behind “conflicting maps,” that is the various mask worn, and he relapses, feeling “his self dissolving again” (p. 530).

Eventually, it is his imagined—hallucinated return to France and Jeanette, and the palpable reality of his wife rescuing and taking him back home, which, owing to the emotional bonds recognized, helps him start recovering and seeing himself as he is, without any pretending or performance whatsoever: “There in the mirror stood a haggard man in a suit, ... the bronze sound of bells thronged through the air. Nothing would ever again be contained by a map” (pp. 607, 619). Midhat may still be the Parisian but has finally started to make peace with his identity—allegorized by the map as “positionality, movement and practices” (Pile and Thrift, 1995, p. 36)—as a multiple, fluid, and hybrid identity, as well as with a renewed sense of belonging in becoming, to multiple emotional geographies, and, first and foremost, to his loved ones; as he says to his youngest daughter at the end of the novel: “we’re going home” (Hammad, 2019, p. 637).

Conclusion

Focusing on the interconnections of space, affect, and identity in Isabella Hammad's *The Parisian*, my analysis mapped the protagonist's transnational movement from Palestine to France and back, as well as his metaphorical journey played out through various identity positions and performances from an immigrant and 'Oriental flâneur' in Montpellier, through a postmodern flâneur and tourist in Paris, to the Parisian in/of Nablus, in search of answers concerning how his bodily and lived experience are influenced by his emotional relationship with people and spaces/places and how the latter become spatially manifested embodied emotions, affecting his identity re-construction and sense of belonging, that is, his emotional geographies as "emotional spatialities of becoming" (Jones, 2007, p. 205).

My analysis has found that Midhat's affective human relationships are projected onto both his body and space/place, and thus influence his bodily and lived experience as embodied emotions, and heavily influence his sense of belonging, which leads to various identity performances and an identity crisis, experienced and manifested in the body through sensible and lived feelings, hallucinations, and, eventually, psychosis. Hammad presents this process metaphorically and spatially by highlighting differences in the atmosphere of Montpellier and Paris, as well as through Palestine's national movements and revolution, which impact the political status, life, and atmosphere of Nablus, itself symbolising the protagonist and his emotional geographies. As Midhat comes to terms with his (embodied) emotions, and his hybridity, multiplicity, and fluidity, he re-constructs himself as a transnational subject with multiple belongings and belonging in movement.

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