The Chronotope of Trauma: RabīʿJābir's novel *The Druze of Belgrade* as example.

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Resumen

La narrativa del novelista Rabie Jabir (1972) gira en gran medida en torno a la guerra civil libanesa, la identidad, y el trauma derivado del conflicto civil. Jabir bucea de manera insistente, desde la ficción novelística, en las causas históricas y en un relato de la historia del Líbano moderno desde múltiples personajes y tiempos, pero centrados en la preocupación por el eje espacial de la ciudad de Beirut y por trazar una historia cuasi mítica del conflicto libanés, desde mediados del siglo XIX hasta la actualidad. Muchas de sus novelas pueden ser leídas en conjunto como una especie de macro-relato del Líbano moderno. Su novela Los Drusos de Belgrado *(2011) sirve como ejemplo de cómo se configura y expresa artísticamente el cronotopo del trauma.*

Palabras clave: Rabie Jabir, novela árabe, guerra civil libanesa, trauma, cronotopo

Abstract

Rabie Jabir's narrative deals largely with the Lebanese civil war, identity and the trauma resulting from the persistent civil conflict. Jabir immerses, through the realm of fiction, onto an

account of modern Lebanon seen from multiple characters and times, almost always focused upon Beirut as its prominent spatial axis, drawing a quasi-mythical history of the Lebanese conflict, since the mid-nineteenth century to the present. Most of his novels can be read at whole as a sort of macro-narrative over modern Lebanon. His latest novel, The Druze of Belgrade *(2011), is an example of how the chronotope of trauma is artistically expressed and configured.*

Key words: Rabie Jabir, Arab novel, Lebanese civil war, trauma, chronotope

Introduction

The focus of contemporary Arabic novel production has centered upon Egypt for decades with Naguib Mahfouz as the prominent figure. However, the Lebanese civil war led to a peculiar twist in the Lebanese novels that provoked changes in formal dislocation of the story and writers' tendency toward introspection "contemplating their own lives, and combining fictional memoir with narration" (Meyer 2001, 117-118). It has become a platitude to identify the Egyptian moment and the Mahfuzian novel with modernity and the Lebanese moment, being Elias Khoury its leading creator, as an example of postmodernism in the Arab narrative (Pliftsch 2010: 30). Edward Said once referred to Khoury's narratives identifying that postmodern turn with certain features such as the rupture of chronological linearity of events, the plurality of narrative voices, etc. (Said 1989). However, Stephen Meyer nuanced this view by stating that the nature of modern or postmodern should not be defined by means of formal traits (Meyer 2001, 257).

In any case, the fact is that the trauma of civil war marked the Lebanese novel. Khoury even stated that the birth of the Lebanese novel did not arise from national consolidation but precisely from the destruction of the national unity as a result of the war (Mejchr-Atassi 2010: 92). This persistence of civil war as an overwhelming thematic element upon the Lebanese novelistic production during recent decades becomes obvious when considering novels by Elias Khoury (1948) and Rabī῾Jābir (1972), two of the most prominent Lebanese writers and both of them related to two distinct creative generations. Dalia Mostafa Said contrasts two novels by Elias Khoury, *Abwāb al-Madīnah* (*The Gates of the City*) and *al-Wujūh al-Bayḍā'* (*The White Faces*), both

published in 1981, and Rabīʿ Jābir's *Ralf Rizqallāh fī al-mir'āt* (*Ralf Rizqallah in the Mirror*), published in 1997, pointing out that these novels fictionalize despite their generational differences "the themes of trauma, memory, and identity in relation to the Lebanese civil war in a way that motivates the reader to piece together the stories and to rethink this war from different perspectives", where "the past and the present as two historical processes which continuously interact and shape one another" (Mostafa 2009: 213, 214).

Rabīʿ Jābir (Rabie Jabir) is a young Lebanese novelist well known in the Arab narrative in recent years by an abundant production (about 18 novels since 1992 to date) that puts him in a place of privilege. He also is a former journalist who has been in charge of *Āfāq*, the cultural pages of the newspaper *al-Hayāt*[2]. I argue that Rabie Jabir approaches these themes (trauma, memory and identity) in nearly all of his novelistic production in a way that seems to configure a sort of *macro-narrative* about modern Lebanon. Every work by Rabie Jabir has its own entity as a novel and every plot can surely be read as an independent story. Nevertheless, when we put all the pieces together, as Mostafa in certain way maintains, the so constructed whole gives rise to a global narration over modern Lebanon, its birth and development amidst civil conflicts, foreign interventions and regional wars.

In this paper I will firstly address the spatiotemporal structure of *The Druze of Belgrade* (دروز بلغراد) —a novel written by Jabir in 2011 and awarded the International Prize for Arabic Fiction in 2012— and how this textual structure harmonizes with the recurring theme of civil war and the city of Beirut as narrative axis. The city of Beirut has in *The Druze of Belgrade* a limited presence as theater of events; however, despite its relative absence during much of the main story, the city arises as the spatial focus to which both events and temporal vector point, not to mention that the story begins in Beirut and in Beirut concludes. On the other hand, the issue of civil war between Maronite and Druze communities in Mount Lebanon does not appear as events viewed on the main story, but as the cause and origin of the misfortunes suffered by the hero or as pieces of the past narrated by some character within secondary tales, sometimes in a dreamlike atmosphere. However, when it comes to link the story of *The Druze of Belgrade* with the rest of Jabir's novels,

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[2] This background as a journalist has been identified as an element that can have influence on his way of narrating and the topics chosen. See Dalia Mostafa Said (2009: 209).

that is, when the novel is inserted in its appropriate place within the macro-narrative frame on Lebanon, the particular chronotope of *The Druze of Belgrade* gains sense and hidden links emerge (for instance, the apparently rupture of fictional boundaries between author-narrator / narrator-protagonist).

Therefore, after analyzing *The Druze of Belgrade*, we will give a glance over some other novels by Rabie Jabir, seeking to reveal the role of Beirut and Mount Lebanon as fictional spaces, the game of identities between author/narrator/protagonist, and the interweaving of several of his novels that conforms the alluded narrative unity.

The chronotope as a tool

A glance at the space-time dimension in *The Druze of Belgrade* can also be understood as a study of its *chronotope*, a term I will utilize throughout this essay. The chronotope is consecrated to the Literature Theory by the Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin, who, in an already classic definition, put it as the:

> [i]ntrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature […]. In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused in one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope (Bakhtin 1981: 84).

Tzvetan Todorov and Michael Holquist (1990) were amongst those who released in the West —from the seventies and eighties on— the Bakhtinian ideas and concepts that are so familiar to us today, as *dialogism* and chronotope[3]. Bakhtin's reflections are largely scattered writings (Zavala 1991: 104), so theorists and critics have devoted a great deal of time and effort to provide some

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[3] For instance, Todorov wrote the preface for the French translation *Esthètique de la creátion verbale* (París: Gallimard, 1979), by Alfreda Aucouturier, and also published in 1981 *Mikhaïl Bakhtine le príncipe dialogique* (Paris: Seuil).

order and to interpret the Bakhtinian ideas. For instance, Henri Mitterand (1990) and Philippe Hamon (1988) referred to the chronotope and warned about its sometimes scarcely defined relationship between space and time, and pointed to the possibility of talking about the coexistence of several chronotopes at various levels: from the layer of the novel itself to that of an entire genre or an historic era. Nevertheless, the task is contextualizing a text —in this case the story of a novel— using the vectors of space and time as an analytical tool:

> It is only by putting the order of the plot against a background of a (hypothetical) story that the figural, textually imposed aspect of the former becomes apparent. *Chronotope is the indissoluble combination of these two elements* (Holquist 1990: 113).

Holquist argues that it must be added to both vectors one more element in order the whole gains sense, that is, the axiological element of the narrator:

> Chronotope, like situation, always combines spatial and temporal factors with an evaluation of their significance as judged from a particular point of view.

> What marks the necessary presence of human subject in both is the assumption that time and space are never merely temporal or spatial, but *axiological* as well (…). (1990: 152)

The evaluative dimension ought to be found in the opinions expressed explicitly in the text, but also, as I understand it, in the manner of presenting the story, in how the events of the story become sorted out and twisted to appear in a specific and particular way at the level of *discourse*. In other words, in the way those events are presented effectively to the reader in a specific plot (Todorov 1973: 75). The text rises out from a narrative voice which is the source of everything, including axiological dimension and basic interpretations.

Yuri Lotman affirms that the spatial dimension of the text, considered this as a particular modeled representation of reality —i.e., of "a finite model of the infinite world"— is the basis to possible readings and interpretations of the same reality and of ideological restructuring of the space of the text. Lotman sees the limit as the fundamental topological feature of the textual space, and affirms that characters can be classified into mobile and immobile ones to the extent they are able to traverse those limits or not. The protagonist can move back and forth and cross over the

boundaries. Had the character not violated his assigned topological limit, it would not be progression of events or story (Lotman 1973: 262-297). To each character corresponds a particular zone of influence, thus leading to the building of a spatial code parallel to the actancial code where for each character arises a sort of particular underworld (Albaladejo, 1998: 70).

Thus, a certain homology might be postulated between the structure of character connections and that of the diegetic universe. The Moroccan scholar Saʿīd Yaqṭīn has utilized this analysis procedure in his work *Qāl al-Rāwī* (1997) to depict the plane of story in popular Arab sagas or *siyar* (*Ḏāt al-Himma*, *ʿAntara*, *Banī Hilāl*, *Sayf ibn Ḏī Yazin*, etc.). Yaqṭīn described the narrative structure of these stories analyzing characters, space and time, and the web of connections woven between all these elements, separating each other for methodological reasons. Thus, we may found a distinct separation between central spaces (*al-markaz*) and peripheral ones (*al-muḥīṭ*), and between the series of characters tied to these spaces, what makes feasible to map homologically both the fictional universe of the story and the panoply of characters, be the latter protagonists or secondary ones (Yaqṭīn 1997: 281-296).

With respect to the spatial level of the *story* we may pay attention on the one hand to the *space of story*, that is, the diegetic world that "the reader is the prompted to create in imagination (to the extent that he does), on the basis of the character's perceptions and/or the narrator's reports "(Chatman 1989: 104). On the other hand we must consider the *space of discourse* as "focus of spatial attention" (Chatman 1989: 102) or *focalization* (Genette 1972: 206 ss.). Gérard Genette elaborated in his *Discours du récit* (1972) a whole apparatus intended for discourse analysis on the basis of contrasting both levels of discourse and story, using concepts such as *order*, *duration*, *frequency*, etc., and their respective manifestations (acronia, ellipses, flashbacks, flash-forwards, anisocronia, summaries, etc.). A detailed analysis of the discourse of a text might lead certainly to a cumbersome and verbose description of discursive surface of a story —as Genette himself carried out along his work, based upon a reading of Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*. However, within the limits of this essay and regarding the analysis of *The Druze of Belgrade*, our concern will focus on the basic alterations on the level of discourse.

Synopsis of *The Druses of Belgrade*

The novel is distributed over 98 chapters or sequences, each one with a title allusive to the content. Some of these sequences may be very concise and short, even no more than a single page, whereas some of them form series of numbered chapters under the same title, be it in a consecutively way or not. For instance, to *Mediation in the headquarters* (شفاعة في القشلاق), follows *Mediation … 2*, and finally *Mediation… 3*; or *The Tower* (البرج) from 1 to 4. However, other sequences lack that consecutive basis: thus the series *The world of the borders* (عالم الحدود), numbered from 1 to 6, is interrupted on the fourth chapter by an episode named *Helena 4*. Significantly the sequence of chapters called "Helena", of which there are exactly five, are not consecutive. Such distribution of usually short chapters displayed along juxtaposed numbered series implies a peculiar organization of textual material, what together with the allusive titles to the contents helps to organize that textual material and provides coherence and readability.

Summarizing the story the protagonist, a Christian egg-seller from Beirut called Ḥannā Yaʿqūb (Hanna Yaqub), is forced by Turkish soldiers in the aftermath of the war in Mount Lebanon between Druze and Maronites to embark amongst a group of Druze sentenced to exile in the Balkans, replacing one of the prisoners that managed to escape. Hanna Yaqub, who thereafter will be called Sulaymān Ġaffār ʿIzz al-dīn (Suleyman Ghaffar Izzeddin), shares the fate of Druze prisoners from jail to jail along various Balkan cities as the conflict between the Ottoman Empire and other states unfolds within the frame of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. After many misfortunes, separated from his Druze peers amongst whom he had become one of them, eventually lost his sanity, speech and even the memory and consciousness of whom he really is, Hanna Yaqub fortunately manages to escape imbedded in a caravan of pilgrims, on a return journey from Montenegro to Syria during which recovers gradually his lost dignity and memory, to finally joint his family twelve years later.

I will focus upon two decisive traits affecting the story linearity as it is deployed along the level of discourse: first the *prolepsis* that occurs in the first chapter; then the severing between the storyline that accompanies Hanna Yaqub and his exile and the parallel one corresponding to Helen —Hanna's wife— who stays in Beirut throughout the text.

Prolepsis and fulfillment of expectation

The novel begins with a chapter that as a whole is a huge prolepsis unequivocally dated: *Montenegro 1872* (1872 الجبل الأسود). This chapter is followed by a second one which presents a precise date as well —*Beirut 1860* (1860 بيروت)— and proclaims itself, undoubtedly, as the beginning of the story:

هذه حكاية حنا يعقوب وزوجته هيلانة قسطنطين يعقوب وابنتهما بربارة، وفيها ما وقع للعائلة البيروتية الصغيرة من مصائب بسبب الحظ العاثر ووجود الرجل المتوسط القامة الحنطي الوجه الأسود الشعر والعينين بائع البيض في المكان الخطأ في الساعة الخطأ. (11- 12)...

> [This is the story of Hanna Yaqub, his wife Helena Constantin Yaqub and his daughter Barbara. It narrates the misfortunes that befell upon that small Beiruti family because of the wrong luck and the presence of this man of medium height, dark skin and black hair and eyes, the egg-seller, in the wrong place and at the wrong moment.][4]

The reader does not know it yet, but this prolepsis spans for most of the time covered by the story throughout *The Druze of Belgrade*. Therefore, the story begins in the second chapter, in 1860, but the narrative begins abruptly in a prison at Montenegro in 1872. This chapter is a very peculiar prolepsis, since it literally replicates chapter 88 even in its title. We are not, I believe, in the presence of a typical *incipit in media res*. Moreover, this is the only chapter in the entire novel in which Hanna Yaqub takes the floor and speaks in the first person. As a matter of fact, the whole chapter is offered as a long quote that sums up along two or three pages Hanna's story since his leaving the port of Beirut twelve years before.

The entire novel is dominated by the voice of an omniscient narrator who penetrates the dreams and desires of Hanna Yaqub and of those who accompany him during his years of exile. This omniscient voice shifts its focus when needed from one character to another, inserting past stories

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[4] All the fragments from novels cited in this study are my own translation. The original cited taken from Rabie Jabir (2011).

of several characters but usually following closely Hanna's movements within his storyline and Helena's in the parallel one. The content of this first chapter emerges when thoughts crowd in Hanna Yaqub's head —already a prisoner in Montenegro— amid the confusion caused by a fire incident in the prison. The most important elements of the story are thus already anticipated in this chapter. We learn that he has been imprisoned in Herzegovina and Belgrade and that he earned his life selling eggs in the city of Beirut, from whose port he was seized twelve years ago after being beaten up. We know as well that since then he has not seen his wife Helena and his daughter Barbara. Furthermore, we anticipate the violent death of Qāsim and his Druze brothers on a riverside in a rainy day. And finally we learn that his name is Hanna Yaqub, a claim with which the chapter concludes.

This anticipation causes the *fulfillment intrigue* (the "intrigue of predestination" as Todorov stated it [1971: 77]) as the events move forward. The repeated chapter (88th out of 98) mark the culmination of events, attaining twelve years of absence already anticipated, and from there on, the outcome of the story begins: in the next chapter, *The flight from Montenegro*, (الهروب من الجبل الأسود) Yaqub Hanna escapes from prison in the midst of the fire, a tremendous confusion and deadly gun shooting, without looking back. After only nine very short chapters that cover some 23 pages (212 -235) everything precipitates, thus meeting Hanna's long run desire of getting back to his homeland Beirut: in a nearby town the Christian Hanna Yaqub joins a caravan of pilgrims in its way to Mecca, and assuming the name of Suleiman Ghaffar Izzeddine —the same name that accompanied him throughout twelve years since the port of Beirut— travels through Belgrade, Edirne, Istanbul, to finally come to Syria. In Damascus Hanna leaves the caravan and takes a diligence bound to Beirut. For anyone who has followed the fortunes and misfortunes of Hanna Yaqub —or Suleiman Ghaffar Izzedin— during twelve years of despair, madness, amnesia, forced labor, starvation and punishment, these last chapters after the flight from Montenegro result in a sort of dreamlike *Anabasis*, where Hanna Yaqub, carried away and hidden amongst the crowd of pilgrims, is provided food and drink, warmth and dignity, and reaches at last Syria and then Beirut.

Thus, chapter *Montenegro 1872* gets loaded from the beginning with a strong semantic component, and this for several reasons: a) it marks, thanks to the date included in the title, the range of the prolepsis by contrast with the second chapter —*Beirut 1860*, which may be seen

almost as a declaration of principles—, a temporal frame (12 years), and a spatial ambit within the fictional world of the story (from Beirut to Belgrade); b) *Montenegro 1872* provides from the *incipit* a summary of the events happened during that period of time, that is, it defines a "fulfillment intrigue" that determines the subsequent act of reading; c) this summary becomes emphasized by being exceptionally narrated in first person by the protagonist of the story; d) it signs, thanks to its occurrence as chapter 88th out of 98, the climax of the plot (the escape from prison) whereupon the events accelerates in rapid succession (the return of the hero disguised as a pilgrim) in scarcely 22 pages along 10 chapters, until the long expected reunion with his family. Therefore, this prolepsis seems to configure itself as a specular element which expresses in a graphical way the unfolding of events and determines the reading process.

The severing of the timelines

We have already affirmed that the spatial structure of a story owes a great deal to the operative links between characters, and that to each character corresponds its own spatial scope, so that the displacements and the crossing over the topological boundaries of these areas encourage the plot movements. Hanna Yaqub has got his own space, which is Beirut, as may be observed through the detailed descriptions —so typical of Rabie Jabir— of the itinerary supposedly followed everyday by Hanna from his home down to the port, where he sells the boiled eggs (*The Port Entrance*, باب المرفأ, pp. 21-23). This itinerary and the urban landscape are also visualized several times in the dreams of the protagonist during his long years of exile. Beirut means his hometown, where his father died and was buried in, where his wife Helena and his daughter Barbara live, and the town he had never left until the fatal day he got shipped by force bound for Belgrade.

The sudden abandonment by the protagonist of his sphere prompts the separation between his own time line and that of Helena's, who is to remain in Beirut. Chapters 6 to 10 narrate us that ill-fateful day, since his leaving early in the morning, his arrival at the dock and subsequent arrest till Helena's tense wait, then nightfall. The chapters that recounting the episode of the port alternate with those about Helena and her housework and tense waiting. Chapter 9th, entitled *Prisoners*

(محابيس), ends showing a bleeding Hanna being lifted up onto the ship. Chapter 10th, entitled *Helena 2*, finishes with the preoccupied wife muttering: "حنا. حنا تأخر كثيراً" ["Hanna. Hanna is too much late]. Then, chapter 11th (*The Citadel of Belgrade*, قلعة بلغراد) starts with Hanna entering a cell in Belgrade:

رموه في قبو تحت الأرض وظل زمناً لا يعرف أين هو ــ هذه عكا؟ ــ غير واثق من النجاة. لم يشعر بالرحلة ولا بالبحر.

(34)

[He was thrown into an underground cell and for a while did not know where he was (Was this really Aka?), unconfident in his salvation. He had not noticed the journey nor the boat.]

We know some days have passed, but we are facing an ellipsis, that what Gérard Genette defined once as an *accélération du récit* (1972: 85). Hanna's time runs fast. Yaqub Hanna is out off his own space, lost in another distant world. When Hanna first enters the cell, the narrator tells us, mixing the prisoner's feeling of horror with his own voice:

دق رأسه على الحائط. داخ من شدة الألم. لم يفهم. كان البحر مثل هوّة سوداء وقبل الهوة حياته وبعد الهوة هذا الظلام الذي يتمدد. (36)

[He knocked his head against the wall and felt dizzy because of the severity of the pain. He did not understand. The sea was like a black abyss, before it stood his life, and after it, stands that growing dark gap.]

From here on, several chapters come successively, focusing upon the misadventures of Hanna and the prisoners' losing track of time, buried alive as they are in the cells. Finally, after a time they are allowed to go outside as forced workers in order to collect apples and plums on the fields.

We had previously left Helena in chapter *Helena 2* lamenting Hanna's delay; but eight chapters later (*Helena 3*), we find Hanna's wife exactly where we left her, whereas the neighbors strive to locate the missing husband throughout the streets around Fashkha market and the seaside. Then, a four-chapters sequence under the name of *The world of the boundaries* (عالم الحدود) occurs, without too much temporal references except the arrival of the early signs of autumn, while Hanna and the Druze prisoners harvest in the fields. However, in chapter 23rd (*Helena 4*) in the

same series, we follow the neighbours as they search for Hanna in the streets in the evening of the same day of his disappearance. Chapter *Helena 5*, five chapters later, shows us Helena on the next day looking for her husband accompanied by helpful Father Butrus, the priest of the neighboring Church of Saint Elias. Thus, the sequence *Helena 1* to *Helena 5* displays a time span narrated along 10 pages that seems to linger over two days: that is, that of the disappearance and the following day, and this by means of descriptive pauses (i.e., such as the preparation of *kebba* by Helena in *Helena 2*) and scenes (i.e., the brief *Helena 4*, pages 59-60, the whole of it one single scene).

We know that his disappearance happened between spring and summer, thanks to references found in the second chapter (*Beirut 1860*): كانت روائح الربيع تهب من البساتين مع النسائم لكنها هذه السنة لم تكن طيبة. (12) [*Spring fragrances used to blow from the gardens with breezes, but this year they were not pleasant.*], and that, as seen before, in the Balkans autumn approaches. Despite all this, Helena's time has stopped in Beirut. This city reappears in chapter 35th (*The egg-seller,* بائع البيض), being Father Butrus this time the main character, which begins: ...بعد أسابيع طويلة من التقصي غير المجدي [*An autumnal morning breeze, after weeks of fruitless inquiries...*]. In other words: weeks after Hanna's disappearance. But the preceding chapter (chapter 34th) bears interestingly the title *The shelling of Belgrade 1862* (1862 قصف بلغراد). Consequently we face two consecutive chapters: the first occurs in Hanna's timeline and within two years time after his departure from Beirut, exactly in 1862, whereas the following chapter narrates events happening in Beirut a few weeks after the disappearance.

Beirut appears newly in chapters 58th (*Nicola Bustros,* نيقولا بسترس), 67th (*Easter cake,* كعك الفصح) and in 81st (*Helena and Barbara*). The first refers to the aristocrat young in whose household Helena served for seven years. The second consists of a brief summary of Father Butrus' life, his childhood, the beginning of his priesthood, and how he ends up taking care of Helena and her child Barbara after the disappearance of Hanna. The chapter *Helena and Barbara*, which makes the 81st out of 98, as said above, when the plot had too much advanced, retrieves the *focalization* upon Helena, summarizing her life since the moment she gave up serving for the Bustros' house until her daughter Barbara becomes ten years old. Thus, it seems that the two timelines corresponding to both Helena's and Hanna's chronotopes respectively, which had become separated at the very moment of Hanna departure, begin to converge anticipating the outcome of

the story when later on in chapter 90th (*The flight from Montenegro*, الهروب من الجبل الأسود) Hanna manages to escape and events run rapidly towards the end.

The separation moment of both chronotopes falls on the traumatic momentum of the arrest of Hanna Yaqub on the port of Beirut, and it is marked by the chapter *The Port Entrance 2* and the following chapter *Helena*. At the level of the story, the chronotope of Helena and Barbara unfolds within its space —that is, Beirut—; and the one of Hanna's, displaced as he is from its own space —which is also Beirut and his family— will develop in its now odd space of the exile in the Balkans.

Nevertheless, at the level of discourse the expression of both chronotopes results more complex. In one hand, the space vector resolves into the focalization of the narrative upon Hanna Yaqub and Helena respectively. In the other hand, the temporal vector incarnates in the severing at the level of discourse between the two parallel sequences of chapters referred to Helena and Hanna. Thus, *Helena 1-5*, which occupy some 10 pages, narrate slowly mostly through scenes what happened to Helena both the very day of the kidnapping and the next day. After chapter *Helena 5* (the 28th of the novel), which recounts the day after the disappearance, comes chapter *The walls of Yodet Pasha* (29th), which takes place months after the event. When Helena's chronotope emerges again in *The egg-seller* (35th) we find ourselves in temporal terms weeks after the disappearance; however, the preceding chapter (34th), related to Hanna's chronotope, bears explicitly the title *The shelling of Belgrade 1862* and situates us two years after the disappearance.

The chronotope of Helena will emerge three more times (in chapters *Nicola Bustros*, *Easter Cake* and *Helena and Barbara*) in a dispersed form through summaries, and harmonizing diffusely its time with the chronotope of Hanna. At the end both cronotopes will converge and unite in the final scene of reunion, where takes place the outcome and the story concludes. Once again, the particular distribution of chapters, which explicitly expresses the unfolding of the two chronotopical lines, acquires an evident specular dimension. Consequently, it results in *The Druze of Belgrade* a chronotopical structure marked by the remoteness of the main character (Hanna Yaqub) from his own space (that is, Beirut), which is at the very centre of the diegetic universe. Such distance in space provokes at the level of discourse the dislocation of the linear sequence of

events that occur within the city of Beirut and beyond it. That results in two discrete chronotopes to be harmonized at the time of the final reunion.

This feature implies a sort of graphic expression of the traumatic situation suffered by the Hanna Yaqub. As Dalia Said Mostafa put it,

> [I]n both theory and fiction, trauma has been often associated with (but not exclusive to) experiences of living through wars, displacements from one's country of origin, the loss of loved ones, or the resulting post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) experienced by soldiers who have taken part in wars (Mostafa 2009: 209)

If we accept this, we can then agree that in the context of *The Druze of Belgrade* we face a paradigmatic fictional narrative about trauma: Hanna Yaqub is a victim of an ethnic conflict that plagues Lebanon Mount; he witnesses the clashes between the Ottoman forces and rebels from the emerging states in the Balkan region during his long exile; he suffers the unexpected and forced removal from his own country and his loved ones, and also the post-traumatic consequences of war: Hanna becomes unable to speech and insane after the massive killing beside the river, where he loses all his fellow Druze and he himself is presumed dead, after which he wanders dumb and crazy. Much of this traumatic complex has its expression, as we have been maintaining, on the structural narrative phenomena of the initial prolepsis and, meanly, in the severing of distinct timelines that accompany both the main character, Hanna Yaqub, far away from his natural space, and Helena, his wife, who remains in Beirut. Nevertheless, *The Druze of Belgrade* is only a component of the group of novels that make up the macro-narrative about Lebanon we have been talking about in this paper.

Beirut and the trauma of the Civil War

Rabie Jabir himself has declared that identity and trauma are the two key issues of *The Druze of Belgrade* (cited by Wrisley 2013: 106).Considering Beirut as the spatial focus of the plot and of its protagonist's chronotope, along with the historical background of the Lebanese civil

conflict in XIX century, everything seems to correspond to the axial themes of much of the literary production by Jabir, whose historical context provides nuances that enriches this novel.

Civil conflict hovers over Jabir's narrative as a presence, sometimes clear, explicit and suffocating, as it is in *al-Iʿtirāfāt* (*Confessions*, 2008), where the narrator gives an account of his childhood and youth memories in a Beirut divided and destroyed by war, bombings, kidnappings and killings. In another recent novel, *Ṭuyūr al-Hūlliday Inn* (*The birds of the Holliday Inn*, 2008), the life of the inhabitants of the Ayyub building, also called *al-Mabrūma* and located in the neighborhood of Achrafiyya, is completely influenced by the conflict bursting at the very heart of the city, with all its tragedy of internal borders, random check-points, sudden disappearances, interreligious conflict, destruction of social cohesion, despaired flight off the country, and so forth. However, in some other times war seems to be present at the mere background of events: in *Shāy Aswad* (*Black Tea*, 1995), although the conflict does not apparently form part of the story, the narrator-protagonist points out in the third page:

يشاهد طفلة صغيرة تدخل إلى دگّان صغير. يشاهدها تمرق بين صناديق الخُضَر الخشبية وهي تمسك بقبعتها فوق رأسها، مستخدمة يدها اليمنى فقط. يبحث عن اليسرى فلا يجدها. يتذكر الحرب.

الحرب أخذت منه أماً رائعة. لا يعرف كيف ينسى هذا. يفكر في يد البنت المقطوعة من المرفق ويقول إنها الحرب. (7)

> [He watches a little girl entering the small shop. He watches her dripping between wooden vegetable boxes while holding her hat above her head, using her right hand only. He looks for her left hand, but does not find it. Remembers the war.
>
> The war snatched from him a wonderful mother. He cannot help forgetting this. He thinks of the girl's cut off hand from the elbow and says that is the war.]

In *al-Bayt al-Akhīr* (*The Last House*, 1996) war is an event from the recent past that remains steadily in the memory of the protagonists: it is present in the film scripts produced by the protagonists, Kaf and Maron (25 -32), who some other times recall events which can be temporally situated thanks to the parallel mention of an well-known event or a date related to the civil war in Beirut (62, 77); or, for instance, through reference to French intervention in 1860 (79-80). At some point, Soraya, one of the characters, comments:

ابتسمت ثريا وقالت إن الحرب تستطيع أن تنتظر. ثم قالت: "إنها تنتظر منذ مئة سنة، فلماذا لا تنتظر سنة أخرى؟".

ولدت جملة ثريا صمتاً ثقيلاً. فكلامها عن الحرب التي تنتظر منذ مئة سنة لم يكن إلا صدى لأحاديث قديمة. (...) في البداية كانت الحجلة، هكذا أخبره "ك".(113)

[Soraya smiled and said that the war could wait. Then she said: "It has been waiting for a hundred years, so why not waits another year?"

Soraya's sentence generated a heavy silence. Her words about the war that has been waiting a hundred years was not only an echo of the old sayings. (...) In the beginning there was the hopscotch, so told him "K".]

This episode triggered civil conflict in Mount Lebanon around 1841. It apparently broke out because of a private dispute between one Druze and one Maronite upon a partridge ("In the beginning was the partridge") near the village of Dayr al-Qamar. The same event is repeated in more detail in *Yūsuf al-Inglizī* (*Yusuf the English*, p. 110) inserted inside a tale the protagonist listens to at school in Beirut. A mythical principle is in this way configured as a sort of curse cast over the Lebanese reality that ought to be re-counted and narrated, as we observe in *Yūsuf al-Inglizī*, along countless passages and episodes of struggle for dominance between Druze and Maronites lords and the Ottoman authorities from the late eighteenth century until the outbreak of 1860, when the protagonist, Yūsuf Ibrāhīm Khāṭir Jābir (i.e., Yūsuf al-Inglizī), embarks on Beirut to abandon Lebanon heading to Europe and leaving definitely the story. The same presence of civil war in Beirut can be observed in the novel *Bīrītūs: Madīnah taḥta al-Arḍ* (*Biritus, an Underground City*, 2005). The memories of a youth Butrus, the protagonist of this novel, are imbued with moments of war; and on their part the inhabitants of the underground city related to Butrus —who fell accidentally from the surface— how explosions, fires and disasters of conflicts happening over ground had affected underground city few years earlier and, more impressively, how there were old stories and tales from refugees of more ancient wars who ended up inhabitants of this subterranean city in former times.

As for the city of Beirut, the trilogy *Bayrūt: Madīnat al-ʿālam* (*Beirut, the City of the World*, 2003, 2005 and 2007) is the clearest instance of the obsession of Jābir upon historic mapping and of his imagining the city as a palimpsest. This trilogy has been studied in its dimension of retrieval of the urban spatial memory by Ghenwa Hayek (2011) [5]. The narrator's voice is continuously projected back and forth as he narrates the story of Count Bustrus Suleiman's family during the nineteenth century, in a constant movement between past and present through which the city map gets drawn and its streets and markets defined. The resulting historic map provides us simultaneously information about the past and present of each name and spot. Hayek affirms that the trilogy —so far the Jabir's greater novelistic project— is an attempt to outline a plan of the historic center of Beirut for the new generation that did not fully know that district —a generation in which Jabir might be included—, and concludes saying that "Jabir's trilogy draws to new cognitive map of the city that connects its past to its present, and resituates both the individual and the collective in the city centre, and in the national past" (Hayek 2011: 187). The density of the prose is so paramount that reminds us of that statement of James Joyce in which he said that he intended with his *Ulysses* to give such a complete a picture of Dublin that had this been disappeared, it could be reconstructed from the book.

I argue that this obsession upon Beirut —that is, upon the map of Beirut— is transverse and extends towards much of his novelistic production. Along with the mentioned trilogy, we find in *al-Bayt al-Akhīr* (1996) a map of Beirut downtown (178) one of the characters in the novel, Mārūn al-Baġdadī, comments thoughtfully about it on the following page, whereas in page 83 the other protagonist, Kāf, writes:

إن بيروت في مستطيل. لا أكثر ولا أقل. في الحرب تهدم المستطيل. والآن بيروت مستطيل جديد. (83)

[Beirut is in a rectangle. No more, no less. In the war the rectangle was destroyed. And now Beirut is a new rectangular]

In *Rālf Rizqallah fi al-Mir'āt* (1997) the protagonist draws a sketch of the surroundings of Sakhrat al-Rosha, a rocky setting near the coast where Rālf Rizqallāh (Ralf Rizqallah) committed suicide

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(156). In *Yūsuf al-Inglizī* (1999) there is a passage in which the protagonist and his classmates calculate conscientiously the area of the city of Beirut in the mid nineteenth century, after which a plan of the city map is displayed elaborated by the protagonist (170). More clearly, the novel *Bīrītūs: A City Underground* (2005), which followed the first issue of the trilogy, described in an almost gothic atmosphere of fantasy and mystery the existence of a parallel city, obscure, miserable and hellish, under the basement of modern Beirut. Thus, on pages 153 and 154 we find charts, it is truth that very schematically, of both *Beirut al-Taḥta* (*Lower Beirut*) and *Beirut al-Fawqa* (*Higher Beirut*). Butrus, the protagonist, devotes much space to try to map the subsurface Beirut and figure out which part of Higher Beirut corresponds to such or such place underneath through allusions to changes applied to the street layout over the centuries that are intuited vaguely by underground people.

With regards to Mount Lebanon, this region appears frequently related to Beirut as an extension of the Lebanese space. In *al-Bayt al-Akhīr* one of the main characters, the narrator called "Kāf" (by the way, a sort of Kafkian-like "K") comes from a village in Mount Lebanon, where he and the other protagonists go from time to time: interestingly no other Lebanese space is put as a setting for the story events —except the very city of Beirut, of course. In *Yūsuf al-Inglizī*, an authentic *Bildingsroman*, the protagonist, Yūsuf Ibrāhīm Khāṭir Jābir, is a Druze-born who grows in Mount Lebanon, receives his education in Beirut among American priests, and ends up living as an Englishman in London. It is noteworthy that this novel is divided into four parts titled successively *Mount Lebanon*, *Beirut*, *London* and *The World*, as if the plot progression, because of its changing spaces of the story, expanded the focus and became projected outwards.

Thus, throughout the narrative of Rabie Jabir Beirut becomes an epitome of the whole Lebanon reconstructed through fiction, drawn as a palimpsest of events and architectural elements from several epochs. Moreover, the recent history of Beirut is added up, from early nineteenth century to our present days, a period during which a small coastal city would become a cosmopolitan capital, signed by a long civil conflict as though it were a legendary curse.

Regarding the question of identity, in *Rālf Rizqallāh fi-l-Mir'āt* (1997) the narrator-protagonist identifies himself as same Rabie Jabir who claims to have met Ralf Rizqallah —whose suicide is the

leitmotiv of the story— after having worked together for the newspaper *al-Nahār*, in an unquestionable reference to extra-textual world. In *Yūsuf al-Inklizī*, Yūsuf Ibrāhīm Khāṭir Jābir disappears from the story near the end of the novel. And in an amazing *crossover* which inserts *The Druze of Belgrade* in the complex of the macro-narrative, the last pages are devoted to expose the adventures of his brother Nūr al-Dīn Ibrāhīm Khāṭir Jābir, the involvement of the latter in the civil war and his subsequent exile in Belgrade, from where he would return some ten years later to Mount Lebanon disguised as a Christian, one of whose descendants turns to be the father of the narrator, who ends the novel by saying:

بعد موت جدي سنة 1983 ورث ساعته الذهبية وساعة يوسف الإنكليزي.

[After the death of my grandfather in 1983, I inherited his gold watch and the clock of Yūsuf the English.]

The narrator had previously mentioned that his great uncle, ʿAlī Jābir, emigrated to Argentina before the First World War to never return: a character who may well be that ʿAlī Jābir featured in the novel *Amrīka* (*America*, 2009) who married in the US to the protagonist Martha Haddad, whom the narrator of this novel identified as his grandmother[6].

More evidently, in *Bayrūt, madīnat al-ʿālam*, the first-person narrator is presented as a journalist working for *al-Hayāt* newspaper in Beirut (pp. 10 and 63) who is commissioned by Count De Bustrus to write a book about his familiy. In *Beirītūs: madīna taḥta al-arḍ*, Butrus —the main-story hero and also the hypodiegetic narrator and protagonist of the fantastic story— addresses the main narrator, whom he asks to write down his amazing adventures and whom he knows after having worked as watchman at the same building where the newsrooms of *al-Hayāt* are located and where the main narrator works:

"أعلم أنك تحب القصص الحقيقية. قرأت رواياتك عن مارون ورالف رزق الله ويوسف جابر وسليمان بسترس وعائلة البارودي (...) أنك مرات تخترع قصصاً تبدو حقيقية. ومرات تكتب قصصاً حقيقية لكنك تجعلها تبدو خيالية...".(16)

[I know you love true stories. I read your novels about Maroun Baghdadi, Ralf Rizkallah, Yusuf Jaber, Suleiman Bustros and Baroudi familiy (…) Sometimes you invent stories that seem real, and some other times you write true stories, but make it look unreal.]

The novel *ʿItirāfāt* (*Confessions*, 2008) consists at a whole on a narration of lifetime memories and testimonies of Maron, the protagonist and hypodiegetic narrator, who speaks in his turn to the main narrator, who is identified in solely one occasion:

قوصوني على خط التماس الذي يقطع بيروت نصفين سنة 1976. وأبي حملني وأخذني إلى بيته. إذا كتبت يوماً حياتي في كتاب يا ربيع أرجو أن تبدأ قصتي بهذه الجملة. (31)

[They shot on us by the contact line which divided Beirut in two halves in 1976. My father picked me up and took me to his house. Rabie, if you wrote a book some day about my life, I beg you to begin my story in this sentence.]

Thus, Rabie Jabir —the author— tries to engage the reader in a game of suggestions by insisting through the supposed identification between author and main narrator, and sometimes between author and narratee, in this apparent transgression of boundaries between factual history and fiction. As highlighted by Wrisley, Jabir offers an unique form of fictional disclaimer in each of his novels ("This novel is a work of fiction and any resemblance between its characters, events and places with real-life characters, events and places is purely coincidental and unintentional")[7]. G. Hayek refers (2011: 188) to the inclusion of an additional narrative level situated between the represented past and the main narrator, a mediating device between the narrated events and the narrator, which helps make visible the production process, making it self-reflexive. When it comes to identify that mediating figure with the author, this *mise en abyme* amplifies the self-reflexive nature of the text, and contributes to dissolve the boundaries between fiction and reality and, in my opinion, reaffirms what Mostafa argues about Jabir, in the sense that he represents "memory and trauma as part of a world that constantly shifts between the factual and the fictional, the actual and the imaginary, dream and reality" (Mostafa 2009: 215).

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[7] "هذه الرواية من نسيج الخيال، وأي شَبَه بين أحداثها وأشخاصها وأماكنها مع أشخاص حقيقيين وأحداث وأماكن حقيقية هو محض مصادفة ومجرد عن أي قصد".

Conclusion

The traumatic experience of the Lebanese Civil War originated since the seventies of the last century in the narrative field a tendency to introspection and experimentation with formal structures. This change has been deemed as the artistic realization of a process of broaching the national trauma through recovering collective memory and identity assertion. In the case of Jabir Rabie's large narrative production, a group of his novels, among which *The Druze of Belgrade* is found, seems to form a coherent whole that might be read as a macro-narrative.

This macro-narrative evolves upon the basis of both a certain unity of space (with Beirut as its central point and Mount Lebanon as its extension) and a temporal continuity that may be traced from the nineteenth century Lebanese conflicts, the civil war in the seventies, till our present days. The axiological dimension that makes sense of this temporal-space complex gets embodied on being this macro-narrative configured as a mythical and tragic story about modern Lebanon, in which the narrator-protagonist subtly identifies himself with the real author. In so pretending to traverse the fictional boundaries, the narrator-protagonist becomes involved in the attempt to cope with the trauma of the persistent civil conflict.

I argue that it is feasible to make a relational reading of most of the narrative production by Rabie Jabir (or at least of much of it) and consider it as, say, a Lebanese *macro-narrative* of trauma. Jabir relates from a fictional logic certain quasi-mythical history of modern Lebanon, always with the permanent background of a civil conflict, jumping in time forward and backward. A history and narrative activity that acquires an air of *catharsis* to the extent in which the author-narrator tends to break the limits between fiction and reality by inserting himself as a participant in the events.

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