

Becoming a Cosmopolite

Identity Construction and The Cosmopolitan Imagination in Isabella Hammad's *The Parisian*

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Abstract: According to Gerard Delanty, the cosmopolitan imagination is “both an experience and an interpretation of the world”; it is “a way of viewing the world in terms of its immanent possibilities for self-transformation” (The Cosmopolitan Imagination 6, 3). As part of a host of new approaches to and understandings of the changing notion of cosmopolitanism, literary representations of the cosmopolitan imagination may shed new light on the ways in which transnational migrants (re-)construct their identity in cosmopolitan spaces as “neo-cosmopolites” and “local citizens of the world.” Through the close reading of Isabella Hammad’s debut novel, The Parisian; or, Al-Barisi: A Novel (2019), my analysis primarily focuses on the intersection of affective cosmopolitanism as an embodied form of “cosmopolitan self-awakening” (Woods 136) and Bhabha’s (2000) vernacular cosmopolitanism as a translation between cultures and the renegotiation of traditions in the diaspora subject’s cosmopolitan imagination. Investigating the protagonist’s bodily, embodied, and lived experiences in Constantinople, Montpellier, Paris, Cairo, and Nablus, I shall contend that the experience and interpretation of these cosmopolitan spaces, as well as their atmospheric affordances, greatly influence and are influenced by the protagonist’s sensible and lived feelings, affective relationships and sense of self, manifested in an identity performance that leads to the reconstruction of his identity as “the Parisian,” a cosmopolite incarnate.

While classical perceptions of cosmopolites tend to define them as free-floating citizens of the world, not subservient to any religious or political authority but forming one single community, contemporary theories stress the importance of the local,

the individual, and the migrant in their definition, and view cosmopolitanism as “a politics of space” (Cf. Rumford [2008]). Appiah’s (1997) rooted cosmopolitans, for instance, “can pledge allegiance to their country but still remain committed to universal values” (Sunderland 70–71). Bhabha’s vernacular cosmopolitans translate between cultures and renegotiate traditions “from a position where ‘locality’ insists on its own terms” (“The Vernacular Cosmopolitan” 139). New approaches also emphasise that being cosmopolitan is not an identity but “a disposition characterised by self-awareness, a sensitivity to the world beyond one’s immediate milieu” (Spencer 4). In Gerard Delanty’s view, such a new, critical perspective requires what he calls “the cosmopolitan imagination,” which occurs “when and wherever new relations between Self, Other and World develop in moments of openness” (*The Cosmopolitan Imagination* 52–53). According to Delanty, the cosmopolitan imagination is “both an experience and an interpretation of the world”; it is “a way of viewing the world in terms of its immanent possibilities for self-transformation” (*The Cosmopolitan Imagination* 6, 3).

Mapping the very possibilities that cosmopolitan spaces may provide for transnational migrants to re-construct their identity as “local citizens of the world,” this paper follows the physical and metaphorical journey of Midhat Kamal, the protagonist of Isabella Hammad’s debut novel, *The Parisian; or, Al-Barisi: A Novel* (2019). My analysis primarily focuses on the evolution of cosmopolitan identity through the stages of growing self-awareness, identity re-construction and empowerment, and finally, finding agency (Cf. Spisak [2009])—a process unfolding at the intersection of Bhabha’s vernacular cosmopolitanism and affective cosmopolitanism as an embodied form of “cosmopolitan self-awakening” (Woods 137) in the diaspora subject’s cosmopolitan imagination. Investigating the protagonist’s bodily, embodied, and lived experiences in Constantinople, Montpellier, Paris, Cairo, and Nablus, I shall contend that the experience and interpretation of these cosmopolitan spaces, as well as their atmospheric affordances, greatly influence and are influenced by the protagonist’s sensible and lived feelings, affective relationships and sense of self, manifested in identity performance that leads to the reconstruction of his identity as “the Parisian,” a cosmopolite incarnate.

THE EMBODIED EXPERIENCE OF GROWING SELF-AWARENESS

Born and raised in Nablus, Palestine, Midhat embarks on his journey at fourteen, when he starts his studies at a French boarding school in Constantinople. Metaphorically, the journey marks the initial stage in the transformation of his disposition and subjectivity, since at “Lycée Impérial” he gets his “first taste of cosmopolitan life” and experiences “his own separateness” (Hammad 33). Looking down at his body in the shower room of the Lycée, Midhat becomes aware of his own body and its peculiarity, and realises 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” (Hammad 33–34). Besides highlighting the protagonist’s interiority and sensible feelings (that is, unintentional bodily sensations), the quotation reveals an awareness of his body belonging to him and defining his self, and points to bodily experience as meaning-making (Cf. Merleau-Ponty [1945]), as the lived body “provides the point of reference for all lived emotional experience” (Denzin 111). Perceived as “victorious and agonising” at the same time, Midhat’s growing self-awareness highlights the difficulty of such meaning-making yet also the spatial aspect thereof. Since embodied emotions are “intricately connected to specific sites and contexts” (Davidson et al. 5), Midhat’s growing self-awareness may be both characterised by and a product of conflicting embodied emotions perceived in Constantinople as a cosmopolitan space contrasted with the cultural space of his home.

In David Chaney’s definition, the “cosmopolis” is a place that “encompasses the variety of human culture,” and cosmopolitans are people who “can cope with unpredictability ... know what is expected in different cultural settings and can move between them with confidence and assurance” (158). In this initial stage, Midhat still lacks confidence and does not see himself as a cosmopolitan. Feeling simultaneously “inside his body” and “alienated from it” suggests that he perceives the body/self as both “I” and “Other,” which signals the beginning of the “transformation of subjectivity in terms of relations of self, Other and world” (Delanty, “The Cosmopolitan Imagination” 6). His becoming a cosmopolite starts with the affected body enabling the growing feeling of cosmopolitanism and gradually becoming “the locus of cosmopolitan awakening,” indicating affective cosmopolitanism (Woods 137–138).

Midhat's awakening and concomitant transformation continues in 1914 when his father sends him to France to study medicine and escape the war.¹ Aboard the ship to Montpellier, Midhat feels that his outline "weighed on him as a hard, sore shape, and his heart beat very fast. He assumed the feeling would pass. But it did not" (Hammad 13). His sense of loneliness re-emerges and manifests itself in the body reacting to and, at the same time, delineating him from his surroundings and situation. What Midhat experiences is both sensible feelings and lived feelings. The former denotes sensations, which are unintentional and not attached to the self, while in the case of the latter, feelings are indeed felt and expressed by the individual, so loneliness as an emotion is "felt as an embodied state," and the body becomes "a sounding board for the emotion" (Denzin). In other words, what he feels in his body echoes what he fears in his mind: the sore feeling of transition, both physically and mentally, the weight of the weightlessness of his very being. These complex and incomprehensible interconnections of body, mind and self recall Heidegger's (1962) notion of "thrownness" (*Geworfenheit*), a theoretical interpretation of facticity as being thrown into the world without any prior explanation and being alive within a fixed set of physical, spatial, and temporal possibilities. Trying to make sense of the sense of thrownness, Midhat makes friends with a fellow passenger Faruq, and expands 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" (Hammad 18). The protagonist's journey/immigration as a transitory state seems to generate a recurring, gripping sense of loneliness and separateness projected onto the environment and

1 In the aftermath of the Balkan Wars (1912–1913), the Ottoman Empire was unofficially divided into zones of influence by European powers, with France claiming and maintaining control in Syria and Palestine through consulates and military presence (Laurens). As described in the novel, when the Ottomans signed a secret treaty with Germany in 1914, mobilisation began, and wealthy Levantine families tried to avoid conscription in the Ottoman army by sending their sons to Europe, considered safer than Nablus or Cairo. The protagonist's father, a Francophile like many of his generation, decided to send his son to France, "the pinnacle of Europe and exemplar of the modern age," and Midhat was "pleased by the confidence in him his father's decision displayed, and the love that wished to put him out of war's way" (Hammad 34–35). The reason that Midhat stays in France until the end of the Great War may be explained by the turbulent situation in Palestine caused by the "Sykes-Picot Agreement" of 1916 and Balfour Declaration of 1917, which threatened the political rights of Palestinian Arabs and led to a series of revolts and violent events in the region, as detailed by the appendix of the novel, "Key events in the development of the Palestinian and Syrian national movements."

experienced in the body, yet it also involves making connections and immersing himself in the possibilities. This resonates with Heidegger's concept of *Dasein*, understood as "the arranging of space into a room for maneuver, a site of active responding to solicitations" (Wrathall 230), which is an integral part of developing "a new way of being-in-the-world" (Denzin). At this point, Hammad's protagonist—a cosmopolitan in the making—is in the bodily-emotional phase of this development, which is then followed by a cognitive phase of his growing self-awareness.

In Montpellier, Midhat is hosted by social anthropologist Frédéric Molineu and finds himself struggling with fitting in a culturally alien milieu that sees him as the "Turk," the "Arabian man," "the famous Oriental guest" (Hammad 70, 72). In response, Midhat identifies himself as "a Palestinian from Nablus who was a citizen of the enemy" and "the fool, the foreigner unable to control his own meanings" (Hammad 87, 108), thus highlighting his national identity and an internalised feeling of being an outsider, a stranger. The discrepancy between these two ways of identification leads to a "renewed sense of separateness and loneliness" (Hammad 109) and makes his stay in Montpellier a "socially situated embodied experience" in which "'culture' and 'nature,' as well as 'body' and 'mind,' are seamlessly intertwined and grounded" (Lindblom and Ziemke 152). He knows who he is but also acknowledges the problematics thereof; that is, he becomes aware of both the incomprehensibility and the irreducibility of his facticity. He wishes to refute his perception by others yet starts to internalise the feeling of being alien. His embodied emotions both trigger and are triggered by intrusive thoughts. Midhat's sense of conflict grows parallel with his (initially unrequited) romantic feelings for the professor's daughter, Jeannette, and eventually manifests itself in wanting to belong, which he tries to achieve by immersing himself in and imitating French culture: walking around the city with his new friend Laurent, improving his French accent and buying a new French hat (Hammad 44) for the sake of fitting in and impressing her. His search for a sense of belonging and the transformation it involves may be explained by Elspeth Probyn's definition of belonging: "the desire for some sort of attachment, be it to other people, places or modes of being, and the ways in which individuals and groups are caught within wanting to belong, wanting to become, a process that is fuelled by yearning rather than the positing of identity as a stable state" (19). Midhat is portrayed as both yearning for attachment and scared by the changes it necessarily entails, and although he might not be fully aware of these conflicting emotions, they are indeed bodily felt whenever he finds himself in new circumstances

and stressful situations, marking the unavoidable end and uncertain beginning of something as necessary stages in his development. His growing self-awareness is thus manifested in the embodied and lived experience of the problematics of identity and belonging and will soon lead to the realisation that both require a degree of change, some sort of fluidity instead of stability.

Midhat's high hopes for belonging and emotional attachment are crushed when he finds out that Molineu used him to write a study on "The Effect of a New Language Learned by a Primitive Brain" (Hammad 154), that is, observed him all along as an anthropological object, an inferior being, as the Other. When he confronts Molineu about studying him, the doctor asserts he only wanted to humanise Midhat, to which he replies: "To humanise me? ... I am—really, I am amazed. Monsieur, I am *a person*. I am—no—" (Hammad 159, emphasis added). Midhat's defiant claim of being a person may be interpreted in several ways. His recognition of self as both the Other and the I—resonating with his embodied emotions in Constantinople—is now perceived and proclaimed to be his essential humanness and personness, pointing to the "recognition of self as Other, self in exile, [which] is the basis of our personal humanity and ethics, the only way to universal hospitality, open borders, equality, and cosmopolitanism" (Meerzon 31–32). On the other hand, "I am—no—" may also be read as both a refusal to identify himself as the Other and the inability to name what or who he is instead. This could mean that Midhat is not yet aware of the fluidity of the self, his identity as transition, and it may explain the masks he wears and roles he plays in Paris, where he flees after Jeannette does not stand up for him and he feels their relationship is irreparably broken (Hammad 161).

IDENTITY RE-CONSTRUCTION AND EMPOWERMENT IN COSMOPOLITAN SPACE

While in Montpellier Midhat failed to identify himself other than as "a person" (Hammad 159), he arrives in Paris defiantly wearing his tarbush, despite knowing that "he could not have marked his difference more obviously" (Hammad 179) or highlight his Otherness more clearly. Joining Faruq and his Arab friends in their heated conversations about Palestine's and Syria's future, he becomes a member of a "cosmopolitan community envisaged in marginality" (Bhabha, "Unsatisfied" 195–196). At the same time, spending his nights in theatres and bars, and engaging in a series of brief sexual relationships with various women and prostitutes, Midhat also lives the life of Parisian *bon vivants*. This duality of attachment and

non-attachment recalls Bhabha's theory of the difference between global and vernacular cosmopolitanism (1996). While for Bhabha the former "configures the planet as a concentric world of national societies extending to global villages," inhabits "imagined communities," and is characterised by privilege and prosperity (*Location* xiv), the latter "measures global progress from the minoritarian perspective" (xvi) and wishes to revise "political, legal and social citizenship ... by extending them to include the realm of 'symbolic citizenship'" (xvii). Both approaches, however, entail the understanding of the cosmopolitan as one who "retains their connection to a particular community, while being aware of the need for openness to others" (Sunderland 70–71). For Midhat, this openness involves applying Bhabhaian mimicry, "an exaggerated copying of language, culture, manners, and ideas" (*Location* 88), as a conscious strategy of performing a "Parisian" identity in the enabling atmosphere of the city. The various roles he plays and the identity positions (Cf. Hall [1990]) he takes up according to the social situations he finds himself in point to the definition of global and vernacular cosmopolitans. Bhabha's concept refers to individuals with local bonding, yet also the willingness to broaden their cultural horizons, as a result of which they can move freely in-between cultural traditions and belong to more than one language or culture (*Location* 13).

Hammad describes Midhat's engagement in the cultural environment of the French capital primarily at the level of the body again. He attributes Paris's "electric atmosphere" to "a charge shared between strangers," which he perceives as "a pure thrill of Being. It lived in the body like a drug, this being alive in the jaws of the full, flying night" (Hammad 181). The interconnections of city and body, performance and emotion are particularly intriguing here from the aspect of affect and emotion as "embodied performativities evoked in, and by, particular settings" (Schorch et al. 94), and affective cosmopolitanism, defined as "embodied forms of cosmopolitanism that can be triggered by affective experiences" (Woods 137).

The "thrill of Being" Midhat experiences while performing the part of a "Parisian" in Paris may be interpreted as an affective experience concomitant with the atmosphere of the cosmopolis, which underlines the idea that "emotional participation is an integral part of one's experience of space" (Hasse 52). As Nora Plesske 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" (139). In Böhme's theory, the atmosphere of place/space may be attributed just as much

to the environment as to the individuals (114)—meaning that it both influences and is influenced by the people experiencing it. Midhat’s bodily, embodied, and lived experience thus results in, and is the result of, the atmosphere of Paris as a cosmopolitan space “of new dynamics, interactive moments, and conflicting principles and orientations” (Delanty, *The Cosmopolitan Imagination* 15): the intoxication and aliveness it offers and the relationships—whether strong or weak ties—it helps build.

The thrilling sense of being alive may also be attributed to what Tonino Griffiero 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 with certain behaviours (4). In this respect, Paris may be perceived, on the one hand, as an enabling city, one that invites—if not requires—both emotional participation and playing roles. On the other hand, the words “drug” and “jaws” suggest that Midhat could get stuck in the mask of the Parisian, get addicted to or fail to escape from the embodied and lived experience of this perceived freedom, which means that his transformation at this point is unavoidable. Paris thus leads to the second stage of cosmopolitan self-awakening—identity re-construction, described by Hammad as the protagonist’s “new urbanity”:

Midhat the Levantine ... now thoroughly estranged: the figure of the Parisian Oriental as he appeared on certain cigarette packets in corner stores ... that innocent, hardworking man would be forever linked in Midhat’s mind with the moment he was awakened to his own otherness. ... 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. (Hammad 187)

Midhat’s embrace of otherness yet estrangement from his Levantine identity is a long process and may be interpreted in several ways. First, deliberately playing the role of the Parisian and the exotic Other may point to mimicry both as “partial representation” (Bhabha, *Location* 88) and as an identity performance, at the intersection of performance (role-play) and Butlerian (2003) performativity (a construction and display of cultural identity), with the immigrant being both the subject and the agent of their performative actions. The hybrid figure emerging through

consciously mimicking the locals and exaggerating the stereotype of the Oriental Other may be perceived as “camouflage” but also “a contesting, antagonistic agency” (Bhabha, *Location* 193), a subversion of his projected-perceived identity as a means of self-empowerment.

Second, the figure of “the Parisian Oriental” also recalls Bhabha’s vernacular cosmopolite, who prioritises a “right to difference” that “does not require the restoration of an original [or essentialist] cultural or group identity” and “has less to do with the affirmation or authentication of origins and ‘identities,’ and more to do with political practices and ethical choices” (Bhabha, *Location* xvi–xvii). For Midhat, these practices and choices involve a certain degree of holding onto his cultural roots through his community of Arab friends and participating in their political debates; yet, at the same time, also re-rooting and assimilating, signalled by the “performed version” of the Parisian, the manifestation of his initial desire to become “European both inside and out” (Hammad 187). However, his embodied and lived experience of being “in a place but not of it” (Hammad 187), that is, being allowed to participate in whatever the cosmopolis offers yet never fully belonging there suggests a compromise that involves a simultaneous attempt and refusal, yearning and inability to belong to any community or place exclusively, as signalled by his constant movement between them.

Midhat 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 realise that “the divisions, though sometimes porous, were abiding” (Hammad 194). The realisation of this multiplicity and the transgressions such divisions may entail suggests that, through his identity performances, Midhat starts to develop a cosmopolitan imagination, that is, a specific experience and an interpretation of the world (Delanty, *The Cosmopolitan Imagination* 8), and a cosmopolitan disposition as a local citizen of the world, recognising the inherent possibilities it may offer for self-transformation “which can be realised only by taking the cosmopolitan perspective of the Other” (Delanty, *The Cosmopolitan Imagination* 3). For Midhat, the performed identity of the Parisian Oriental and the multiplicity of roles played signal self-transformation as identity re-construction, which involves estrangement from his Levantine identity, described by Hammad as follows:

Midhat was learning to dissemble and pass between spheres and to accommodate, morally, that dissemblance through an understanding of his own impermanence

in each. But as despondence broke out among his friends, Midhat found it was the arguing Arab, that least interesting of roles, which he performed more and more. ... Standing on Faruq's balcony, looking down at the black cars in the street like a procession of hearses, he felt that some great frame had cracked. He turned back to the apartment and the scene trembled through the quartered glass, the room appeared dislocated, the faces of his friends unfamiliar. (Hammad 194)

The protagonist appears to be discontent with the role of "the arguing Arab," that is, the nationalist in exile,² and increasingly detached from his friends as he is "learning to dissemble and pass between spheres," that is, to embrace the new roles he is navigating between. From the aspect of his cosmopolitan identity, this may signal a shift from global to vernacular cosmopolitanism, moving beyond "simply acknowledging already constituted 'marginal' entities and identities" (Bhabha xviii). Such a move entails the possibility of reconstructing and accepting his identity as multiple and fluid; yet, it will prove to be a long and complicated process, of which the above-quoted realisation is but the first stage. At this point, Midhat's bodily and emotional reaction to this multiplicity still reveals a sense of rootlessness, the loss of a collective communal spirit (Cf. Weil [1952]). The longer he continues to play these parts, the more distant his roots (symbolised by his friends) become, and the less he can hold on to a sense of fixed, national identity (symbolised by the dislocated room), especially with the national movements and impending revolution back home, rewriting the borders and dislocating identities. At the same time, his "dissemblance" and "impermanence" (that is, the transitory and transformative nature of his performances) do entail a recognition of the possibilities for and inherent in self-transformation.

Midhat, the Parisian Oriental, may thus be read as the figure of subversion and transformation, marking the birth of a new cosmopolitan persona that relies on a "repertoire of imaginaries and practices" which "involves symbolically or physically crossing defined boundaries and claiming a degree of cultural versatility" (Jeffrey and McFarlane 420). As he claims in a letter that he writes to Jeannette before departing Paris:

2 Here Hammad refers to the Arab nationalist organisation al-Fatat (the Young Arab Society), established in Paris in 1911. Midhat is not a member, but his friend Hani Murad is one of the original founders and Emir Faisal's secretary at the Peace Conference in Paris (Hammad 237).

I hoped that somehow my memories of life before I came to France might be the ones to stick, and that you would slide off them, and I would remain the same beneath. But I fear that on the contrary 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. (Hammad 203–204)

His words not only attest to the transformative power of affective relationships—with both people and places—but also suggest a shift from vernacular to affective cosmopolitanism as “a way of being in, and engaging with, the world ... a modality of existence that is grounded in and by the body” (Woods 135), through the spaces and places he inhabits and the physical-emotional connections he makes. In this respect, Midhat’s transformation through love and heartache, and in the cultural space of the enabling metropolis, may also be understood as identity re-construction through “a process of learning or self-discovery” (Delanty, *The Cosmopolitan Imagination* 86); he learns to relativise his own culture and identity, “even if an alternative is not articulated” (Delanty, *The Cosmopolitan Imagination* 21), even if he cannot put into words who that “myself” is. Acknowledging becoming himself and belonging to both France and Palestine thus indicates Midhat’s self-awareness and may also be read as a sign of empowerment.

DEVELOPING AGENCY

By the time Midhat, the Parisian *bon vivant*, returns home to Nablus in 1919, both he and the city have changed considerably. Jewish presence has increased due to the Balfour Declaration (1917). The Battle of Nablus (1918), which ended in British victory and Ottoman defeat, has led to British and French Occupied Enemy Territory Administration, the British Mandate, and a concomitant growing national sentiment demanding the independence of Palestine (Hammad 640). In response to these changes and under the influence of his life in Paris, Midhat clings to “a particular idea of cosmopolitan life” (Hammad 220), a cosmopolitan disposition *per se*, rejecting a rigid definition of identity along the lines of nationality and nationalism; yet, he is forced by his father to settle, both physically

and metaphorically. Fourteen years later, Hammad's narrative portrays Midhat as an established man, running his own business and enjoying a much-envied, comfortable life with his wife and children in Nablus. What has not changed is positioning his identity as the Parisian, and the multiplicity of the roles played and perceived: "a man who had married above his station, a sybarite, an optimist, a success with women, a carefree lover of the West" (Hammad 458). This time, his cosmopolitanism appears to be less self-discovery and more "self-problematisation of one's own assumptions as well as those of the Other" (Delanty, *The Cosmopolitan Imagination* 16)—the Nabulsi community he no longer feels part of.

Midhat's uprooting seems to be an irreversible process, making him keep up appearances, as he considers performing the identity of a Parisian (and thereby being seen as the Other) a safer and more liberating choice than having to return to his old, fixed identity. Realising 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" (Hammad 389), a few remaining traits of who he used to be—more Parisian than Oriental. His performed and embodied cosmopolitanism may be read as a "masquerade" freeing him from the requirement of local attachment but it also runs the risk of becoming "an entrenchment of divisiveness through its inability to foster connectivities and multiplicity of being" (Krishnan 689). Midhat, the Parisian of Nablus, or "Al-Barisi" becomes a native outsider, the epitome of in-betweenness and hybridity, a condition/position which, after a while, proves to be more limiting than liberating: he feels that 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 235–236). Experiencing his place identity, that is, situatedness and rootedness through an emotional bonding with a place (Cf. Proshansky et al. [1983]) as suffocating, he increasingly yearns for the embodied and lived experience of his cosmopolitan self as "Al-Barisi."

As the social and atmospheric affordances of Nablus do not favour his cosmopolitan disposition, he frequently elopes to Cairo for a few days, where he can be "almost as anonymous as in Paris" (Hammad 223), that is, whoever he wants to be, thereby developing a sense of agency. Contemplating the differences, Midhat describes Cairo by claiming it is "not a part of him as Nablus was. Nablus was all smells and sounds, the rushing air between the mountains" (Hammad 208). Although his description shows a sense of nostalgia and an affective relationship

with his hometown (the smells and sounds), it also suggests a considerably different approach to belonging. The embodied experience and atmospheric affordance of Nablus make it a confining space (surrounded by mountains) where Midhat, the transnational subject and cosmopolite not confined by borders and national identities (the rushing air), would not want to take root again. In contrast, the bodily and lived experience of Cairo is that of a cosmopolitan place “rich with possibility” (Hammad 220), oozing the atmosphere of freedom, offering him anonymity and bodily pleasures, and a transitory place, where he could experience belonging as becoming and “belonging in constant movement” (Probyn 19).³

Owing to his perceptible disposition, fellow Nabulsi view Midhat as “strange” (Hammad 236), in the sense of being both odd and foreign, indicating a negative view of cosmopolites as “rootless, dabbling, parasitic, without commitment to any community or place, lacking loyalty to their own country” (Sunderland 69). The local’s envy and hatred, growing in parallel with the national sentiment of the Arab Rebellion in Palestine—campaigns against the Balfour declaration and increasing Jewish immigration (Hammad 645)—reaches its climax when Midhat’s shop is burnt down, which leads to the realisation of his father’s betrayal (hiding Jeannette’s love letter for years). Similarly to the experience of previous betrayals and identity crises, the protagonist hears a ringing sound that feels like “a sharp blade of silver being inserted into his eardrum. Midhat clutched his ears and moaned. It was pretending to be benign, it pretended to be beautiful. But it was pain, that high ringing sound was pain. It was entering his ears like a virus. It was interfering in there, it was doing things it shouldn’t” (Hammad 495). The embodied experience of treachery involves both sensible and lived feelings as pain takes over his entire body and mind. 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” (Hammad 526, 539). The sense of separateness, first felt in Constantinople and signalling the start of his journey towards becoming a cosmopolite, is now complemented with a sense of multiplicity when he 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 526–527). Hammad’s description

3 Probyn draws on Deleuze’s nomadic approach to movement and becoming, and describes her theory of belonging as “a heightened sensitivity to the sensibilities, to being captured by the manners of being and desires for becoming-other” (5).

of her protagonist's mental state points to both multiple identity disorder and the multiplicity of identity positions, and suggests that his mental condition is a metaphor for 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 that

It was hard to cling onto himself when there were so many others, there were so many other people and they were crowding him out. He tried to summon one of his four ideas of himself ... but he couldn't even locate one. All he had left was this strange cut-out. He was a likeness in reverse. He was a cameo. (Hammad 529)

Seeing himself as a part played, a mere resemblance of who he used to be, incites fear that his "true" identity has forever disappeared behind "conflicting maps" that are the various masks worn. He relapses, feeling "his self dissolving again" (Hammad 530), suggesting a sense of loss due to a desperate yet futile attempt to return to a singular, solid identity.

Amidst the turbulent events of 1936—the riots and strikes, British military "comb-out," and the martial law declared in Palestine (Hammad 647)—what the protagonist experiences may be interpreted as a crisis of the cosmopolitan self, a "condition of self-confrontation," eventually leading to "more reflexive kinds of self-understanding" (Delanty, "The Cosmopolitan Imagination" 38, 42). As Midhat starts recovering, he begins to realise the importance of meaningful relationships and to see himself as he is, without any pretending or performance whatsoever:

Here they all were, watching him return, gently, to this world. Ready to press him back into the shape of a person. ... Without them, he was a body floating in the air. ... His old schematic way of thinking was quite gone. Gone that ability, or propensity, to map one thing onto another. Nothing would ever again be contained by a map. (Hammad 619)

Midhat's determination to take control of his life indicates agency: he may still be the Parisian but has finally let go of identity performances and started to make

peace with his multiple and fluid identity, allegorised by rejecting the map as “positionality, movement and practices” (Pile and Thrift 36), that is, the social and political context, as well as the mobility and practices it enables or requires, which creates one’s identity. This learning process also resonates with the idea of affective cosmopolitanism denoting “the ways in which the self can *learn to be cosmopolitan* by realising a sense of open engagement with the (affect[ive/ed]) body” (Woods 137, emphasis added), as well as the immigrant’s identity re-construction through embodied and lived experience, affective relationships and self-awareness.

CONCLUSION

In Bhabha’s theory, the vernacular cosmopolite’s lack of original identity entails a celebration of difference and privileging the individual, while identifying as one may be regarded as a decision, whether political or moral (Taylor-Collins), a conscious choice of “moving in-between cultural traditions and revealing hybrid forms of life” (Bhabha, *Location* xiii).⁴ Affective cosmopolitanism likewise focuses on the individual but shifts its focus from the mind (decision) to the body, emphasising the process of learning to be a cosmopolite through engagement with the body, which can, in return, “enable a feeling of cosmopolitanism,” based on “the embrace of the unity of embodied affectiveness” (Woods 144). Hammad’s protagonist becomes a local citizen of the world both by learning to accept his right to difference and by learning through bodily engagement. First scared by cosmopolitanism in Constantinople, then getting to appreciate it in Paris and longing for it back in Nablus, Midhat’s character represents “this interplay of the local and the global by which Self and Other interact” and “are transformed” (Delanty, *The Cosmopolitan Imagination* 11). His cosmopolitan self-awakening is a response to a series of affective experiences, in which “the self is freed from the inscriptions of society and culture, and empowered to explore new ways of being in the world” (Woods 137). A gradual and decades-long process, it is manifested in his embodied experience and fostered by his affective relationships and lived experience in cosmopolitan spaces, it involves becoming aware of the endless possibilities of transformation as a means of empowerment, and eventually leads to self-understanding and agency: his identity performance/positioning as the Parisian as a way of rejecting a rigid, national

4 Bhabha provides this definition regarding V. S. Naipaul’s characters, in the Preface to the 2004 edition of *The Location of Culture*.

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identification of the self amidst the turbulent times in the history of Palestine between the two world wars, and constructing a multiple, fluid identity with a cosmopolitan disposition and imagination.

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