

## “Words That Turn Mirrors of Words”: Political Intertextualities in Elias Khoury’s *Children of the Ghetto*

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### Abstract

Twenty years after his monumental *Gate of the Sun*, Elias Khoury returns to the Nakba in *Children of the Ghetto*, evoking it through a more powerful allusion to the Holocaust already apparent in its title. I argue that revisiting the Palestinian trauma, in a complex confrontation with literature, testimony and accountability, is the outcome of a protracted and exhausting failure to reach out and find a listener. Paradoxical as this may seem, it is the novel’s deficiencies of excessive speech and monologism that convincingly capture the Palestinian aporia of a testimony that has no addressee. Through a close reading of several intertexts – *Gate of the Sun*, Anton Shammas’s Hebrew-language novel *Arabesques* and Sami Michael’s *Refuge* – I seek to unravel the relationship between colonial mimicry and cultural appropriation, the representation of trauma and its clichés, and the fragmented identity of Palestinian Israelis, bound by the Jewish question of a traumatized self, and torn between narcissism and melancholy in the possibility of dialogue and self-(mutual-) determination. I argue that while dialogue informs *Gate of the Sun* in its insistence on language’s ability to reach out, *Children of the Ghetto* turns to futile immersion in one’s own words, in an endless paratext. I also examine the way *Children of the Ghetto* avoids one of the fundamental and universal aspects of the Holocaust, that of the “gray zone” where no clear differentiation between perpetrators and victims is possible, a phenomenon which its two intertextual predecessors courageously confront.

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