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**Spatial Checkpoints of Power: A Study of Smooth and Striated Spaces in  
Ghassan Kanfani's "The Land of Sad Oranges" (1962) and Richard Wright's  
"Big Boy Leaves Home" (1938)**

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**Abstract**

Throughout the two short stories "The Land of Sad Oranges" (1962) by Ghassan Kanafani and "Big Boy Leaves Home" (1938) by Richard Wright, spaces are not only created, mapped, and described but also negotiated and changed. Spaces are not passive vessels in which the plot unfolds, but rather directors of action and shapers of identity. Using Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's notions of smooth and striated spaces sheds light on the profound ways in which the state apparatus determines human relations to spaces and geography. The act of crossing borders between different divisions of geography not only brings about transformation but also begets tragedy. The current research demonstrates that different power structures change spaces of freedom to places of confinement through complex transformational interventions aimed at changing smooth spaces' characteristics to striated ones. Those transformations are not final or absolute but partial and gradual.

**Keywords:** space, geography, smooth, power, borders, land, place.

**محطات القوة المكانية: دراسة في الفضاءات الملساء والمخططة في «أرض البرتقال الحزين» لغسان كنفاني (1962) و«بيغ بوي يغادر المنزل» لريتشارد رايت (1938)**

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**ملخص**

في القصتين القصيرتين "أرض البرتقال الحزين" (1962) لغسان كنفاني و"بيغ بوي يغادر المنزل" (1938) لريتشارد رايت لم تخلق الفضاءات وتتسع وتوصف فحسب، بل تصبح أيضاً محلّ للتفاوض والتغير المستمر. إن الفضاء في هذا السياق ليس وعاءً خاوياً تكشف داخله الحكمة، ولكنه محرك للأحداث ومكون للهوية. يسلط استخدام مفهومي الفضاء المهد والفضاء المخطط لجبل دولوز وفيليكس جوتاري الضوء على الأساليب المركبة والعميقة التي تحدد أجهزة الدولة من خلالها علاقات البشر بالفضاء والجغرافيا. لا يؤدي اجتياز الحدود الفاصلة بين التقسيمات الجغرافية إلى التحول والتغير فحسب، بل إلى التراجيديا. توضح الورقة البحثية أن هياكل القوة المختلفة تحول فضاءات الحرية إلى أماكن تقويع وتقييد من خلل عمليات تحويل معقدة تهدف إلى تغيير خصائص الفضاءات الممهدة لتصبح فضاءات مخططة، إلا أن هذه العمليات ليست نهائية ولا مطلقة ولكنها جزئية وتدرجية.

## Introduction

History has been the major tenant of metanarratives, offering classifications, insights, and meanings based on peoples' and nations' place in time. Such philosophical preoccupation with history has been reflected on both politics and literature, so as to account for power dynamics and different sources of injustices organized in chronology. Such is the case with postcolonial studies to cite one example. Nevertheless, with the shift to postmodernism, metanarratives have declined, and history has been given less magnitude than geography.

The spatial turn manifests the postmodern sense of unbelonging, in-betweenness, and liminality. Metaphors of space are representative of the postmodern condition as a vacuum and a world without a center. Philosophers believe that the postmodern world witnessed a shift in meaning-making from a historical understanding and organization of thought to a geographical one. In addition, space manifests power relations "as a hyperspace that produces derivative spaces, as a referent for an experience of the real, as a product of speech, and as a construct of social forces and power discourses" (Tally 13). The current research investigates geographical relations in two short stories marked by their focus on resistance of power through movement in space and changing its characteristics. The paper examines two types of space in Ghassan Kanfani's "The Land of Sad Oranges" (1962) and Richard Wright's "Big Boy Leaves Home" (1938); namely, smooth and striated spaces.

First, the three terms referring to space, milieu, and place are not used interchangeably in the current research; the points of similarity and those of difference between them are set out to avoid confusion and misinterpretation. Spaces have long been treated as homogeneous and generic, particularly in literary criticism. For instance, the most prominent manifestation of space in literature is the setting. Setting "in literature, the location and time frame in which the action of a narrative takes place" ("Setting"), may also "be an actual city or region made greater than life, as in James Joyce's characterization of Dublin, to "be completely the work of an author's imagination" ("Setting"). The sole distinction in the above-mentioned definition is that between real and imaginary places. Nevertheless, location gives precedence to action or matter that bestows importance on space. Thus, a milieu is not a natural space, but a space accentuating the human agency in its creation and representation as "milieus are

created by action, but at the same time, they are modeling the human actors who have constructed them" (Tally 17). On the other hand, places and spaces are different because they instigate diverse feelings in their inhabitants' psyches. Yi-Fu Tuan suggests that "place is security, space is freedom: we are attached to the one and long for the other" (3). As such, using space or place is heavily dependent upon the characters' emotions toward geography.

The study of literature in relation to place had initially been known as regionalism. Such a broad connection between disciplines has not stood the test of time for several reasons. With the advent of globalization, life forms within rural spaces, as William Mallory suggests, became irrelevant in a cultural sense. In "Anytime the Ground is Uneven: The Outlook for Regional Studies and What to Look For," he clarifies the opposition between regional culture and urban culture through the way critics define each. He

states: "regional fiction is defined in terms of what it is not: it is not about big city life, not about life with which the critic is acquainted" (Mallory 2). Because culture is space-bound, "our inherited understanding of what culture is and where it is found causes us to view life outside urban centers as the domain of the uncivilized" (Mallory 3). Significantly, the two short stories at hand belong to underrepresented regions that in no way belong to the idea of the global city. Accordingly, investigating spaces of both texts brings to the fore two cases of marginalized cultures and their relationships to geography as "geography is not an inert container, is not a box, where cultural history 'happens,' but an active force, that pervades the literary field and shapes it in depth" (Moretti 3). In the seminal work *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari introduce multifaceted applications of their notions of smooth and striated spaces that attempt to demonstrate how spaces participate in human lives.

Deleuze and Guattari's interdisciplinary orientation is in compliance with the postmodern condition:

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, the second volume of their *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* project, Deleuze and Guattari distinguished between a smooth (heterogeneous) and a striated (homogeneous) space. The latter functions as a locus for the state apparatus and, being a sedentary space, is 'striated by walls, enclosures, and roads between enclosures.' While a smooth space is directional rather than dimensional or metric, intensive rather than extensive, and a 'Body without Organs' instead of an organism or organization. In a striated space, lines or trajectories tend to be subordinated to points, contrary to a smooth space in which points are subordinated to trajectories. Despite the dissymmetrical mixes between these two spaces, there are simple oppositions between them. (Tally 23)

The theory of smooth and striated spaces is politically saturated and literary enlightening. The two French theorists offer five models of understanding the similarities and differences between smooth and striated spaces as part of their larger intervention of deciphering the capitalist condition and its philosophy. Those models cover various domains, including the maritime, the mathematical, the technological, the physical, and the aesthetic domains. The theorists provide inexhaustive examples of numerous relationships between smooth and striated spaces through the above-mentioned models. Noticeably, examining both types of spaces in two literary texts on geographical oppression reveals that the mechanisms of power worked through, in, and out of space.

If power dynamics are to be investigated from a spatial perspective, resistance tactics should naturally follow the same path. The Palestinian diaspora and racial segregation in the United States lend themselves to spatial interpretation. Although the two narratives belong to two disparate and distant continents and cultures, space plays a significant role in the acts of oppression and resistance of the two peoples. On the one hand, the Palestinian conflict is primarily a territorial one. That is to say, the land is the physical and metaphorical site of struggle. As a result, the land becomes in itself a symbol of Palestinian identity. On the other hand,

the American national identity is essentially extraterritorial. That is, the essence of America is found not in particular places but in an idea. . . American historiography has until recently subordinated section or region, and the diversity of people and

places, to the idea of America. American history has not denied that the nation was consolidated out of opposing forces representing different sections, groups, and regions; but emphasis has been on homogeneity and centralization—on the emergence of what, with respect to governance, economy, and culture generally, was common to all parts of the country. (Mallory 4)

Nonetheless, racism and racial discrimination necessitate spatial segregation. Consequently, the American South becomes outstanding in its preservation of the American national identity while at the same time experiencing territorial identification and otherness. For Michel Foucault, space is a site of power practice, whether in its formation or its marking. Accordingly, it can also be a place of resistance and power subversion (Tally 22). Foucault asserts that "the power exercised on the body is conceived not as a property but as a strategy; that its effect of domination are attributed not to appropriation, but to dispositions, manoeuvres, tactics..." (Foucault 26).

Ghassan Kanfani's short story "The Land of Sad Oranges," published in 1962, places its characters in a remarkable time and place. Right before the Nakba, a Palestinian family is forced to leave Akka for the Israeli settlers. Kanfani's characters symbolically move from the center of their world to the periphery of geography as they turn from citizens to refugees. Since Akka is located on the coast of the Mediterranean, the road from there to the Lebanese border combines the smooth and the striated. On this journey, people move along the concrete lines separating the directional and the dimensional, as well as those distinguishing between territorial sovereignties while maintaining the sense of connection between these binaries. Similarly, in Richard Wright's "Big Boy Leaves Home" (1938), the young African American protagonist runs away from the American South to escape punishment for crossing the borders between races and between properties. Despite the fact that the act of spatial transgression does not influence the protagonist's national identity, it impacts the social division of latitude.

As Tally suggests, the sea and lakes are smooth spaces par excellence. Water imagery in "Big Brother Leaves Home" represents the perfect space that unifies and possesses no power of division on racial, class, or gender bases. In Erich Neumann's *Origins and History of Consciousness*, he discusses the ancient Egyptian view of water as both good mother and terrible mother. The good mother is the water that cushions the fetus in the womb, whereas the terrible mother is the destructive power of the flood, the devouring deep (Webb 7). However, such a perfectly smooth space turns through power labeling into a striated one, in the act of creating private swimming pools and neighborhood pools, allowing some groups of people in and shutting others out. Through the dialogue between the boys on whether or not it is the right decision to use the pool, the reader infers the processes through which spaces turn into places sheltered from communication between dominant and marginalized races and classes:

Bobo said, "Yuh know ol man Harvey don erllow no niggers t swim in this hole."

"Mean ain no dogs n niggers erllowed," said Buck.

"The white folks got plenty swimmin pools n we ain got none."

"Ah useta swim in the ol Mississippi when we lived in Vicksburg." (Wright 33)

In this instance, the Mississippi conforms with the unitary force inherited in smooth spaces. Conversely,

the white stained swimming pool renders a replica of increasingly controllable features to striate the smoothness of water surfaces. In short, swimming becomes equality that extends from space to the floating inhabitants thereof. In other words, swimming is a mode of existence that is not marked or traceable, which suggests a free flow of the body.

In their book, Deleuze and Guattari compare the dominant metaphors of spatial manifestations in the East and the West, arguing that “the West has a special relation to the forest. . . the East. . . a relation to the steppe and the garden (or in some cases, the desert and the oasis), rather than the forest and field” (18). Interestingly, the two persistent metaphors of geography are represented in their respective lots in the American and the Palestinian short stories. In Wright's text, the forest is the smooth space of enjoyment and communion that is altered through segregation and violence. The image of the tree is reminiscent of slavery and torture as much as it conjures vegetation and freedom. On the Eastern side, oranges die with their peoples' movement to the city and thus their diaspora.

In both short stories, space is horizontally depicted and sensed to resemble Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome. The reader does not feel a vertical navigation through space that is more connected to city life. Characters in "The Land of Sad Oranges" are forced to leave their hometown and move forward to neighboring cities like Saida to be replaced by Israeli settlers: "when we left Yaffa to Akka, I felt no agony. It was like going from a city to another for a holiday" (Kanafani 1). However, the site of struggle is the land rather than the domestic milieu symbolized by the house, which the protagonist, child as he is, could not comprehend. Similarly, in "Big Boy Leaves Home," the African American boys wander around the neighborhood to heighten their sense of freedom of movement. Moving in the forest and from one striated space to another is a recurrent motif underscoring the psychological impact of spaces on the characters.

With the spatial transformation, characters' psychological and physical states are deeply altered. In the Palestinian short story, the child protagonist associates the atmosphere and ecology with space. He declares, "the car started moving and Akka started to fade little by little, through the ascending, zigzag road that led to Ra'ss- Ennakoura" and "the sky was cloudy, a touch of cold air chilled my body" (Kanfani 2). The zigzag road complies with the diasporic condition of the characters. It resembles a maze in which the destination is not visible, but the direction is unalterable and predetermined. Such is the striated space par excellence. The protagonist adds, "all along the way there were orange groves. A sense of fear and anxiety spread over

everyone. The car moved with difficulty over the wet soil, and from a distance, we heard the sound of gun shots as if bidding us farewell" (Kanfani 2). At that particular moment, the sight of orange lands turns from a source of safety, ease, and belonging to an instigator of fear. Hence, displacement is equated with disconnection. Throughout the narrative, spaces and milieus inform the family's psychological states.

Oranges are metaphors of personal acts of mapping. Instead of human-drawn lines and borders, orange farms represent the material center of the territory that is ours as a map is "a representation founded on a language whose characteristic is to build the analogical image of a place" (Lévy 128). During their displacement, the protagonist confesses that "at that moment [he] realized that oranges are something precious, and that they are dear to [their] hearts" (Kanfani 2). Roads, which are striated spaces, stand for danger, exclusion, and even immorality. In both texts, the city with its buildings, means of transportation, highways, and roads constitute the sites of suffering as "the city is the striated space par excellence; the sea is a smooth space fundamentally open to striation, and the city is the force of striation that reimports smooth space, puts it back into operation everywhere" (Deleuze and Guattari 481). The Palestinian family goes through a road journey to oblivion as the child declares: "the road absorbed us among many other things. Your father suddenly became older than before" (Kanfani 2). Roads lead to various destinations as they disconnect and isolate, according to the single direction chosen in advance. Moreover, the child's stream of consciousness uncovers the psychological connotations of roads as opposed to houses or natural spaces, as he reveals, "thinking that I am going to spend the night on the pavement filled my spirit with dreadful nightmares" (Kanfani 2). Roads are milieus in that they are imagined, created, and maintained by the human agency and the power of the state. As such, roads are entirely liable to power practices with no sense of equal or free access. Accordingly, the road is a contaminating force: "your uncle wasn't a man of real values, and when he found himself on the road, he became more savage" (Kanfani 3). Likewise, Big Boy feels alarmed when he hears or sees a car or a train: "in the distance he heard the approach of a train. It jarred him back to a sharp sense of danger" (Wright 52). Wright even compares between the striated and the symbol of the smooth as the boys "could see the open road leading home, home to ma and pa. But they hung back, afraid. The thick shadows cast from the trees were friendly and sheltering" (Wright 65). The writers' merging between roads and smooth spaces symbolizes the lack of rigid borders between the two types of spaces and their liability to transformation.

The horizontal geography of the land is parallel to the linearity of the protagonists' lives. The characters' personal history is like a rhizome that extends through the space of the narrative. Kanfani's protagonist "ran away from the house, toward the hills. The further [he] ran from the house, the further [he] felt [himself] moving away from [his] childhood" (Kanfani 4). Furthermore, he remarks that "The happy, strong-bonded family we had once been was left behind along with the orange groves, the old house, and the martyrs" (Kanfani 3). The once-happy family is essentially connected to geography. The writer suggests that happiness and joy in his narrative are spatially bound. In "Big Boy Leaves Home", the boys' sense of joy is spiritually and psychologically connected to earth and trees: "they laughed again. Their shoulders were flat to the earth, their knees propped up, and their faces square to the sun" (Wright 26).

Natural spaces are partially outside of human oppressive power and thus demonstrate the values of freedom, belonging, and emancipation in the two texts. On the Palestinian side, the land of oranges gives consistency and stability to the people's bond with national identity. On the American side, trees, water, and earth symbolize freedom and equality for African Americans.

“Man, don the groun feel warm?”

“Jus lika bed.”

“Jeeesus, Ah could stay here ferever.”

“Me too.”

“Ah kin feel tha ol sun goin all thu me.”

“Feels like mah bones is warm.” (Wright 26)

The African American boys feel the capacity to communicate with the smooth land that infuses their bodies with warmth. However, the white man's emergence turns smooth space into striated space through the acts of chasing, hiding, and escaping. Big Brother uses elements of nature in his running away to convert the directional to dimensional. In his attempts to run away, Big Boy's relationship with nature changes. When he heads to the railway station, he approaches the forest as a striated space that either hides or reveals, a place of defeat or victory, “fearing every clump of shrubbery, every tree” (Wright 52). Furthermore, the characters' first encounter with the other coincides with a dimensional perception of the setting where the sense of division invades natural space. Wright puts the boys in opposition to the white woman who “poised on the edge of the opposite embankment, stood directly in front of them, her hat in her hand and her hair lit by the sun” (Wright 36). Moreover, the precise mathematical measurement of distance and proximity in this instance is underscored to mark the transition from smooth to striated space. The white woman stood “twenty-five feet away” from the boys (Wright 37).

Crossing the power-imposed borders between milieus constitutes the center of tragedy and transformation in both texts. In “The Land of Sad Oranges,” crossing the borders between two countries marks a transformation of identity. Kanfani underscores this metamorphosis in a stark remark on the exact moment in which this huge transformation takes place: “when we reached Saida, in the afternoon, we became refugees” (Kanfani 2). The word refugee highlights the sense of liminality, spatial ambivalence, and subjugation to power forces. That is to say, people do not become refugees historically but geographically. As such, this constitutes a significant case in which slight movement in space causes detrimental lifelong consequences. In the American South, the four boys “climbed over a barbed-wire fence and entered a stretch of thick woods” (Wright 31). This symbolic crossing of racial borders brings about a long narrative of bloodshed and unending attempts at escaping.

The finale of both stories demonstrates the irreversibility of spatial alterations; with all the changes they inflict on human life. The land of oranges permanently disappears for the Palestinian refugees carrying with it their roots and identities. The only orange they have rots to put an end to all their bonds to the land as the

child clarifies: "I snuck into the room, an outcast. I saw your father's face quiver with broken rage, and I saw, at the same time, that black pistol on the low table. Near it was orange. The orange was wrinkled and dry" (Kanfani 4). As for Big Boy, although he succeeds in escaping to the north, his journey of escape does not come to an end; he remains stuck in the void as every place is not his and every milieu is fearful, and safety can be found nowhere.

Literary texts do not exist in a void but in spatial networks. Historically, fiction has always been perceived as action revealed in place, which is the setting. Traditionally, settings have been either an entire work of imagination that defies the characteristics of space as readers know it or a realistic space that should conform to its earthly referent. However, in both cases, the setting has been deemed static and fixed.

Power and resistance create novel relationships to places as they involve stark differentiations between 'real' space and personal space. Put differently, in this regard 'personal' refers not to the individual but to the communal and social. This is because oppression and resistance generate processes of negotiation. Similar to the dichotomy of institutional versus personalized histories, geography is divided into "representations of space (space perceived by planners, etc., and drawn on maps, diagrams), and representational space (imagined by writers and artists)" (Tally 20). Representations of space cannot be fully grasped in separation from power structures.

Power implements a highly intricate process of subjugation and segregation through transforming smooth spaces into striated ones. Comparing two cases of space transformation from the smooth to the striated unveils how war and displacement, on the one hand, and violence and segregation, on the other, result in similar affective processes of resistance. In the Palestinian narrative, forced displacement leads to a quest for collective existence in different lands that is characterized by movements from one striated space to another. Accordingly, striated spaces, causing the Palestinian diaspora, do not separate Palestinians from one another but disconnect *them* from their identity. Racial segregation of African Americans, on the other hand, leads to an individual escape attempt. This escape is doomed to fail as the African American body is in itself branded by power structures so as not to be able to exist outside of its corporal prison. The Palestinian struggle works in the opposite direction. Palestinian characters strive to psychologically and physically move back to their space of freedom, while the African American characters seek their liberty outside of the borders of marked blackness and territoriality. Not only do nation states set borders and rules that govern movement within and between them, but they also attempt to obliterate the possibility of 'a way out' through blocking directional democratic spaces and placing symbolic walls on them. Those walls are the checkpoints of power ensuring the durability of spatial oppression.

### **Conflicts of interest**

**The author certifies that she has no affiliations or involvement with any organization or entity with any financial or non-financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.**

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