You Are What You Speak: The Secret Language of an Iraqi Girl

Hana Askren

Institute of Islamic Studies
McGill University, Montreal

August 2006
A thesis submitted to McGill University in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts

Your file Votre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-32501-8
Our file Notre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-32501-8

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Abstract

In this thesis I discuss the technical linguistic aspects of ʿĀliya Mamdūḥ's *Ḥabbat al-naftālīn* using postcolonial language theory, showing how these techniques contribute to Mamdūḥ's literary goals. This is in contrast to much of English scholarship on Arab women authors, which has instead focused mainly on the social and political questions that Arab women's writing raises. Mamdūḥ uses circular language and a child's narrative voice in order to portray her narrator growing up in 1950's Baghdad. The Arabic in the novel is a hybrid, mixed language with elements of classical language, colloquial language and Iraqi/Baghdadi dialect, and it facilitates the expression of women in the novel. Mamdūḥ intertwines these language techniques with politics, fear and history to create a uniquely postcolonial work that explores women's words, women's stories, and women's agency.

Résumé

Ce mémoire de recherche utilise la théorie de la langue postcoloniale pour analyser les aspects linguistiques techniques du roman *Ḥabbat al-naftālīn* d'Āliya Mamdūḥ. Il montre comment ces techniques servent les buts littéraires de Mamdūḥ. Cette démarche s'oppose á la majorité de la littérature anglophone sur les auteurs arabes, qui s'est principalement concentrée sur les questions sociales et politiques soulevées par l'écriture des femmes arabes. Mamdūḥ utilise une langue circulaire et une voix narrative enfantine pour représenter sa narratrice qui grandit á Bagdad dans les années 1950. L'Arabe dans le roman est hybride: langue mixte mêlant éléments de la langue classique, langage familier et dialecte Irakien/Bagdadi, il facilite l'expression des femmes dans le roman. Mamdūḥ mêle ces techniques linguistiques avec la politique, la peur et l'histoire afin de créer une œuvre postcoloniale unique qui explore les mots des femmes, leurs histoires, et leur action.

Acknowledgements

I would like to show my great appreciation for Michelle Hartman for being easy to talk to and always constructive, and also for being incredibly demanding. I would also like to thank everyone at the Islamic Studies Institute, especially Kirsty McKinnon and Ann Yaxley, for providing technical and administrative support when I needed it, as well as Laila Parsons, for learning from her students as well as teaching them.

A special thanks to Adam Zolkover and Joslyn Trowbridge for their eager comments on the final draft.

And to David Mendelsohn, for encouraging me not to take things too seriously.

Notes

Note on translation: All quotes from the novel will be provided in both Arabic and English. Because of technical word-processing considerations, single words, phrases and short sentences will be provided in a footnote.

Note on the edition: There are two English editions of *Ḥabbāt al-naftālīn.* All references in this thesis refer to the 1996 edition, *Mothballs: A Story of Baghdad,* as the newer edition was not available at the time. Both the Arabic and the English page numbers will be given with a slash (/) between them, the Arabic page number coming first. For example, 28/17 refers to page 28 in the Arabic version and page 17 in the English version.

Note on names: All names of characters from *Ḥabbāt al-naftālīn* have been transliterated. All other Arabic names have been left in the same form as the source from which they were quoted (for example, when discussing an article written in English, I have left Salwa Bakr's name as it was printed without transliterating it).

Introduction

The goal of creative writing is to produce something new, something different, something that has not been seen before; the goal is to *create*. Writers of fiction put words together in new combinations in order to tell a story, make a statement, describe an experience, or impart something unique in a unique way. Iraqi novelist ʿĀliya Mamdūḥ considers the creative aspect of her writing so fundamental and formative as to give rise to a new language. In a non-fiction piece entitled "Baghdad: These Cities Dying in Our Arms," she writes that "a secret language has formed inside of our Arabic language" (Mamdūḥ in Burrell 43). Her fiction is the instrument with which she transmits this "secret language."

Language is not always the first point of reference in discussions of Arab women's writing. Many notable English-language scholars on Arab women's writing have largely neglected questions of writing style, focusing instead on larger social issues or political agendas. Some scholars, like Evelyne Accad and Fedwa Malti-Douglas, have an activist, feminist agenda. For example, Accad uses literature in *Sexuality and War: Literary Masks of the Middle East* to support her claim that wars in the Middle East are caused by the masculine aggression of a patriarchal society. She openly and frequently advocates "a basic change of values, the development of feelings of love, sharing, forgiveness, tolerance, and acceptance of the other" (Accad 30). Her use of the pronoun "I" in expressions like "I believe" and "I was struck by" demonstrate her personal

stake in the message of her book. In her analysis of Hanan al-Shaykh, Etel Adnan, and others, she highlights their portrayals of patriarchy, sexuality, and nationalism in keeping with her vision of a Lebanon fraught with problems of gender and sexuality. If she discusses particulars of style or literary technique, it is only to give a brief example of how style mirrors content in a particular place. Her politically charged thesis informs every point of analysis, and her conclusion is a call to activism to her readers.

Likewise, Fedwa Malti-Douglas, in her book *Woman's Body, Woman's Word: Gender and Discourse in Arabo-Islamic Writing,* looks at Nawal el-Saadawi, Assia Djebar and other writers primarily through a feminist lens and only occasionally though a literary lens as she follows the Arabo-Islamic literary discourse from classical to modern times. As she moves from discussing representations of women in men's literature to women's own contributions to literature, she consistently claims that "woman's voice in Arabo-Islamic discourse is indissolubly tied to sexuality and the body" (Malti-Douglas 10). Her main argument is that the body, specifically woman's body in literature, is a charged site of conflict, tension, and gender concerns. As Arab women found their literary voice during the last century, these same concerns shifted from women's bodies to their words; but the sexual politics remained.

Other scholars have attempted to categorize Arab women's literature in order to trace its development over time – but they have done this categorization along thematic, not stylistic, lines. Sabry Hafez's "Women's Narrative in Modern Arabic Literature: A Typology" and Joseph Zeidan's *Arab Women*

Novelists: The Formative Years and Beyond both put forward two similar typologies constructed around feminism and politics rather than literary style. Hafez holds that Arab women's writing has progressed in three phases of increasing maturity and complexity, incorporating more and wider social and national issues; Zeidan also describes three phases in which this writing progresses from a focus on personal issues to a focus on issues of national identity. These two scholars attempt to place Arab women's writing in a social, political and historical framework, reading the works in order to understand something about Arab women's engagement with and portrayal of their society, finding a "textual equivalent" of "social conditions" (Hafez 173). They privilege literature from which they can extract a nationalist or political agenda over literature in which these concerns are in the background, or not present at all.

Likewise, the anthology *Opening the Gates: A Century of Arab Feminist Writing*, edited by Margot Badran and Mirian Cooke, is organized in three sections: "Awareness," "Rejection," and "Activism." The editors' introduction deals with issues of feminism, women's access to education and publication, women's social liberation, and the history of women's writing in the public sphere. While much of the writing contained in the anthology is fiction, the editors pay little attention to questions of the development of the style or literary technique of these works. Likewise, the compilation *Intersections: Gender, Nation and Community in Arab Women's Novels,* edited by Lisa Suhair Majaj, Paula W. Sunderman, and Therese Saliba contains many informative essays about feminism, war, transnationalism, and societal changes, but very few about

writing style.

Not all scholars use literature solely to distill truths about society, privileging that kind of reading over a reading that emphasizes literary significance. There are a few scholars who have highlighted the linguistic peculiarities of the writing they examine while connecting the language issues to the political ones. Nadia Elia's chapter in *Intersections*, "The Fourth Language: Subaltern Expression in Djebar's *Fantasia*" discusses Djebar's oscillation between French and Arabic as a way of expressing the alterity that cannot be articulated fully in either language. She talks about the language Djebar uses to depict the polyphonic and varied women's voices in the novel. Similarly, Caroline Seymour Jorn, in her article "A New Language: Salwa Bakr on Depicting Egyptian Women's Worlds," describes Salwa Bakr's creation of a feminine literary language and the specifically literary techniques she uses to accomplish this. She connects Bakr's writing strategies to her desire to "disrupt the status quo, condemn the structure of relations, the concepts, values and norms that prevail in Egyptian society" (Jorn 160). Thus she points out the link between language and social issues. Michelle Hartman also discusses the politics of language in her analysis of Andrée Chedid's *La maison sans racines.* In her article "Multiple Identities, Multiple Voices: Reading Andrée Chedid's *La maison sans racines,*" she proposes an intertextual reading of the epigraphs in the novel in an "attempt to underline the connections between Chedid's work and an Arab cultural context" (Hartman 55). The interplay between the Arabic and French languages and cultures, as shown by the epigraphs, is a means for Chedid

to question the ideas of "home" and "roots," while inhabiting a space between cultures. Elia, Jorn and Hartman are some of the scholars who treat language as an important facet of literary discussion as well as a vehicle for the exposition of social issues.

My study falls into this second category of scholarship, that which studies language as the primary point of analysis. I argue in this thesis that the innovation of the "secret language" formed by Mamdūḥ's writing is a unique literary product that follows from the techniques she uses in her novel *Ḥabbāt al-naftālīn*. The circular and self-referential narrative voice is one technique which makes the language seem secret and self-contained. Mamdūḥ's distinctive use of Arabic creates a hybrid classical/colloquial language suited to her story. I will show how these innovations, together with other literary techniques, help to create the particular language of this novel and to inscribe her identity as an Iraqi woman. I could not have made these arguments without first studying Mamdūḥ's literary techniques, as my arguments are based on the literary language of the novel. I hope that my study will add to the growing body of work that emphasizes the literary merits of Arab women's writing, forming an expansion of the scope of the dominant discourse of social projects and exotic stereotypes.

Language and politics are inseparable, as the study of literature involves a complex dynamic between the expectations and assumptions of readers and reviewers, voices of public opinion, scholars, and the force of the author's own voice. Just as politics and ideas about feminism and women's oppression can

form the main focus of scholarly writing to the detriment of literary discussions, these issues can influence popular readings of a book as well. In this light, I will consider the English media reception of the 2005 edition of *Ḥabbāt al-naftālīn* (republished in English by the Feminist Press at the City University of New York as *Naphtalene: A Novel of Baghdad*). The reviews of this book expose some of the assumptions and misreadings that have surfaced because of the reviewers' preconceived notions about what kind of a book *Ḥabbāt al-naftālīn* is. These misreadings have come partly from the exotic associations attached to Arab women, and partly from reviewers' attention to flashy topics like oppression and violence. It is telling that the reviews I discuss below cater to stereotypes while they ignore the unique aspects of the novel.

Even more than literary theorists, reviewers for newspapers and magazines have devoted an inordinate amount of time and energy to the social aspects of the novel and hardly any time to its literary aspects, often missing important details. *Ḥabbāt al-naftālīn* is a semi-autobiographical story of a young girl in Baghdad in the 1950's. Hudā, the narrator, passes her adolescent years playing and growing up in her neighborhood with her brother and friends, noticing the changes occurring as she gets older and as Iraq moves closer to revolution. Although one of the main events in *Ḥabbāt al-naftālīn* is Hudā's coming-of-age, along with her friends both male and female, nearly every review mentions the restrictions on women and the "severe division of men and women in Iraqi society" (Brozio-Andrews 46). A page of synopsis immediately inside the cover of *Naphtalene* (perhaps a preface – it is not clear where this page

comes from, who wrote it, or why it is there) includes the heavily clichéd phrase "oppressive patriarchal society."

The reviews of *Naphtalene* do emphasize the dominant presence of women that is an undeniable facet of the book – most of the characters, especially the stronger ones, are women. The reviewers note that Hudā is a tomboy and that she plays rough and speaks loudly. But their focus on the gender concerns of the novel downplays the coming-of-age aspect of the story, instead providing an image of a society with men and women in total opposition. The women are always the weaker side, marked by "helplessness and rage" (Straight 90), locked in a "world made up of women but dominated by men" (Amendolia 3). The powerful and varied women's voices are swallowed up by the reviewers who underline cross-gender divisions rather than female agency, circumscribed though it may be.

There is no doubt that Mamdūḥ's female characters are restricted by social norms of dress and behavior, and that men play a part in this restriction. But Hudā spends far more time wandering among the women and observing them as people than documenting men's actions toward them. She looks at her grandmother with awe, her mother with love, and her lesbian aunts with confusion; she describes the removal of her aunt Farīda's body hair for her wedding in intimate and painful detail. She annoys the women in the public bath by skidding and sliding into their laps. Thus, there is a disconnect between the large world of women described by the book and the narrow world described in the reviews.

The contents of the book – its stories, characters and images – will frustrate many expectations of Arab women based on stereotypes of passivity and weakness. Hudā is a loud and outspoken child, and the women of her family are anything but passive. Although Farīda submits to a traditional wedding and marries her cousin Munīr, she is so enraged by his absence that she violently assaults him upon his return. Hudā's grandmother is the matriarch of the house, to whose judgment even her father Jamīl defers. The women speak freely and coarsely, pray at the mosque, and do not act like victims of an oppressive religion or society. Mamdūḥ herself has written that men are not the worst perpetrators of physical and moral "excesses," writing that women in her society "were even more tyrannical and moralistic than the men" (Mamdūḥ in Faqir 65). A reader expecting to find caricatures of victimized women and tyrannical men will be surprised to find women doing violence to each other as well as to men. Mamdūḥ's characters are too complex to be pigeonholed merely on the basis of their gender.

The foreword to *Naphtalene*, written by Hélene Cixous, is markedly distinct from most other writing about it. In her foreword, Cixous highlights the poetic aspects of the novel's language, Hudā's volatile personality, and the child's narrative voice. This foreword is written in the same kind of dreamy language as the book, and it is a fitting introduction. It does not mention Islam, oppression, patriarchy, or the veil, affirming that men and women are "never reduced in this text to a banal opposition between sexes and emotions" (Cixous

vi-vii). Cixous discusses Mamdūḥ's literary techniques and effects, taking the book on its own literary terms.

Mamdūḥ herself has expressed concern about the way her books are being read outside the Arab world. As Amal Amireh shows in her article, "Publishing in the West: Problems and Prospects for Arab Women Writers," she "makes it clear that she is suspicious of the attention her own writing is getting outside the Arab world. But she believes this attention is ultimately for her benefit since it allows her to present nuanced work that enlightens and provokes Western readers, instead of merely confirming their ready-made assumptions and prejudices" (Amireh 1). Mamdūḥ is committed to transmitting her Iraqi heritage and to writing her identity. She resists stereotypes and categories, writing "I'm from Baghdad. I am neither a conservative nor a feminist..." (Mamdūḥ in IPW 61). Aware of the problems of reception, she tries to actively contend with these problems in her work. She writes explicitly of "what the West does" with Arabic literature and culture:

> Such activities construct a gaze that remains characterized by simplification, abridgement, and condescension. It is as if they are saying to us, or to themselves: Come, now, let us read or listen to the wailing, the muttering, of those writers, men and women, for that is all we hear. This is why a writer or book may 'explode' here in the West, because the writer or book pleased and delighted the westerner with an exotic quality. For the West is the giver of blessings and medals, and the strict arbiter of pleasures and titles. We must say 'I' in all simplicity, with a refined simplicity if we are truly to be the masters of our own words. (Mamdūḥ in Burrell 43-44)

Methodology

My methodological approach uses postcolonial and feminist theory with a focus on language in order to incorporate the microtextual aspects of Mamdūḥ's language (fragmentation, circularity, colloquial language) with the macrotextual aspects of the book (women's writing, postcolonial writing, national identity). I believe that elements of postcolonial language theory will best help me to delve into the particulars of linguistic variation while connecting my analysis to contextual issues like history, reception, politics, and gender.

The term "postcolonial" can be broadly applied to literature from any country which has been previously colonized, but has also been applied to minority literatures within countries that have never been colonized. Shohat and Stam have brought attention to the many problems with the term "postcolonial" in their book *Unthinking Eurocentrism.* They point out that the "post" is not merely chronological, denoting a time period after colonialism, but that it also implies "going beyond anticolonial nationalist theory" (Shohat and Stam 38). The term also tends to obscure the distinctions between, on the one hand, the concerns and power dynamics resulting from the European colonization of indigenous populations like India, and on the other hand, the relationship between European settler elites and their metropole, not to mention power discrepancies within European and Western countries (Shohat and Stam 38). The "post" also implies that colonialism has ended, obscuring "the deformative traces of colonialism in the present" (Shohat and Stam 40). The term is non-

specific in time and in space and ends up with ambiguous and variously interpreted connotations.

I have nonetheless chosen to characterize *Ḥabbāt al-naftālīn* as "postcolonial" for two reasons: it takes place during a time when Iraq had just received nominal independence from the British but was struggling to gain real independence; and as a woman writing within European patriarchal society, writing about an Iraqi patriarchal society, 'Aliya Mamdūḥ can be described as "writing from the margins." The issues of foreign domination and control enter into this work as in many other postcolonial works.[1] Issues of personal and familial domination and control make up the thematic fabric of this book and parallel, in certain ways, the political issues.

One thing that makes postcolonial authors so interesting and what brings them together as a group is the kind of creation that they are trying to do. Though they work in a variety of languages, themes, styles, and with a variety of goals (from national liberation to literary innovation to personal catharsis), they are all trying to create something new from the pieces of a history fraught with problems of power. They are trying to create something new from a history of dominance and submission, resistance and violence, wars of gender and of language. All of the pieces of the past are incorporated into their creations, making postcolonial literature one of the most unique, complex and hybrid types of literature. In spite of the problems with the term "postcolonial," I have found it and the theory behind it to be a useful framework for analysis of this book.

[1] See works by Assia Djebar, Arundhati Roy, and Hanan al-Shaykh, among others.

I will use elements of postcolonial language theory developed by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin in *The Empire Writes Back* as my guide in analyzing Mamdūḥ's "secret language." Their theory speaks of linguistic variations such as code-switching, glossing, and syntactic fusion as strategies authors use to express their identities. Although their theory was developed mainly in order to analyze the English language and the literature of former British colonies, the theory can be aptly applied to Arabic, with some modifications. For example, Arabic diglossia is analogous to other diglossic languages. Also, the juxtaposition of a "formal" language (English) with a "vernacular" (native language) parallels the situation in Arab countries where standard Arabic is used for writing, while dialects are a spoken language of common use. Moreover, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin's general theory of writing "from the margins" (Ashcroft et al 265) can and should be applied to a novel from the Middle East which has been translated into English and other powerful "prestige" languages.

"Writing from the margins" and attempting to create something new requires the postcolonial author to clear a linguistic space for her new creation. A history of colonization and decolonization brings unwanted baggage from the culture of the colonizers with it, and much postcolonial creative writing must deal with this baggage by clearing it away. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin have called this first step *abrogation*: "a refusal of the categories of the imperial culture, its aesthetic, its illusory standard of normative or 'correct' usage, and its assumption of a traditional and fixed meaning inscribed in the words" (Ashcroft

et al 38). Thus the author rejects categories and language traditions that serve the needs of those in power. The second step is the process of making the language work for the author's intentions: "the process by which the language is taken and made to 'bear the burden' of one's own cultural experience..." (Ashcroft et al 38). Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin have called this second step *appropriation.* Language appropriation allows the author to invent her own mode of expression to serve her own needs. This twofold approach is a process by which the author takes the power of language into her own hands and uses it to create literature that addresses her concerns.

Mamdūḥ uses this abrogation/appropriation strategy in many ways. One important technique she uses that I will discuss in "Chapter One: Writing in Circles" is a shifting narrative style. *Ḥabbāt al-naftālīn* is narrated by a child, and the narrative follows her whim, coming in jumbled details and a non-chronological timeline. This produces confusion and disorientation, the erasure, or abrogation, of conventional or predictable structure. At the same time, there is a pattern and ultimately a circularity to the narrative, which ends where it began. Mamdūḥ succeeds in telling her story in an unconventional way – by a disorienting structure, silence, and with her characters' unusual voices.

Mamdūḥ's Arabic, which I will discuss in "Chapter Two: Switching Codes," also constitutes a rejection of generally accepted literary norms and linguistic domination. Most of the dialogue in *Ḥabbāt al-naftālīn* is produced by women, making them the bearers of the Iraqi colloquial dialect, as most of the colloquial language is found in the dialogue. However, the language, both

dialogue and narration, is full of ambiguity that challenges the binary definition of language as either/or. For example, Mamdūḥ often switches between classical and colloquial linguistic structures. And much of the dialogue could be read either with a colloquial accent or a classical pronunciation. The fact that she uses both types of language together and in ambiguous ways means that she is not simply turning from one to the other, from the standard classical language to colloquial language. What she is abrogating here is not literary Arabic, but rather the binary aspect of Arabic use, combining different usages. She marks the gray areas of the language continuum as she appropriates it for her novel's voices.

Mamdūḥ's circular writing style, fragmented chronology, and language use all raise issues that come together in "Chapter Three: Political Creatures of Madness and Fear." The fear that pervades *Ḥabbāt al-naftālīn* is a less concrete, more macrotextual example of this abrogation/appropriation strategy: by writing the fear she not only transcends it, but embraces it. For Mamdūḥ, fear begins as a visceral response to daily life and ends as a celebration of it, and this is supported by the type of language she uses. As she appropriates fear's meaning, giving it positive and personal associations, she automatically casts out any controlling or dominating power. In her ecstatic and fearful worldview, there is simply no room for any power but that of language.

Chapter One: Writing in Circles

The writing style of *Ḥabbāt al-naftālīn* follows the circular and self-referential logic of its adolescent narrator, Hudā, and this technique serves as a formal framework for the story. Hudā's narrative voice is neither clear nor consistent, giving the novel an elliptical quality by leaving much unsaid, by omitting important details and by emphasizing descriptive minutiae. This inconsistency exists because she does not speak in a standard third-person narrative voice, and does not even keep the same point of view throughout – she constantly switches between first and second person, plural and singular. These switches occur often and without warning, although Hudā is always the one narrating. Her chronology shifts in a similar fashion. Although her story is consistent, she tells it with sudden shifts from past to present and blurry transitions between sentences and paragraphs. Her maturity level fluctuates as well, as she narrates most of the novel in a child's voice with occasional leaps into a more adult consciousness.

Mamdūḥ uses other narrative strategies to represent silences and omissions. She uses many ellipses (...), which are common in the Arabic original, but have not been reproduced in the English translation. (Perhaps this is because in English, ellipses imply the omission of important details, or the omission of a quoted section, whereas they are a common punctuation added for emphasis in Arabic.) In addition to creating silence with ellipses, she also creates it by sketching certain characters and places in outline and by leaving many details

out. The reader must often infer a complex relationship and an entire conversation from a single sentence of dialogue. This style, at first disorienting and inconsistent, gains clarity; the reader finds that the omissions are a necessary part of Hudā's whimsical, inquisitive nature and reveal much about her psyche and her worldview. Upon closer examination, it becomes clear that by her silences, Hudā critiques the seamless, impersonal narrative style and speaks in her own "secret language."

So much lies under the surface of the narrative that the ellipses and the silences must be read as a possible continuance, the hint of a potential extension of the narrative. For example, when Hudā says, "You did not realize all this. What was occurring in front of you left its mark"[2] the space between the two sentences is filled by an ellipse in the Arabic (Mamdūḥ 16/7). Here, the ellipse signifies the "mark" that is left on Hudā by the family interactions she observes – a mark that is perhaps subconscious, whose influence she does not quite yet grasp. As the story progresses, there appear tenuous connections between her various voices, and her silences begin to make sense in the disjointed narrative. Her story closes in on itself, creating a pattern out of the chaos. The silence of omission that pervades the narrative makes room for a story of marginality: a child's story, a woman's story, a story of the transition from childhood to adulthood.

Many aspects of *Ḥabbāt al-naftālīn* are discontinuous and chaotic: the narrative voice, the timeline, the narrator's level of maturity and comprehension.

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[2] كنت لا تدركين هذه الأمور.. وما كان يحدث أمامك كان يسجّل خطوة...

Magda M. al-Nowaihi, in "Re-envisioning National Community in Salwa Bakr's *The Golden Chariot Does Not Ascend to Heaven*" refers to Egyptian novelist Salwa Bakr's use of this style as "the poetics of disorientation." By "juxtaposing and dislocating," she argues, Bakr disorients her readers

> in order to challenge their expectations, thereby presenting a powerful critique of... the very ways in which we apprehend, make sense of, and represent our world...She is invested in exposing the superficiality and hypocrisy of the various languages we have become accustomed to... In their place, she [offers]... a humorous topsy-turvy world that disorients to reorient, pushing us to voyage under the surface of her style in search of meaning and value. (al-Nowaihi in Majaj 74)

In challenging the expectation of a standard novelistic storyline, Mamdūḥ disorients the reader with ellipses, silence, fragmentation, and unexpected narrative shifts. This is a stylistic abrogation, a clearing away of literary norms that do not contribute to her purpose. Though this may be disorienting, something does surface to take the place of the confusion: the appropriation of a voice, an identity, a narrative vitality. This process produces a Baghdad world of woman's memory, a world where children are central and women's spaces are vital. By subverting the standard linear narrative style, Mamdūḥ creates a unique space for the story she tells and a unique style in which to tell it.

Framing the "I": Postcolonial Viewpoints

The narrator of any story frames and colors it with her tone and disposition, her assumptions and worldviews. The narrator determines the way

the story is told, choosing which details to describe and which to omit, choosing the angle from which to portray each character. Not even the "invisible" third-person omniscient narrator is free of this power – on the contrary, this is arguably the most powerful of all narrators. Because there are no human doubts or uncertainties to weaken its authority, it can take on the voice of pure truth and fact: "the omniscient narrator's reports and judgments are to be taken as authoritative by the reader, and so serve to establish what counts as the true facts and values within the fictional world" (Abrams 232).

Postcolonial theorist Robert Fraser writes about narrative points of view in *Lifting the Sentence: A Poetics of Postcolonial Fiction.* He argues that the third person narrative serves the interests of colonialism because it is a point of view from which the colonizer can scrutinize, study and catalogue the native in a pseudo-scientific way. When used by the dominant colonizers, this point of view affected omniscience and assumed the uniformity of that which it described, referring to all natives as a group with the pronouns "they" and "them," and always in the present tense. The third person narrative works with the colonial gaze in converting colonial subjects into anthropological objects of study, a group whose culture and practices are uniform and frozen in time. Fraser argues that when used in this way, the third person point of view effaces the individuality and personhood of those it describes.

One way in which postcolonial authors have rejected this effacement and control has been to use other narrative points of view. By rejecting the voice of the "colonial third person," they also reject its attitude of superiority, using

different points of view in order to subvert the "system of cultural assumptions" underlying colonial modes of expression and accepted linguistic norms. For example, the Rastafarian practice of deliberately eliminating the objective first-person pronouns "me" and "we" and replacing them with "I" liberates the speaker from being the object of a verb, thereby disturbing the grammatical "binary structuration" that assumes a dominant and a subservient (Ashcroft et al 47-48). Similarly, Hudā's second-person narration disturbs the binary structuration that separates the reader from the narrator, while her first-person narration gives her complete and conspicuous power over her narrative. She talks to herself in her mother's room: "Look at the shelves. All these books will be mine. The spiderwebs are mine, and all the dust of the rebellious nights. Here you may scream at al-Aqqad and Taha Hussein. Turn on Baghdad Radio and listen to the royal anthem"[3] (Mamdūḥ 111/85). She switches back and forth in her internal monologue, abrogating standard ways of seeing the world, appropriating her own narrative voice and disregarding conventions of language use.

Sociolinguists have made arguments about the power structures reflected in conventions of language use, claiming that the English language practice of using the pronoun "he/him" or "man/mankind" to represent both genders represents an uneven power relationship and affects language usage.[4] They argue

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[3] انظري إلى الرفوف. كل هذه الكتب ستصير حصتي. بيوت العناكب بيوتي وكل غبار الليالي العسية. إزعقي هنا على العقاد وطه حسين. افتحي اذاعة بغداد واسمعي السلام الملكي.

[4] See Wendy Martyna, "Beyond the He/Man Approach: The Case for Nonsexist Language." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 5:3 (1980): 482-493; J. Silvera, "Generic masculine

that these pronouns and other usages form a masculine language in which women are subordinated and denied a textual existence apart from men. Moreover, women who try to use this language encounter difficulties, as they feel this language is not suited to describing the experiences of women. This claim is not unique to English; some Arab women writers, like Salwa Bakr, have deliberately departed from masculine modes of expression - such as linear narration and unambiguous, nonrepetitive phrases - in order to create a more female language. Bakr disrupts the binary separation of classical and colloquial Arabic by writing in what she calls *al-'amīyyah al-fāṣiḥa*, a grammatically correct language that nonetheless contains words that real women might use in everyday speech.

Caroline Seymour Jorn, in her article "A New Language: Salwa Bakr on Depicting Egyptian Women's Worlds" argues that Bakr uses a variety of techniques to imitate female patterns of speech and to convey a distinctly female consciousness in *The Golden Chariot Does Not Ascend to Heaven.* In this work, Bakr appropriates the privilege of omniscience, giving it to her female narrator, who tells the life stories of many different women in prison together. Though it is unclear whether the narrator is 'Aziza, one of the prisoners, or an objective observer, the narrator performs a similar function to Shahrazad in *The Thousand and One Nights*, linking together all the stories as different facets of a woman's worldview. A worldview in which all stories are integrally linked is part of Bakr's concept of female community and a "female lexicon" (Jorn 153). Also, by

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words and thinking." *Women's studies International Quarterly*, 3 (1980): 165-178; and J. Moulton, G. Robinson, and C. Elias, "Sex bias in language use." *American Psychologist* 33 (1978):1032-1036.

placing a woman narrator in control as keeper of all the stories, she dictates how and when they are connected. The woman as storyteller has appropriated control over language, so all the language, even men's speech, comes from a woman through her words and her style.

I suggest that in *Ḥabbāt al-naftālīn*, a different technique performs a similar function. Hudā speaks from many different points of view, shifting among first, second and third person narration. In doing this, she connects the characters to each other while sidelining the colonial, androcentric point of view. Her use of complex and varied pronouns makes the narrative fluid and full of motion, disturbing conventional notions of person, action, time and place:

> So let males marry females; let your aunt launch her fireworks into the vast sky, and let it show anew in your faces, and the faces of the neighbors, the coffee-house men, the women at the baths, in the faces of the neighborhood youths and in the street. Put her on the wedding throne and read her the thousand commandments. Let Farīda, electrified by her constant laziness and long mistakes, walk to Uncle Munīr. Let her rock back and forth to the music if her head is bowed or her hand is bound. Let her swallow his saliva, his water and his phlegm; let the first Farīda disappear.
> Rejoice, now, and strew flowers about her and about us. Sit on the threshold as Rasmiya does, as my mother did and my grandmother does, and wait with the long queues for his bald head and vomit. Go to him. Let Rachel create a wedding outfit for you.
> ***
> "Take me with you!" Let them take that Hudā, and to carry a sack of clothes for you of brilliant colors, white, pink, and violet.
> Your grandmother said, "Dear Farīda, have a violet dress made - you know how much I love that color."
> We went to the markets in Baghdad, hand in hand, face to face with the city I did not know. (Mamdūḥ 77-78/58)

> فليتزوج الذكور الإناث, لتطلق عمتك ألعابها النارية في السماء الشاسعة, ولتصح وجدداً في وجوهكم, في وجوه الجيران, رجال المقاهي, ونساء الحمامات, في وجوه صبايا الحي وأطفال

الشوارع. اجلسيها على مقعد العرس العالي وردّدي عليها
الوصايا الألف, لتمش فريدة المكهربة لكسلها الدائم وزلاتها
الطويلة إلى العم منير, ولتهتز طرباً إذا نكس رأسها أو أوثق يدها.
لتبلع بصاقه, ماءه, مخاطه, ولتختفِ فريدة الأولى.
ابتهجي الآن, تناثري عليه وعلينا واجلسي على عتبة الباب
كما تفعل رسمية, كما فعلت أمي وجدتي, وانتظري مع الصفوف
الطويلة, صلعته, قيأه. اذهبي إليه ولتبتكر لك راشيل ملابس
الزفاف.
***
"خذوني معكم" .. خذوها تلك الهدى, ولتحمل معك صرّة
الملابس اللماعة بألوانها, الأبيض والوردي والبهقسجي.
قالت جدتك: "عيني فرودة لو تعملين ثوباً بلون البنفسج
تدرين أني أحب هذا اللون كثيراً."
نطلع إلى أسواق بغداد يداً بيد. وجهاً لوجه مع المدينة التي
لا أعرفها.

In a more conventional style of narration, the narrator would be consistently referred to as "I" "he" or "she" and everything stated by the narrator would be left without quotation marks, while the statements of other characters speaking to each other or to the narrator appear in quotes. But Hudā's narration above uses the full range of voices to which she has access, changing constantly according to context and situation, with and without quotes. In addition to speaking as "I" (anā), she also uses the pronoun "we" (naḥnu) which could include any number of people: herself and her brother, herself and her neighborhood friends, and sometimes herself and her entire family. Most often, "you" (anti) refers to Hudā herself, as in "You struck ʻĀdil..."[5] but sometimes it

[5] تضربين عادلاً

includes herself, ʿĀdil and her friends: "You children dared not play"[6] (Mamdūḥ 61/45). On rare occasions, a third person narrator steps in, but only to comment on Hudā, as if parodying an adult's exasperated sigh: "They said, 'Hudā was suckled by Satan'"[7] (Mamdūḥ 66/49).

Sometimes the "you" is not Hudā at all, but another female character - as when she speaks of Farīda's planned marriage to Munīr: "Let Rachel create a wedding outfit for you"[8] (Mamdūḥ 78/58). Here, the "you" is Farīda. This kind of switch calls attention to the similarities between the women characters, making connections between them. Hudā spends much of her life with the women in her family, the aunts and grandmother, and her life mirrors theirs; she herself could be the next recipient of a wedding outfit. She moves in and out of the state of belonging with these women, sometimes aware that she will grow up to become one of them, sometimes acting like a youngster making trouble for them.

The paragraph above illustrates the disorienting frequency of these shifts in voice. First Hudā speaks in the plural "you" (antum), grouping herself with the rest of her family, speaking of Farīda in the third person. With the command "Sit on the threshold,"[9] she begins to address Farīda directly. In the next paragraph, "them" (hum) becomes her family, and she becomes a third person "that Hudā," only to become singular "you" in the next paragraph, and "we" and

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[6] وأنتم لا تتجرأون على اللعب

[7] قالوا: هدى رضعت من ابليس.

[8] ولتبتكر لك راشيل ملابس الزفاف

[9] واجلسي على عتبة الباب

then "I" in the next. English does not differentiate, as Arabic does, between the singular, feminine "you" (anti) and the plural "you" (antum); however, the use of the second person in the English translation still has an enclosing, disorienting and circular effect.

Her use of the second person is most unconventional in literary forms; as Abrams notes, "This form of narration occurred in occasional passages of traditional fiction, but has been exploited in a sustained way only during the latter part of the twentieth century and then only rarely..." (Abrams 234). Aside from being unconventional, this form of narration also has the most interesting effect. Since Hudā is talking to herself, her use of second person encloses the narration inside her consciousness; yet the word "you" (and in Arabic, the letter "kaf" and other markers for second-person conjugated verbs) implicitly includes the reader as well. The first person "I" puts the reader in Hudā's mind, looking out on all that she sees, receiving her sensations and sharing her emotions. But it also allows some distance, because the gaze comes from one person, the "person-looking," and is only pointed in one direction: out. However, when Hudā starts addressing herself as "you," transforming parts of the book from narrative to soliloquy, the gaze goes two ways. Hudā (and the reader, by extension) is both the "person-looking" and the "person-looked-at," and the reader is brought even further inside Hudā's mind. "You" is an accusatory, personal, and intrusive pronoun, and forces the reader to engage more fully with Hudā, erasing any narrative distance. Without this distance, any possibility of domination or control is effectively abrogated.

Hudā uses this point of view to indicate anxiety or unrest. When her father is present, whether he is behaving abusively or lovingly, Hudā often switches to "you," referring either to herself (anti) or to herself and 'Ādil (antumā). She describes her father's actions on one of his visits: "He acted lovingly toward you each in turn..."[10] (Mamdūḥ 64/47). Perhaps it is her way of reconciling the two opposing emotions she feels for her father - intense love and devotion combined with intense fear. By addressing herself as if from a different place inside her mind, Hudā can allow these two emotions to co-exist. She is also reminding herself who she is, as a defense against her father's overwhelming presence and unavoidable power. Her fear of him silences and paralyzes her, and it is only when she slips into her secret language that she can live with her contradictory feelings about her father and retain her personhood. When she speaks to herself, she is able to speak, no longer silenced by her fear.

Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin write about overcoming silence in the face of imperial control of communication. Writing of the "line ...between cultures" and the silence it engenders, they write that "only by denying the authenticity of the line and taking control of the means of communication can the postcolonial text overcome this silence" (Ashcroft et al 86). Hudā and her father are engaged in a "struggle for control of the word" (Ashcroft et al 86). She describes their relationship as adversarial, but characterized by need. They need each other in order to engage in this struggle, and they are worthy adversaries: "Alone, he

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[10] يصادقكم واحداً بعد الآخر

followed me to learn that I had surpassed him. My father"[11] (Mamdūḥ 68/50). She needs her father's silencing power in order to go within herself and come out with her own language. His dominance and suppression of her individuality spurs her to create a new kind of individuality by talking to herself as "you."

The personal pronouns "I," "you" and "we" imply involvement, making it impossible for a narrator or reader to remain disinterested, above or outside of the action. This kind of language brings the reader into the community of characters and endows the events of the novel with a sense of contemporaneity and vitality. It makes the narrative energetic and full of motion, full of moving points of view and speakers. These pronouns bring the reader in close to the characters in the novel as they swirl around the story and around Hudā's consciousness. Sometimes she sees herself as part of the community and neighborhood, sometimes only as part of her own family, and sometimes as her individual self. The switches among the continuum of belonging to a larger group, a smaller familial group, and her own individual self show her fluid travel between group consciousness and individual consciousness. As a child, she is in the process of growing up and becoming her own person. Her language reflects this adolescent negotiation of the boundaries between herself and her family, shifting between the tightly closed, self-referential voice and the open, encompassing familial voice.

The use of the plural "we," "us," and "you," as opposed to the singular "I" and "you," provide a more public point of view that includes Hudā, ʻĀdil and any

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[11] وحده يتبعني ليعرف أني أتفوّق عليه. أبي.

number of their friends and family. When Hudā chooses to say "our aunt" ('ammatunā) instead of "my aunt" ('ammatī) she is opening her language to include more people than herself. This can be seen as the second step in Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin's abrogation/appropriation strategy: first she closes her language, making it circular, narrow and exclusive, and then she opens it to include the people in her community. She must first close it in order to rid the language of dominating and traditional influences, including the "colonial third person." Only then can she let in the people who are important to her – 'Ādil and the rest of her family - marking the language with her particular stamp. She must thoroughly reject the colonial point of view in order to inscribe her own (see below for more on the child's voice).

Another way to understand this use of viewpoint is through the artistic philosophy of Cubism, which often served as a vehicle for the Cubists' own self-conscious critique of colonialism. Many modernist artists and thinkers, including Pablo Picasso, Kees Van Dongen and Alfred Jarry, espoused socialist and anarchist politics and vehement anti-colonial attitudes as a "rebellion against bourgeois morality and bourgeois art" (Leighton 611). They protested French abuse and mistreatment of African colonial subjects in France and in Africa with their innovative art, political cartoons and other works that rejected the traditions of artistic production, traditions which they saw as inextricably connected to the colonial project. At the same time, their challenge of colonialism was problematic and incomplete, often remaining "implicated in the prejudices they sought to expose" (Leighton 610). But in spite of their

Orientalist and reductionist inclinations, I have found the Cubists' self-conscious subversion of colonial modes of creation to be a useful tool for analysis.

Cubism challenged traditional artistic expectations as the painter

> observed the subject from multiple viewpoints, and presented these data in simultaneity. Rather than present the object in its singular and fixed perspectival appearance, Cubism offered a field of overlapping and interpenetrating planes on which were portrayed the painter's myriad 'glimpses' of his subject. (Kaufman 278)

Instead of a smooth omniscient narrator or a consistently individual one, Mamdūḥ uses a disjointed, shifting point of view. Hudā describes characters in all dimensions, so that like Picasso's distorted faces, they show angles that would otherwise be hidden. Her shifting points of view portray the same neighborhood simultaneously from different angles, giving a more subjective and personal view of it.

Mamdūḥ's literary effects also mirror the goals of the Cubist method of painting – to depict not the painted object itself, but the artist's experience of seeing it. "The stable object was fractured and reconstituted in a manner which better represented the artist's psycho-perceptual or conceptual, rather than a merely visual experience of the world... the world no longer existed apart from human awareness" (Kaufman 279). By giving space to all the voices competing in Hudā's head, the language of *Ḥabbāt al-naftālīn* undermines a straightforward "factual" experience of the world in favor of Hudā's more subjective and conceptual experience of it. Nothing in *Ḥabbāt al-naftālīn* can be separated from Hudā's awareness of it and her description of it from various points of view.

The fragmentation and subjectivity of the Cubist point of view contrasts with the standard, one-dimensional point of view, showing what would otherwise be hidden, exposing more than one consciousness. Mamdūḥ says of her first-person narration, "The critics do not like this type of writing much because it refers to the personal, maybe even to the intimate" (Mamdūḥ in Faqir 67). However, the personal and intimate is the only way to communicate a subjective view of the world, especially when commonly accepted linguistic practices exclude certain types of people and preclude certain types of writing. The particularities of any human character, be they female, male, Iraqi, Arab, or Albanian, may not fit easily into that of the "colonial third person" which erases distinctiveness with its linearity, objectivity, and presumption of scientific clarity. The first/second person point of view is better suited for nebulous issues, personal and subjective matters, circular or repetitive situations, and coming from a female character, it communicates the particularities of her female story.

Thus by negating the masculine, generalized omniscience of the broad sweeping gaze of colonialism, Mamdūḥ takes her reader into a feminine, particularized omniscience – that of the house, Hudā's family, and her neighborhood. Hudā draws a double circle around herself, first by saying "I," then by saying "you," enclosing the reader inside her own consciousness. This means that within *Ḥabbāt al-naftālīn*, she leaves no room for the control or dominance of male characters or the demonized British. As a child growing up, she is learning to negotiate her own boundaries.

The Eloquence of the Child

Hudā's fragmentary storytelling relies heavily on silence as a method of communication. Her discontinuous timeline and changing points of view leave out many details and larger issues. Hudā's silence is important in her negation of external control over language and in her appropriation of her own personhood as an adult.

Marnia Lazreg has written of the eloquence of women's silence. She holds that the historical silencing of women has been due to circumstances like the availability of education, the control of state mechanisms and survival strategies to circumvent them. Her book *The Eloquence of Silence: Algerian Women in Question* is an attempt to bring out the special kind of women's talk "adapted to the gender and political status of their audience" that history has not recorded (Lazreg 106). Women's voices have always been present, but circumstance prevented them from being heard. She writes that Algerian women's historical silence has had two contradictory effects. It has been deadening because of its weight and the momentum of the dominant discourse that has turned women's existence into a "caricatural existence" (Lazreg 224). But it has ultimately led to the eloquence of women's actions and words in response to this reduction. The importance of the silence lies in women's "constant struggle" to overcome it, "to impose their basic right to be... themselves" (Lazreg 223). A woman who writes, like Mamdūḥ, is overcoming silence by imposing her basic right to be herself and to speak.

Mamdūḥ chooses a child to narrate *Ḥabbāt al-naftālīn*, a story of marginality and femininity, because children are also engaged in a struggle not only to be themselves but to discover themselves. Children are often silenced, yet when the child's voice comes through, it is distinctive and expressive. Children are always speaking, although they rarely get the same attention and respect as adults. The adults in this book reserve their meaningful conversation for each other, granting only scolding and slaps or simple maternal comfort to Hudā and the other children.

The child is the voice most suited to bear the burden of the female and the postcolonial because she is marginalized, but her natural instinct is to resist and eventually overcome this marginalization by growing up. She begins as an almost invisible, genderless person: not yet a woman, she is not subject to society's gender divisions; not an adult, she does not feel the colonial power as strongly. The child speaks from a subordinate position, subject to the orders, reprimands, moods and actions of the adults in charge of her, yet her independence from them is imminent. It is important that *Ḥabbāt al-naftālīn's* narrator is an adolescent, on the cusp of independence. The narrative voice captures the story at the moment of independence and adulthood: Hudā turns from a child to a woman, and goes from silence to speaking.

The child's voice is important, able to show the impact of mundane events, because for a child every new experience is momentous. Hudā's tone is one of wonder and confusion, innocence and exclusion, full of interruptions and breaks and many kinds of silence. Although she is a keen observer, she manages

to communicate mostly in fragments and questions: "Were these the corrupt women you have heard about?"[12] (Mamdūḥ 15/7) She describes body parts, especially hands, as performing actions, rather than people. When describing Farīda's anxiety at Munīr's absence, she writes "we saw the trembling of her fingers, the tapping of her palm and an anonymous lamentation depart from her chest"[13] (Mamdūḥ 132/101)). At times, the characters resemble not human beings so much as a collected mass of hands, arms and legs, hair and faces: "Then all these limbs descended at once..."[14] (Mamdūḥ 32/20). Hudā personifies objects: "the water seized me entirely"[15] (Mamdūḥ 79/59) and even seasons: "winter attacked"[16] (Mamdūḥ 19/10). The gaps and discontinuities in the descriptions communicate the confused perceptions of a child bewildered by the adult activity around her, emphasizing her limited understanding. And the reader is limited to experiencing the adult world of *Ḥabbāt al-naftālīn* only through Hudā's wide-eyed and truncated impressions.

Hudā's fear and awe of adult subjects increases their significance: she gives the most telling detail of the relationship between Munīr and Farīda when she says, "When Munīr thrust his fingers around your aunt's upper arm the mark remained for days, indelible, like that of a slap"[17] (Mamdūḥ 7/1). Her awe shows when she mentions the charged political conversations of adults where they

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[12] هل هن الفاسدات اللتي سمعت بهن؟

[13] نرى رجفة الأصابع, خفقة الكف وعويل مجهول يغادر صدرها

[14] والأعضاء ترينها دفعة واحدة

[15] الماء يأخذني برمتي

[16] حين يهجم الشتاء

[17] السيد منير كان إذا غرز أصابعه في زند عمتك, تبقى تلك الغرزة أياماً لا تُمحى مثل اللطمة..

mention names like Nuri al-Said, the Iraqi Prime Minister, the English, and Voice of the Arabs Radio. She does not explain any political events to the reader, and no adult explains their meaning to her, although she senses the adults' emotion when they mention these words. It is not clear whether she understands what is going on, or whether she is merely repeating what she hears adults saying: "Curse the English..." Does a child of nine, ten, or eleven know the significance of words like "colonialism" and "Zionism"? At times Hudā repeats these words as though she does not understand them at all, and at times they appear to have a strong effect on her that can only come from her understanding.

Her repetition of these words and phrases is not completely childlike or devoid of comprehension. The child Hudā understands what is going on around her in terms of how it affects her family and friends; this is the beginning of her understanding of the true gravity of words like "colonialism." When Hudā hears people talking about her friend Maḥmūd, "'He's become a communist,' the people said", she understands that her sweetheart might be in danger, and that she might be in danger as well: "I did not understand what that word [communist] meant, though I had heard it as if my father had his pistol out and was chasing me"[18] (Mamdūḥ 188/144). She sees Maḥmūd's parents' displeasure and worry, and mentions his absence many times. When Ḥūbī the butcher is taken away by the police, she describes how the neighbors stop by his shop, stunned and sad. Although Hudā cannot communicate the entire meaning of these situations, she

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[18] يقولون: "صار شيوعياً". لم أفهم معنى هذه الكلمة, إلاّ أنني سمعتها و هي تطلق كما لو أن أبي يحمل مسدسه ويركض ورائي.

perceives the existence of a substantial political consciousness in which members of her community are taking an active part, and it comes through in spite of her gaps in description and comprehension. She conveys the emotion and human aspirations that are at the heart of ideologies like communism, anti-Zionism or anti-colonialism as these ideas filter down to her in half-understood phrases.

The significance of these events reaches her as a parallel to her growing up. She understands the rebellious energy of the adults as they reject external power and control, negotiating a new reality. She is trying to negotiate her own reality as she rejects the control of adults over a child, discovering who she is in the process. One could say that she abrogates the adults' hegemony in her life, appropriating it for herself. Of course, once she becomes an adult, there are other social controls which she must negotiate as well.

Because this novel spans Hudā's entire adolescence, her voice oscillates between the tone of a small person looking up and the tone of a young adult growing up. Innocence and the beginnings of comprehension often blend as she begins to come out of childhood; she says "I hardly understood anything; there was hardly anything I didn't understand"[19] (Mamdūḥ 189/145). The voice of the nine-year old who plays with a top in the street mingles with the voice of the teenager watching her friend die of typhoid and remembering a childhood pact agreeing not to cry if one of them died. The child hears the adults mentioning Voice of the Arabs Radio, while the teenager tells her family that she wants to listen to it every night. The gap in understanding is still there in the eloquent

[19] لم أفهم كثيراً, لم أفهم قليلاً

silences: Hudā gives no clue that she understands the incendiary and anti-imperialist statements that she hears on the radio. Nevertheless, the radio is a symbol of her awakening consciousness, a hint at a growing awareness of adult issues and abstract concepts like nation and country. Thus, while her silence does not alert the reader as to whether or not she understands, it signifies the beginning of the "constant struggle" to be herself that Lazreg describes.

The gaps in Hudā's narration are eloquent because they are her own. Unlike the case of Algerian women, who, according to Lazreg, "had so many women and men ostensibly speaking for them but in fact speaking against them" (Lazreg 224), no other character speaks for Hudā; the fragmentary imagery and discontinuity of the narrative allow her to own it completely. The gaps and silences are purely hers, whether they come from fear, from lack of understanding, or from simple narrative omission. The separation between what is said and what is not said marks the boundary between her child-voice and her young adult-voice, and is uniquely hers. There is silence in the uncertainty of adolescence on the cusp between childhood and adulthood. It is the gray area where the adult "center" meets the child "margin," with the chaotic tone that conveys a "notion of difference, an indecipherable juncture between cultural realities" (Ashcroft et al 57). The adults and children speak different languages, and Hudā must negotiate the space between these realities. As she grows up and becomes an adult, she begins to understand the vocabulary of the previously alien world, but still interprets it according to her own reality. Thus as she goes from disorientation to nascent consciousness, she fills the gap with her own

language, her own experience.

By narrating the novel in this way, Hudā reverses the usual privilege given to adult voices and adult observations; it is analogous to the response of Algerian women to their historical silencing. While she is sometimes an inconsistent narrator, she is a narrator nonetheless, and her silences are eloquent because they punctuate and inform her speech. Hudā's response to the potential adult dominance and silencing forms a "bridge between the 'centre' and 'margin,' simultaneously [defining] their unbridgeable separation" (Ashcroft et al 57) as she bridges the gap between childhood and adulthood. In the end, her silence is eloquent because it belongs to her and her alone, marking the unique place she occupies between the margin and the center. And by her own speech, her narration, she responds to that silence, filling it with her own developing identity. Like the Algerian women in *The Eloquence of Silence*, she has made silence eloquent by making it speak of her marginality and her challenge to the (adult) center.

Circular Time, Cubist Time

Another kind of disorientation accompanies that produced by Hudā's shifts in point of view and her transformation from a silent child to a speaking adult. Hudā rejects a standardized chronology, and time in *Ḥabbāt al-naftālīn* does not progress in a linear fashion. The narration jumps chaotically from present to past in an impressionistic jumble, again portraying the shifting and

subjective worldview that can be understood through a Cubist lens. Shifts in time occur alongside shifts in point of view, forming a narrative that is fragmented both in terms of narration and chronology. Just as the Cubist points of view subvert standard ways of looking at the world, rejecting the dominant one-dimensional view, the chronological fragmentation subverts the dominant concept of time as inexorable, perpetually forward-moving, and bringing unlimited progress.

Fraser has written about the progress-oriented, Eurocentric concept of time in *Lifting the Sentence.* Fraser writes that colonialism forced a confrontation between two opposing notions of time. He writes that the imperial European notion of time as unilinear and constantly progressing forward met the indigenous notions of time as discontinuous or circular, and the two kinds of time were measured differently. In many places, the European calendar and clock replaced indigenous calendars. Postcolonial authors responded by rejecting imperial notions of time and attempting to "indigenize" it. They produced narratives marked by discontinuity, simultaneity, and temporal dislocation, frequently dispensing with "the unidirectionality of time" (Fraser 182). These techniques produced chronologies "sufficiently fluid to accommodate many directions, speeds and modes" (Fraser 183), expressing one facet of the relationship between empire and colony. A similar argument has been made about masculine and feminine notions of time. I have found it useful to use this argument in order to describe how *Ḥabbāt al-naftālīn* rejects one chronology in favor of another more amenable to the story.

In *Ḥabbāt al-naftālīn*, Mamdūḥ rejects a unilinear chronology in which a character moves from the past to the future along a single line. Instead, this story is made up of isolated points in time, some earlier, some later, and some temporally unmarked. Since memory is mixed with present-tense narrative, it is almost possible to begin reading the book on any page, since every part contains past and present in equal measures. And at the novel's end, the narrative is made fully circular as the story begins and ends with the same scene. The reader could continue the events on the last page by returning to the first page. The circular narrative unifies what is disjointed and chaotic by aligning it not with linear time but with circular, subjective time.

The circularity of Hudā's story makes her self-contained, suspended in her own disordered timeline. Hudā refers to this when she says, "Time was bewildering: it did not pass quickly, either to let you grow up or to consummate your despair"[20] (Mamdūḥ 62/46). Her adolescence seems to never end, doubling back on itself; she is always talking to herself, a fusion of her present experiences and past memories. She is self-contained and secretive, talking to herself, speaking only the language of her own psyche. This perpetual Hudā is the bearer of a hidden language, enclosed by the text and time, poised in it, shaped by it. She has abandoned standard time because using circular time is the only way she can tell her story.

An extreme example of the shifting chronology that begins and ends in an undefined present tense is when Hudā describes going to the markets in Baghdad

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[20] والوقت حائر, لا يتقدم سريعاً لتكبروا ويكتمل بأسكم

with her grandmother to find a wedding dress for Farīda. Seeing the Tigris, she recalls bathing there with other children and her sweetheart, Maḥmūd. Then she goes back and forth between recollections of Maḥmūd with typhoid and Maḥmūd in full health, eventually returning to the present and the day at the markets:

> Maḥmūd, you have suddenly grown two years and waited for me. Leave the fever behind and come with me.
>
> ...Maḥmūd did well in school and I failed the exam. What was it about the exam and the school? Answer me, Maḥmūd.
>
> I wiped away his sweat and looked at his beautiful face and his fine, curly blond hair. His cheeks were fiery hot and briny, his lips were dry. My tears did not fall...
>
> You looked at his arms and entwined your arms around his, and asked him to laugh and be bad. Maḥmūd laughed, and Aunt Farīda will get married in a few days.
>
> ...Before going out, my grandmother said, 'Buy the household things first, and later on the wedding clothes and gold.' (Mamdūḥ 78-81/59-60)

محمود.. لقد كبرت عامين دفعة واحدة وانتظرتني, غادر الحمى وتعال معي.
..نجح محمود بالمدرسة وسقطت أنا بالامتحان. ماذا بين الامتحان والمدرسة؟ أجبني يا محمود.
أمسح عرقه وأنظر في الوجه الجميل. بشعره الأشقر الناعم القصير المجعد. خداه ناريان مالحان, شفتاه يابستان, ودموعي لا تطلع...
توجّهي الى ذراعيه, لقي الذراعين على الذراعين واطلبي منه الضحك والشيطنة الأولى. اضحك محمود, فالعمة فريدة ستتزوج بعد أيام.
قالت الجدة قبل الخروج: "اشتروا أغراض البيت أولاً, وبعدين ملابس العرس والذهب."

What makes this passage so disorienting is not the use of the literary devices of memory and flashback. Memory and flashback are plot devices used by authors to build characters and strengthen the reader's understanding of

character by a knowledge of their past. Flashbacks "manage the exposition of essential prior matters" (Abrams 226). Although these flashbacks do provide the reader with a sense of Hudā's past, the shifts in time are so frequent that they become chaotic and often confuse the reader instead of making sense of the plot. In addition, there is no distinction in tense to set the flashbacks apart from the rest – flashbacks and present events alike are narrated in many different tenses – so the result is a confusing temporal jumble. This confusion accomplishes the abrogation of colonial modes of organization and allows the postcolonial author to create something new. It tells the reader that this is a different and new text, and it will not be narrated in a linear way. It does not make progress that can be measured or quantified; the characters do not develop over time. The story does unfold and the characters do develop, but they do so on Hudā's terms. She accomplishes the disruption of the linear cause-and-effect upon which much colonial thought depends – the idea of backward natives in an earlier phase of "development."

Circular narration is a salient feature of both women's writing and postcolonial writing. For example, Jorn cites it as an integral element of Salwa Bakr's female language, calling it a "narrative of digression" (Jorn 165). Bakr's characters speak and narrate long sentences containing many relative clauses and relative pronouns like *alladhī* and *allatī* ("that" or "which") and *man* ("one who"). In this way, she communicates her understanding of how women experience time. She argues that "poor women, whose horizons, social contacts and daily activities are limited by harsh economic and social realities, experience time in a

cyclical manner. These women, she feels, experience their lives as a series of repeated, mundane and unfulfilling activities" (Jorn 166). Time has a different meaning for these women, who experience it repetitively, than for the men, whose lives are presumably not as repetitive or circular but more linear and progressive. Likewise, the women of *Ḥabbāt al-naftālīn* seem to constantly move between their relatives' homes, or to the bath and back home again: "From there she rotated between the big bath and the neighbors' houses and your grandfather's house"[21] (Mamdūḥ 24/14). Occasionally they go to the markets, but their lives revolve mainly around a narrow back-and-forth between a few places.

Mamdūḥ uses the circular narration as a temporal parallel to this spatial narrowness. In the first and last scene, Hudā and her family are driving in a truck, ostensibly going somewhere, but the reader is never told exactly where. At the beginning of the novel, this traveling leads to the home, the heart of the family and Hudā's life. At the end, it leads back to the home and back into the cycle. The "trail made by our blood"[22] (Mamdūḥ 212/162) is what binds the family in their togetherness and their pain, and is also what ties them into this circular story that ends where it began in space as well as in time. These few places contain so much emotional impact because they are where the family's life takes place.

There are other circular and repetitive aspects to life in *Ḥabbāt al-naftālīn.*

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[21] من هناك كانت تراوح بين الحمّام الكبير وبيوت الجيران وبيت جدك.

[22] خطوات دمنا تمتد مثل شريط

Rasmīya the nurse is always beaten by her husband; Iqbāl is always in the kitchen; Grandmother is always praying. The women travel small distances compared to the men – Jamīl routinely travels between his work in Karbala' and Baghdad, and Munīr disappears to unknown places, while a trip to Bahīja Khān's house is an exciting occasion for Hudā and 'Ādil. When the government orders the evacuation of their al-'Adhamiyya neighborhood and they are forced to move, it seems as though they have moved to a different world. Part of this effect is caused by the child's excitement at seeing everything for the first time, in contrast with her smallness that makes short distances seem great and a short wait seem like forever. But in many places, it is the woman's more seasoned boredom at having to repeat the same tasks and go to the same places over and over that is more evident. In her more childlike moments, Hudā fragments the narrative and describes everything as though she is seeing it for the first time, giving many small details, making circular connections between subjects and situations. In her more mature, womanly moments, the same circularity is expressed as boredom at repetition and frustration at being spatially restricted.

Mamdūḥ uses this type of chronology to produce more repetition than a linear chronology would produce, approaching the same event multiple times. This allows for a great presence of memory, both personal and communal. Hudā hints again and again at Maḥmūd's sickness, going over her memories of him many times until she finally mentions his death. She remembers her mother many times and in many different ways – by remembering the night of her death, by sleeping in her room, by quoting other characters' memories of her – so that

Iqbāl's image is like a recurring shadow throughout the narrative. Political events of the time also recur many times, and the nonlinearity allows them to be mentioned as though they were actually happening, whenever Hudā thinks of them. This narrative style emphasizes the characters and events that have made the most impact on Hudā - Farīda's anger, Maḥmūd's sickness and death, Iqbāl's death, and the political turmoil in 1950's Baghdad.

The title *Ḥabbāt al-naftālīn* means "mothballs" and is a controlling metaphor for the organization of the novel. In this light, the novel becomes a series of stories that has been preserved by memory just as clothing is preserved by mothballs. As Hudā unpacks each story, the exact chronology matters less than the completeness of each snapshot and the overall import of the collection. Each unpacked item goes with every other piece in a unique way. It is similar with memory: each memory is a part of Hudā's character and has been integrated into her life story to fit with all the other memories, and they form an unbroken circuit.

Critic and anthropologist Saddeka Arebi has written about the importance of memory in women's narratives as a way for women to reconcile the past with the present. Hudā mixes past and present in order to make sense of her life, although it is her own unique kind of sense. Arebi writes of Ruqayya Ash-Shabib and the opposition of her female characters' circular worldview to the male characters' linear worldview. Hudā's manner of storytelling is chronologically rhythmic, going in waves from present to past and back again, and it is also circular. Arebi calls this technique a "critique of separation,

whether between the personal and the political, between men and women, or between 'we' and 'the other'" (Arebi 94).

Mamdūḥ's use of unconventional points of view and her disjointed storytelling techniques can be seen as a critique of colonial, masculine modes of storytelling; these techniques are also the ones best suited to her story and her character. They provide Hudā with a vehicle to reject all storytelling possibilities except for her own voice, and the timeline shows the interconnectedness of all of the characters and events.

In contrast, the men in *Ḥabbāt al-naftālīn* are more isolated and often take actions without understanding the consequences for other people, perhaps because they see time as linear – for them the past is the past and it does not return as it does for the women and their repeating memories. Jamīl remarries with little regard for the children of his first wife, and Munīr stays away without communicating, coming back as though he had never been away, giving orders to Hudā and expecting to be welcomed. But the women, like Bakr's character 'Aziza, are better able to perceive the web of interactions as interconnected: Hudā's grandmother reminds Jamīl of his obligations to 'Ādil and Hudā, Farīda agrees to marry because she knows it will increase her social status, and Hudā picks up on the connections between larger political events, Ḥūbī the butcher and others in her own neighborhood. The women have a better awareness of the circularity and interconnectedness of time and space.

This temporal circumscription parallels the women characters' sense of being trapped in a world of men, moving under their cloaks from the house to the

mosque to the bath and back home again, yet always trying to find their own agency within these circles. Hudā describes their entrapment by men and their subsequent appropriation of their space by adding this sentence on the end of a vivid description of the women's lives: "Walking carefully around the forbidden area: men"[23] (Mamdūḥ 23/13). So while women do find fulfillment in their own spaces, their situation also parallels the colonial subject's sense of being trapped in a subordinate position, without agency or choice, doomed to repeat the same actions over and over as long as they remain colonized.

While the discontinuous time of *Ḥabbāt al-naftālīn* allows Hudā to communicate many realities simultaneously, its circularity, when seen through a political lens, can also be read as a comment on Iraq's post-independence history. After nominal independence in 1932, Iraq experienced political turmoil during the process of freeing itself from the controlling influence of the monarchy, a ruling class that was closely aligned with the British and that catered to their interests. There was a series of uprisings and anti-British demonstrations. Sparked by Iraqi leaders signing restrictive treaties with the British, the uprisings were exacerbated by unemployment, rising costs of living, and conflicts over oil revenues. But though each of these uprisings led to promises from the government, they have been described as largely ineffective (Batatu 806). During this time, Hudā and her family are trapped in a cycle of recurring street demonstrations and political promises that achieves nothing in real terms, leaving them where they started – in fact, the only local effect of these political

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[23] ويخفن من الطواف في المناطق الحرام: الرجل.

events is the disappearance of a number of the neighborhood characters. The recurring descriptions of demonstrations, whether they are different demonstrations or the same one, communicate a "postcolonial disenchantment with promises and projects" (Fraser 170).

Perhaps this is why Hudā's references to demonstrations and political events are sparse, chaotic, and unspecific. She switches from present to past tense and back again, with occasional forays into future tense. The reader is never certain how old Hudā is at any given time or what event she is describing. Nasser's voice on the radio, whispers about the Suez Canal, demonstrations in their neighborhood - none of these are organized chronologically, but rather swirl around Hudā to give a vague impression of turmoil and of history repeating itself. Each demonstration seems the same to her, and different impressions from the same demonstration keep returning to her mind. All of this communicates a postcolonial disenchantment and her refusal to adhere to the orderly history made by the colonizers. Perhaps it also represents a woman's disenchantment with a political world dominated by men.

In conclusion, it is important to underline that both Hudā's jumbled timeline and her shifting point of view are not pure chaos; they are part of her unique method of storytelling. The chronology has rhythm, returning periodically to the present. It has continuity, giving the reader a picture of Hudā piece by piece. And its circularity is enclosing and self-referential, suggesting an alternative to masculine, linear time, as well as to imperial, progressive time. The disjointed narrative voice effectively abrogates the colonial third person,

while the disjointed chronology abrogates the imperial concept of time as forward-moving and progressive. At the same time, Hudā reclaims her own concept of time and person with memory and circularity, inscribing her femaleness and her postcoloniality onto the disorienting backdrop that eventually loops back on itself.

Chapter Two: Switching Codes

The unique narrative style of *Ḥabbat al-Naftalīn* is complemented by Mamdūḥ's parallel appropriation of the Arabic language. As she subverts the standard narrative style, she also subverts notions of a "standard" or normalized Arabic, appropriating an Arabic with many variants, better suited to her literary purpose. By using techniques that Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin call "interlanguage strategies," she succeeds in representing not just one version of Arabic, but a range of linguistic possibilities.[24] By switching between a number of "codes," she accomplishes an abrogation of linguistic dominance and subverts the binary conception of Arabic as either classical or colloquial. This codeswitching marks difference, that is, a linguistic separation between the margin and the center (whether it is adult/child, men/women, or foreign/native). But in this case, it is not a rigid difference. The lines between classical and colloquial, foreign and native, even children and adults, shift and blur in the process. This language succeeds in communicating a complex identity in its many shapes and permutations. Like Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin's "creole continuum," the Arab-Iraqi identity produced by this kind of language use is defined by gradations, subtleties, and implications.

One of the English-language codeswitching strategies that Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin describe in *The Empire Writes Back* involves the author

[24] For more on codeswitching see Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*, specifically Chapter 49: "The Language of African Literature" by Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 285-290, and Chapter 55: "Relexification" by Chantal Zabus, 314-320.

placing her indigenous language or her native English vernacular side by side with the colonizer's language in order to highlight difference and "install linguistic distance" (Ashcroft et al 57). Postcolonial authors have also used techniques of glossing words or leaving them untranslated, interlanguage or syntactic fusion, and vernacular transcription. These techniques serve to "re-place" the language of the colonizers with a more complex and hybrid language.

Samia Mehrez has written about the concept of "radical bilingualism" in texts that constantly move between languages or even among different levels of the same language. In her article "Translation and the Postcolonial Experience: The Francophone North African Text" she discusses Abdelkebir Khatibi's novel *Amour bilingue* as an example of conscious radical bilingualism in which the author uses this fluid language to "subvert hierarchies... exploding and confounding different symbolic worlds and separate systems of signification in order to create a mutual interdependence and intersignification" (Mehrez 122). The "radical" part of this bilingualism means that one language is not simply substituted for another, but rather that both languages are combined, hybridized and used together in ways that neither language could support on its own.

With its existing colloquial-classical dichotomy, Arabic is rich in complex usages and contains vast potential for hybridity and use of multiple codes. Mamdūḥ takes advantage of this, using various types of interlanguage strategies and code-switching to put standard written Arabic side by side with a language made of Iraqi words, colloquial dialect, and foreign words. Instead of two codes, Mamdūḥ creates an Arabic continuum in which her characters speak

and narrate in a range of lexicons, syntactical formations and styles, and even potential differences in pronunciation.

The shift in linguistic emphasis then creates space for other shifts to take place. For example, women's voices increase in dominance because they narrate most of the dialogue. An Iraqi dialect is also favored by the predominance of Iraqi words, while foreign words occasionally intrude. And the women's spaces are privileged by a much more sensual and vibrant language.

In her article "Reenvisioning National Community in Salwa Bakr's *The Golden Chariot Does Not Ascend to Heaven*," Magda M. al-Nowaihi discusses the "masculine literary eye" which exerts force on any text, favoring female characters in traditional, symbolic or caricatured roles. She discusses the female characters in Bakr's novel, who are

> 'real' or 'ordinary' women who are neither angels nor devils, but humans struggling to survive and to endow their everyday life with some meaning and beauty... She is not interested in perpetuating androcentric images of women and is anxious to deal with them as subjects rather than as discursive constructs. ...She feels impelled to create a new literary language to deal with the world of women as it actually is. (al-Nowaihi in Majaj 72)

Mamdūḥ has created her own new literary language, an Arabic adapted to her story. The hybrid Arabic of *Ḥabbat al-Naftalīn* deflects the masculine, the imperial, and the standard linguistic literary eyes that exert force on the text. This is not simply a redirection of the androcentric eye, but a fundamental change to the quality and method of its looking. Mamdūḥ effects a shift in

language not merely by shifting to women's modes of expression but by exploring the entire continuum of language.

Michelle Hartman has written about the language continuum in Andrée Chedid's *La Maison Sans Racines*, using "an approach to literary texts which acknowledges and embraces the spaces between cultures in which authors create those borderlands that cannot be simply described by one label or category" (Hartman 1). She argues that Chedid employs a hybrid language marked by "métissage" and intertextuality in order to question ideas of monolithic versus shifting identities and to address issues of belonging. Similarly, Mamdūḥ's codeswitching is a technique that both abrogates and appropriates at the same time, that denies the masculine its hegemony by using the power of language to transmit a more complex and nuanced identity.

Lexical Markers of Difference

Its extensive history and its many local dialects make the Arabic language extremely rich in linguistic shades. Mamdūḥ is not the first author to experiment with this range. The famous novelist and playwright Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm has written a play called *al-Ṣafqa* dealing with themes of land ownership and the exploitation of poor peasants. The play is comprised of words that are all *fuṣḥa,* standard Arabic words, but are part of Egyptian dialect as well. The play may be read with a more elite *fuṣḥa* pronunciation, or with a more vernacular colloquial dialect pronunciation. Thus the same words are

transformed and even given different class connotations by their pronunciation and by the decision of the person who speaks them (Badawi 378-9).

The characters in *Ḥabbat al-Naftalīn* also speak along the continuum of classical and colloquial, albeit in a different way. These characters use some words that are unmistakably *fuṣḥa* and other words that are unmistakably colloquial, along with some words that are particular to the Iraqi dialect. Their dialogue is peppered with colloquial words like *zeyn, laysh, al-bāriḥa, bas,* and *shwaya*.[25] These words suggest the rhythm of speech and the pronunciation of Iraqi/Baghdadi dialect, which is different from other colloquial Arabic languages. This lexicon is the most striking aspect of Mamdūḥ's language and the most noticeable marker that sets her novelistic language apart from standard Arabic.

Some of the colloquial words that the characters use (*shwaya*: a little bit, *laysh*: why, *'aynī*: my dear) are used throughout the Arab world. Some, like *al-bāriḥa* (yesterday) and *zeyn* (good/fine) are more uniquely Iraqi, and sound "Iraqi" to Arabs from other countries, who recognize them instantly as such. These unmistakable Iraqi words, along with other constant reminders of Baghdad and Iraq (like the flags at the prison in Karbala') mark the whole colloquial lexicon as part of an Iraqi language. These markers make it impossible for the colloquialisms to be interpreted as belonging to another dialect.

When Mamdūḥ uses words from Iraqi dialect, she emphasizes the fact that *Ḥabbat al-Naftalīn* is an Iraqi book written from an Iraqi perspective. This particular lexicon is the first site of difference, the first marker that informs the

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[25] زين, ليش, البارحة, بس, شوية

reader of the distinct identity of the language of this book. The non-Iraqi Arabic reader's familiarity with these words as Iraqi will highlight the difference between the reader's culture (or mainstream Arabic culture) and Iraqi culture and language. They will also jar the expectations of a reader who is not used to encountering colloquial language in a literary text.

Even if the reader knows Iraqi dialect, even if the reader is Iraqi, she will still experience the process of going back and forth between standard Arabic and colloquial Iraqi. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin have written that this process is a very important aspect of postcolonial writing because it highlights a linguistic gap between native cultures and colonial cultures. This cultural-linguistic gap can be highlighted by using a different lexicon, by codeswitching, or other interlanguage strategies. They argue that once the reader encounters unfamiliar cultural items, even if she understands them, she must still go through a process of traveling back and forth between the dominant culture and the "different" one expressed by the language.

Language is the first point of contact in the novel. The difference of Iraqi colloquial words is difficult to ignore. A reader may not pick up on the child's voice, may miss the significance of temporal discontinuity and silences, and may not even note the separation between the women's and the men's spaces, but an Iraqi word in a standard Arabic text is as obvious as a flag. The physical pause that the reader makes when encountering these words is enough to jolt her and may bring even the most insensitive reader to think about the implications of this linguistic gap. Once the Iraqi words make the reader aware of this linguistic

interface, she can then become aware of the many other interfaces in the novel that communicate difference: between children and adults, between men and women, between native and colonizer.

This language difference is something that the anglophone reader of the translated work *Mothballs* will miss completely. Both the words *shwaya* and *qalilan* may be translated as "a little bit," but the first is colloquial and the second is classical. Theroux's 1996 translation[26] is elegant and faithful, but there is simply no English equivalent to "'ithhab fada' lilbābūnaj,"[27] which translates literally into something like "go be martyred for a chamomile." Theroux has translated this as "you're killing me!" which conveys the correct sense, but not the idiomatic flavor. The true Iraqi-ness of the unique idioms cannot be fully translated into English, since by translating the sense one misses the exact words of the idiom, but they will not mean the same thing if merely translated word-for-word. Thus in translation, the linguistic difference is a larger one, a difference between English and Arabic, rather than a more subtle lexical difference within Arabic.

The Foreign Lexicon

Quotation marks are another sign of difference: Mamdūḥ puts them around words derived from foreign languages like *al-rūb* ("robe") and *al-sigāra*

[26] This is the translation I have used for all quotes. There are some slight differences between the original Arabic, the 1996 translation and the 2005 edition, but they are inconsequential.

[27] إذهب فداء للبابونج

("cigarette"). These quotes frame words from English, French, and other languages. Mamdūḥ does not gloss the foreign words or otherwise explain what they mean or where they come from, although there may be Arabic variants of these words that she could have used. This is standard practice in Arabic; however, it has an interesting effect when considered as part of Mamdūḥ's lexical codeswitching. The quotes mark the difference of these words visually and make them stand out – so while the reader stumbles over Iraqi words and idioms that she may or may not understand, her attention is also drawn to European and foreign linguistic intrusions.

Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin argue that when authors leave untranslated words in the text, they are pointing to "the difference between cultures...[and] the fact that the language which actually informs the novel is an/Other language" (Ashcroft et al 63). The "Other" language to which they refer is a local, native, indigenous language. But when this "Other" language is European, the language of the colonizers, and the book itself is written in the native language, what effect does this have on the argument?

Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin's argument is still valid here in the sense that it assigns importance to the interactions between languages with varying power dynamics, and because it assigns importance to "Other" languages that inform the novel. In *Ḥabbat al-Naftalīn*, the linguistic pressure is coming from two directions. On the one hand, there are untranslated foreign words in quotes, and on the other hand, there are untranslated Iraqi words, unmarked by quotes. The presence of both kinds of words shows that multiple languages lay beneath

the surface of the novel. One of these languages is the native Iraqi language, and another is the foreign language, which is "Other" vis-a-vis both colloquial and standard Arabic. Thus it is important to consider two different language relationships: the relationship of foreign languages to Arabic, and the relationship of colloquial variants to standard Arabic.

However, the difference between colloquial and standard Arabic is much less apparent than the difference between foreign words and the rest of the text. The colloquial words are unmarked because they belong to a range of Arabic language and culture that Mamdūḥ is representing, while the foreign words belong to a completely different culture. Thus she legitimizes the colloquial words and gives them weight by putting them on the same level as standard Arabic, while separating Arabic as a whole from foreign words.

"Other" languages represent differences in culture, but they can also represent differences in power. Words cross from one language into another all the time, and some of these crossings are influenced by more than mere ease of use. They represent a power discrepancy that is reflected in the language: the power of colonizer over colonized, and power over the means of communication. Because they take control of the means of communication, colonizers make imprints on the local languages and cultures that last long after decolonization.[28]

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[28] Postcolonial theory began as a method of analyzing English texts from former colonies of the British Empire which had adopted English as their national languages. These colonies had had indigenous languages, but English superseded them to such an extent that many natives now speak only English. Although the Middle East and states of the former Ottoman Empire were able to maintain their own languages, British domination undoubtedly made its mark on the language. See "Part IX: Language" in Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin's *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*. See also Dennis Walder, *Post-Colonial Literatures in English: History, Language, Theory*. Oxford:

By putting quotes around these foreign words, Mamdūḥ is visually emphasizing their exclusion from Arabic, marking a difference that perhaps goes unmarked in daily life. The reader can now see these words for the intrusions that they are, signifiers of European hegemony, the footprint of colonialism. By placing them in quotes, Mamdūḥ is rejecting them by separating them from the main language of the novel.

The dialogue that follows is an interesting example of Mamdūḥ's travel between languages.

> "Where are you going? Are you upset with me or just being spoiled?"
> "Hudā, my girl, bring me the chair and a tray, and you and 'Ādouli come and help me a little."
> "If God would only have mercy on me and let me stop smoking. My chest is swollen and my breath is short, but I love cigarettes, God curse them and the day I first tried one!"
> "What do they taste like, Grandma?"
> "What is it with these homemade cigarettes? I tell 'Umm Jamīl, why don't you try Craven A?"
> "I don't like the English or their cigarettes. God damn them in this life and the hereafter."
> "Now time is with the English. You've started to talk about politics – aren't you afraid? That isn't your way."
> "Good. Five hundred cigarettes. Every time my dears come, they help me. Today they left me alone." (Mamdūḥ 72-73/54)

"إلى أين ذاهبة؟ ماذا, هذا زعل لو دلال؟"
"بنتي هدى حضّري الكرسي والصينية وتعالي أنتِ
وعدولي. ساعدوني شوية."
"لو بس الله يرحمني ويدعني أترك الدخان, صدري تورم
ونَفَسي انقطع, لكني أحب السيجارة, الله يلعنها ويلعن اليوم الذي
تعلمت عليها."
"يمه, كيف هو طعمها؟"

Blackwell Publishers, 1998, and Vaihedi Ramanathan, *The English-Vernacular Divide: Postcolonial Language Politics and Practice*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2005.

"هذا دخان المزبّن أقول أم جميل لماذا لا تجرّبين سيجارة
كرهفن."
"أنا لا أحب الإنكليز ولا دخانهم. الله يلعنهم بالدنيا
والآخرة."
"الآن الوقت مع الإنكليز. بدأت تتحدثين سياسة ألا تخافين؟
هذه ليست عاداتك؟"
..."زين, خمسمائة سيجارة. كل مرة يأتون الحبايب
يساعدوني. اليوم تركوني وحدي"

Hudā's grandmother rejects colonial products explicitly when she says "I don't like the English or their cigarettes." All of Umm Jamīl's other sentences, and many of Hudā's responses, carry colloquial markers such as sighs, colloquial words or colloquial syntax (*hā, yammah, bas, zeyn, shwaya*). In contrast, this politicized statement and Munīr's response are in standard Arabic, further emphasized by Umm Jamīl's beginning formally with *anā*, a word made unnecessary by Arabic verb conjugation, which contains its pronoun within the conjugated verb. Umm Jamīl's rejection of the colonizer is made more forceful by her use of correct Arabic – even while her sentence contains one word borrowed from English – *al-inkilīz*. The word she uses for cigarettes in this sentence – *dukhān* – is a native word, not borrowed from English like *sījāra*, another common word for cigarettes. She prefers the native Arabic word when she rejects the English and their products. Thus in this section, colloquial and standard Arabic take precedence over foreign words.

This dialogue demonstrates a lexical variance that includes non-Arabic, colloquial Arabic and standard Arabic words. When the characters are not discussing matters of great consequence, they use colloquial words, terms of

endearment, borrowed foreign words, and other non-standard lexical items. When the characters have a politically charged discussion, they use standard Arabic words, omitting foreign words wherever possible. They revert back to a more pan-Arab language to express their rejection of the foreign occupiers.

Another effect of the presence of words from a foreign language in the narrative is to blur the lines between colloquial and standard Arabic. If Mamdūḥ had chosen to write the entire novel using the vocabulary of standard Arabic, the implication of colloquial variants would have been muted, leaving the intrusions of foreign words as the only site of language difference. However, she uses words from Iraqi dialect in order to push the language variance deeper. The foreign/native language distinction is most important when considering postcolonial theory in English. In *Ḥabbat al-Naftalīn*, it is the internal language variance that is more important, the variance which Mamdūḥ uses to take the language "re-placement" to a deeper level. This is the process of abrogation and appropriation of which lexical re-placement is only a small part.

Dialogue and Codeswitching

The mixing of foreign vocabulary, standard Arabic, and colloquial words is one of the interlanguage strategies Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin describe. But this is not the only strategy Mamdūḥ employs; she also uses the rhythm of dialogue and the syntax of the vernacular alongside that of standard Arabic, switching codes rather than just lexicons. In some places, she writes in a

classical style and rhythm; in other places, she writes in a vernacular style and rhythm. Placing two or more linguistic codes side by side in order to cross between them at will is an effective way to inscribe alterity with language variants that change with the subject, situation, and the character who is speaking. Much of this switching is done by Hudā, as she not only moves between codes in dialogue and narration, but also takes up many different identities with the use of different points of view.

Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin cite the importance in postcolonial literature of "the narrator who 'reports' in standard English, but moves along the continuum in the dialogue of the characters" (Ashcroft et al 71). One could argue that any time a writer of Arabic writes dialogue, she is shifting codes, implicitly or explicitly. When writing dialogue, she is faced with the choice between writing it in standard Arabic, a language that is not spoken naturally, or in colloquial Arabic. If she chooses standard Arabic, there will be an apparent disconnect between how real people speak in daily life and the kind of language the characters speak, the dialogue may sound stilted and artificial, and the reader will be aware of the colloquial code that remains unwritten. If she chooses colloquial Arabic, the dialogue may sound more authentic, but the writer has still clearly switched codes.

Some controversy and criticism has been produced around authors who use colloquial Arabic in writing. It is a constant topic of scholarly debate; some, like Naguib Mahfouz, hold that the classical language is far superior to the colloquial language because it is shared by all Arabs and because it has been the

language of religion since ancient times (Badawi 242). Pierre Cachia writes that literature written in the colloquial has traditionally been "held in some measure of contempt, if only such contempt as is born of familiarity" (Cachia 13). It has been seen as a lower language, more degraded, more suited to popular expressions, jokes, and newspaper, rather than literature. Cachia himself, while giving the colloquial language some recognition by outlining the history of its use in literature, states that "its expression has none of the refinement we have come to expect in genres associated with the classical" (Cachia 13). Scholars and writers have privileged the classical language as more "literary" and sophisticated.

It is clear that the reason Mamdūḥ uses the colloquial language is not lack of sophistication, as her knowledge of standard Arabic is demonstrated by her elegant and proficient use of it. She employs many techniques considered part of a superior "high" Arabic style, such as verb-subject-object syntax, correct use of cases, and the classical lexicon discussed above (like *qalīlan* rather than *shwaya* or *khayr* rather than *zeyn*). When describing characters, she will often write long sentences with lists of descriptive words; the following paragraph is one long sentence in Arabic but has been broken up into shorter sentences in the translation:

> He mocked and ridiculed. He laughed and winked. He jumped like a field locust and scurried like the cockroaches do in the cesspool. He moved the way movie heroes did, and pinched me on the cheek when he came in, and slapped my behind when he left. He filled the ashtrays with cigarette butts. He drank a great deal of water and tea. (Mamdūḥ 8/2)

يسخر, يهزأ, يتضاحك, يتغامز, يقفز مثل جراد المزارع, يسرع
مثل صراصير البالوعات, يتحر□ك مثل أبطال السينما, يقرصني
من خدي أذا دخل, يضربني على مؤخرتي أذا خرج, ويعبىء
الصحون بأعقاب السجائر, يشرب ماء وشايا□ كثيرا□.

These adjectives come in groups of three, often synonyms, a practice considered necessary for "good" Arabic writing: "He was order, melancholy, and introspection. You were anarchy, insolence, and violence"[29] (Mamdūḥ 11/4).

Most of Hudā's narration is in this standard Arabic style; but when the characters speak, they use a more colloquial register. The rhythm of dialogue is distinctly different from the rhythm of narration.

> "Let her walk about a little."
> 'Ādil came after me and walked behind me. "Stop a little."
> We jumped over the luggage. Everyone's eyes were on us.
> Their faces inspected us. We stood before the window, finding
> a place among the young men and girls. We stuck our heads out
> of the windows; the hot air blinded us as we staggered and
> bumped into the others gathered at the window. (Mamdūḥ
> 151/116)

"اتركيها شوية تتمشي"
يلحق بي عادل. يمشي ورائي: "قفي شوية".
نقفز فوق الأغراض. العيون مفتوحة علينا. الوجوه
ببفحصنا. نقف أمام النافذة, نجد موطىء قدم بين الصبيان والبنت.
نطلع رأسنا من النافذة. الهواء الساخن يعمي عيوننا نتمايل
ونتصادم مع الآخرين.

In this section, the language switches abruptly from repetitive dialogue with the word *shwaya* repeated twice in two sentences to a narrative section in

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[29] هو النظام, الكآبة, والانفراد, وأنت الفوضى, السفاقة, والعنف

standard Arabic. In that section, each sentence is complete and follows the standard Arabic verb-object syntax. There are no colloquial words in that section (although *yamshī* could be standard or colloquial). When Hudā reports the dialogue, she uses the same words that her characters use, which helps her to mimic the chatty rhythm of their speech, but when she narrates, she switches back to standard Arabic.

Colloquial words and forms appear solely in dialogue, although often, a word will appear that could be either colloquial or standard (like *yamshī* above). This colloquial language is generally used to express the personal opinions and feelings of the characters. It also gives the dialogue a particular rhythm with exclamations, terms of endearment like *'aynī*, and many repeated words. For example, the characters often preface sentences with *zeyn*, ("fine") and the children begin sentences with *yammah* ("mama"). Mamdūḥ also writes out sounds like *ha*! or *akh*! as well as rhetorical invocations to God like *allahu akbar* (which Theroux sometimes translates as "Oh, for God's sake!" Mamdūḥ 117/90). These interjections and terms of endearment stand in for that which cannot be written – facial expressions and gestures, voice modulation and intonation. Thus the dialogue is a truly human language, much more than mere vernacular words placed here and there. It gives their speech a different rhythm from the narration and allows for more nuanced dialogue, providing the characters with affect and personality.

Just as they suggest these visual and gestural aspects of dialogue, these rhythms also suggest other aspects of the dialogue, such as pronunciation. There

is only one place where Mamdūḥ writes the words as an Iraqi would pronounce them, and that is in Chapter 11 when she quotes a song that Umm Sutūri sings in mourning for Iqbāl. *Ya ḥaffar* becomes *yaḥfar*, *waḥkī lakī ay shay...* becomes *waḥjalij ash...*[30] (Mamdūḥ 123/94. In other places, the distinctive characteristics of Iraqi/Baghdadi pronunciation are only implied. This song has an important purpose, however – it creates the rhythm and sound of Iraqi/Baghdadi speech, so that the reader can hear these in other places as well. This highlights the rhythmic contrast between the dialogue and the narration. Words like *ha* and *'aynī*, perhaps read by some as throwaway words or fillers, become important as markers of a colloquial rhythm and perhaps a regional accent.

This pronunciation aspect of the dialogue demonstrates the flexibility and multifaceted nature of Mamdūḥ's language. Just like the words that can be read as both colloquial and classical, the dialogue can be read with or without an Iraqi regional accent. Mamdūḥ could have transcribed all of the dialogue in the same way as the song, but she chose to leave it up to the reader to decide how to pronounce the words. The reader could read them assuming standard pronunciation, or she could read them with an Iraqi/Baghdadi accent. When going from dialogue to narration, the codeswitch will be more pronounced if the reader assumes a regional accent, and less so if she assumes standard pronunciation.

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[30] يحفار الكبر مويلى سماية
بيني وبين أمي حجاية
والحجليج اشسوون ويايه
أمي يالحماية كفاية

The colloquial rhythm of the dialogue is especially interesting when one considers that most of the dialogue in *Ḥabbat al-Naftalīn* is produced by women and children. Men's speech appears occasionally, most of the time in the form of a one-line sentence. Men rarely participate in dialogue long enough to produce a whole conversation, with the exception of an argument between Jamīl and Iqbāl. In this argument, Jamīl tells Iqbāl that he has married another woman because Iqbāl is too sick to give him more children or anything else of value. He silences her, telling her "listen – don't shout and don't cry"[31] depriving her of a choice in the matter (Mamdūḥ 53/38). His strong voice in this section is an exception, however, and whenever a man speaks elsewhere in the novel, the dialogue soon switches away, back to women's speech, without much space spent on the men. Although Hudā alludes to the potential power of men over women, the men in *Ḥabbat al-Naftalīn* are largely silent, while women's speech takes up the vast majority of the spoken space of the novel.

Women, as the locus of the "secret language" of spoken rather than written words, play a central role in Mamdūḥ's travel along the continuum of language. In reality, words that are spoken, since they are usually not written down, are more temporary than those that are written. The spoken word is not usually recorded unless someone sets out to do so specifically and for a reason, while written words are recorded as they are written, regardless of what they say, who is writing them and for what reason. The juncture between the spoken word and written word constitutes a gap similar to the margin-center divide, a space

[31] اسمعي لا تعيّطي ولا تبكي

through which Mamdūḥ's women speak: the writing of women's dialogue turns this power structure around. By privileging women in dialogue along with colloquial forms restricted to dialogue, Mamdūḥ brings them to light and to power. The spoken word, in its transience, is not negated by this but rather emphasized and strengthened as a valid type of language.

The contrast between the classical language and the vernacular, dialogue style highlights the effect of these intentional switches. Mamdūḥ uses them in order to show how people speak and negotiate their identity in the many spheres of their lives. Hudā jumps fluidly from one world to the next, from considering half-understood political rumblings to resisting her aunt's reprimands. She is engaged in a constant dialogue between two cultural realities in which she takes part. This back-and-forth is not simply between standard and vernacular, but between proper and casual, sanctioned and black-market, public and private. It is the word of the book alongside the word of the street, and Hudā learns to go between them as she has learned to go between the child's world and the adult's world.

This movement between standard and colloquial allows the characters to speak in their own words, as Iraqi is usually spoken, without mediating or changing them to make them more standard. It helps show that being Iraqi is an important facet of Hudā's identity and it is important that she speaks in words that communicate that identity. Not only does she tell an Iraqi story, but she uses an Iraqi language. The switching produces a hybrid language, a complex continuum in which colloquial words are sometimes also classical, characters

speak Iraqi and standard Arabic with a number of foreign words, and local pronunciations are implied but not transcribed.

She pushed me in front of her as if I were on my way to school. She surrounded me, and I heard the movement of her cloak and her rapid, heavy breathing. She waited for my tongue to spring into action as she enveloped me under her armpit, the sour smell of the sweat that trickled down her neck and belly:
"Hah – have you gone mute? This is the only place you show any manners. Have you prayed or not yet?
"Will you pray for me?"
"What's wrong with your tongue? May God cut it out and give us a rest from it! I'm not praying for anyone. Everyone prays for his own soul."
"I don't know how."
"Say, 'God, guide me on the right path, may my father prosper and my mother, brother, and grandmother be blessed with health; and may my aunt marry very soon so that she will be rid of Hudā and that damned house."
"Why don't you pray for us all?"
"Oh, for God's sake! Even in this sacred place you're still a brat? Where on earth did they get you? Fine, I'll pray by myself. I don't want anyone near me listening to what I'm saying." (Mamdūḥ 117/90)

تدفعني أمامها كما لو أنني سأذهب إلى المدرسة. تحاصرني, أسمع حركة عباءتها وتنفسها السريع الاهث. تنتظر عضلة لساني وهي تلفني تحت إبطها, رائحتها حامضة من العرق الذي ينزّ من رقبتها وبطنها:
"ها. اخرست؟ بس هنا عيونك تنكسر, ها دعوت لو بعد؟"
"أنت ادعي لي."
"ولسانك ما به؟ الله بقطعه ويخلصنا منه, أنا لا أدعو لأحد. كل واحد يدعو لروحه."
"أنا لا أعرف."
"قولي الله يهديني على طريق الخير, ويرزق أبي ويعافي أمي وأخي وجدتي ويزوج عمتي بسرعة حتى أخلص منك ومن ذاك البيت الأسود."
"ليش أنت ما تدعين لنا جميعاً؟"

"الله أكبر عليك. حتى بهذه الأرض الطاهرة تعاندين؟ أنت من أية طينة جئت؟ زين أنا أدعو وحدي. لا أريد أحداً قربي يسمع ماذا أقول."

This conversation between Hudā and her aunt takes place in the mosque, a public place where other people are praying. It is the kind of back-and-forth between a small child and an adult that is usually whispered and intimate in spite of the scolding. It is full of colloquial words, vocal interjections like *ha*!, as well as standard sentences. Hudā's aunt's annoyance comes through especially in phrases like "Oh, for God's sake!" and "Fine, I'll pray by myself." Instead of magnifying and describing the mosque, the imam's voice, the other worshipers, or any of the other things that may be happening there, Mamdūḥ focuses on this quiet conversation between family members. It is an exchange that would normally be silent and unnoticed, but she makes the reader notice it.

The codeswitching produced by this woman-dominated dialogue is both formal and semantic. In one light, it is a switch between classical Arabic and Iraqi vernacular, marked by a different lexicon and syntax. In another light, it is a switch between public, male-dominated space and the viewpoints of the women in them. In a place like the mosque, that "had no times for women, but the men entered in droves"[32] (Mamdūḥ 113/87), the women's voices constantly interject, intruding on a space that was previously, and is usually, all male. When the women speak, they move between standard and colloquial, at the same time forcing the literary eye to switch from the public space to the women's

[32] المسجد نفض يده عن أوقات النساء. فدخل الرجال أفواجاً.

space and focus on their voices.

Women's Spaces

In addition to technical, linguistic codeswitching, Mamdūḥ also uses a metaphorical kind of codeswitching to bring the women's spaces into the foreground. These switches are neither lexical nor stylistic, but rather sensory. She uses particularly sensual and intense language to describe places like the women's day at the public bath, using more flat and monotonous language for other gender-neutral or male public spaces. In the vivid passages, her language is not always beautiful and pleasing, but its intensity sets the private women's spaces apart from a background of drab places. This opens a gap analogous to the gap between languages, a break between the divergent styles of description used for these two kinds of space. For example, Hudā describes the outside of the *ḥammām* in plain terms:

> In front of the great door, painted a dark grey, the boys played marbles. Black wooden benches were set in the four corners. Warm breezes blew from inside, and a tall woman in her fifties, slender and ugly, was standing in front of a wooden partition... A damp shawl was pulled around her middle. (Mamdūḥ 29/18)

> أمام الباب الكبير المصبوغ باللون الرصاصي الكامد, يتقاذف الصبية الكرات و"الدعابل". مصطبات خشبية كالحة موزعة في الأركان الأربعة, هبات ساخنة تجيء من الداخل, امرأة خمسينية طويلة, نحيلة قبيحة واقفة أما حاجز خشبي... تشدّ على وسطها إزاراً رطباً.

This description engages only the sense of sight, with the exception of the "warm breeze," which comes from inside the *ḥammām.* The description is bland, colorless, and monotonous. But once Hudā enters, the sights, sounds and smells become more intense:

> There you saw the whisper of skin soaked with steam, water, and perspiration. The smell of armpits and buttocks, of urine, mutters and grunts escaping their lips, and shouts across the water barrel...You were showered and soaked, and bowls of hot water were poured over you, on your head, over your delicate frame. You wailed... (Mamdūḥ 30/19)

> هناك كنت تشاهدين هسيس الجلود المزدانة بالبخار والماء والعرق. روائح الآبط والمؤخرات, البول الداخلي, اللهاث يغمغم بين الشفاه, والصراخ يشق براميل المياه... ترطبين بالماء, تنقعين هناك, تسكب عليك طاسات الماء الحارّ, على الرأس, على البنية الطرية, تعولين...

The contrast between the sober picture of the outside and the vertiginous and sensual description of the inside makes the bathhouse and its women alive and vital. This shift in language is most apparent when only the sense of sight is engaged in descriptions of the outside, while in the women's spaces all senses are engaged. This space which is forbidden to men and hidden from public sight becomes enlarged, while the public, sanctioned places shrink. Usually, only the sense of sight is engaged in the former, while all five senses are engaged in the latter.

Jamīl's room in the prison in Karbala' is another example of a place of sensory deprivation that highlights the switch to the tumultuous world of women.

"The floor was of tile that had lost its color..."[33] (Mamdūḥ 161/123). Hudā is the only female in this man's space, accompanied by her father and brother, with the other officers and the male prisoners just beyond the cell. On her way there, Hudā is obliged to wear the black 'abaya which conceals her body while it reveals her status as a woman. She wears this label, like the 'abaya, uncomfortably, tripping over the ends of it - it is big and unwieldy and does not fit her. When she takes it off in her father's cell, she describes the floor as being "stained"[34] with it (Mamdūḥ 161/123). This is the most striking word, as well as the only word describing something female, in the whole description of the cell. Although Mamdūḥ writes the woman as a "stain," – perhaps reflecting society's view and not her own – it is nevertheless a word that is full of life and strength, due to its associations with blood. The man's world in which this stain appears is silent, weak, and monochrome.

The women of *Ḥabbat al-Naftalīn* are often associated with blood, vitality, and violence. "This was the day my aunt's blood would be spilled,"[35] the first sentence of Chapter 8, begins the painful and detailed description of Farīda's full-body hair removal before her wedding:

> She was stretched out on the carpet in our room, nearly naked, her legs open. 'Umm Sutūri lifted her right leg, and Aunt Na'ima took her left leg. They drew thick lines along each thigh, clipping and up-rooting the hair of her thighs and legs. She was like steel, turning on to her stomach, her hair hanging between her eyes. The white cube of chalk moved

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[33] الأرض من الكاشي الذي اختفى لونه

[34] بقعت

[35] اليوم سيسفح دم العمة

along her brown flesh, swelling, red, rushing into her cells, seeping into her blood.
Farīda's voice created a new layer: "Ouch! Let me rest a little while. I'm dying!" Her bursts of trilling were like a declaration of war.
(Mamdūḥ 88-89/67-68)

هي ممدّدة في غرفتنا على السجادة, فاتحة ساقيها, شبه عارية. أم ستوري رفعت ساقها اليمنى. وأخذت اليسرى الخالة نعيمة, الخيوط الغليظة تمشي على كل ساق, تحف وتشيل شعر الأفخاذ والساقين. هي مثل الفولاذ, تنقلب على بطنها ويطير الشعر بين العيون. مكعب الطبشور الأبيض يمشي على اللحم الأسمر, الذي تورّم, احمرّ, انتفضت خلاياه واحتقن دمه.
وصوت فريدة يخترع لنفسه غشاء جديدا: "آخ, دعوني أرتاح قليلاً, راح أموت." الهلاهل تطلع مثل إعلان حرب.

This dramatic scene opens a chapter full of sensuality, descriptions of women's bodies and voices in the process of preparing for the wedding. It engages all the senses, especially the sense of smell ("It all collided and mingled together, the flesh of the lambs and the flesh of all these women..."[36] Mamdūḥ 91/69) and sound ("...sudden voices, murmuring among the aromatics, slanders coming from their gums..."[37] Mamdūḥ 90/68). They shout and trill, let their dresses open and their hair go loose, touching each other, full of scent and sound. Hudā is overwhelmed, comparing the women to a "flood,"[38] (Mamdūḥ 91/69) saying that the house was "inundated"[39] with them (Mamdūḥ 90/68). The description of this women's night is so lively as to be a sensory overload.

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[36] كل شيء يتلاطم, لحم الخروف, ولحوم كل هؤلاء النسوة
[37] الأصوات المباغتة, الهمهمة بين الأفواه, النميمة بين اللثات تطلع
[38] الطوفان
[39] يغوص

The women's presence fills the house to such an extent that it leaves no room for the men. Hudā says of her father, "but still the house banished his voice"[40] (Mamdūḥ 95/72). Even 'Ādil is subdued, not telling jokes as usual. Munīr only shows up at the very end of the chapter, and there he is an island of silence. "Suddenly silence fell. Munīr cleared his throat"[41] (Mamdūḥ 99/75). The men do not get the same kind of space or descriptive energy as the women, and they are silent and monochrome, especially when compared with the sounds and smells of the women in the house, and the many images of blood.

Thus, the most energetic and sensory language of the novel is produced in relation to women. The codes Mamdūḥ uses here are not linguistic or vernacular codes, but descriptive codes. She employs different kinds of sensory language in order to show "the articulation of two quite opposed possibilities of speaking... [that] outlines a cultural space between them which is left unfilled..." (Ashcroft et al 54). The drab, monochrome language is one possibility and the vivid language is another – and the juncture between the two communicates and maintains "distance and otherness" (Ashcroft et al 39). Since the vivid language is so much more dynamic and lively, it opens up the women's spaces and expands them into the foreground of the reader's attention.

In conclusion, the codeswitching strategies that differentiate between Iraqi, standard Arabic, and foreign lexical codes, narrative and dialogue, and

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[40] لكن البيت ظل يبعد صوته

[41] بغتة, كل شيء يصمت. السيد منير يتنحنح داخلاً.

male and female create a gap, a distance between cultural realities. Mamdūḥ successfully abrogates binary and simplistic notions of language and identity, creating a complex Iraqi identity in their place. Both the standard Arabic and the Iraqi colloquial are important as Arabic variants, but the act of traveling between them is most important in understanding *Ḥabbat al-Naftalīn* as a postcolonial work. When "the 'standard' code and the appropriated usage continue to exist side by side" (Ashcroft et al 75), the existence of the unique identity is strengthened by the inclusion of both codes in its sphere of linguistic possibilities. The cultural space between them is left unfilled, producing a gap between what is understood as mainstream and what is understood as marginal. This weakens the separation between them, allowing an author and her characters to take part in both.

Hudā takes part in many different permutations of center/margin in her life, and traveling between them is part of her identity. The "secret language," the continuum of language variance along which she travels, is her vehicle for negotiating the gap between different spheres of her identity. She belongs to the adult's world and the child's world, the public and the private. The coexistence of multiple variations of Arabic and multiple modes of description mirrors the complexity of the Iraqi postcolonial society through which Hudā moves.

Rather than simply denigrate the standard or mainstream reality, the goal of this codeswitching is to bring a formerly invisible reality to light. Mamdūḥ does not deny the importance of men or attempt to eject them from her story. She depicts women's spaces and voices, usually invisible to the public, in detail

alongside men's spaces. She places Iraqi Arabic alongside standard Arabic in order to give the Iraqi Arab identity a place. She does not reject the reality of the men's world or the reality of standard Arabic, but rather their dominance. She is not abrogating their existence or rejecting their importance; she is showing these as possibilities among many, revealing other, previously silent, possibilities. After this abrogation and appropriation, Mamdūḥ ends up with a *whole* language, a complete Arabic language that includes many variants and is best able to communicate her cultural reality.

Chapter Three: Political Creatures of Madness and Fear

> So, it is fear alone. It has been with me all my life. The older I get, the more I control the factors that give rise to it. One day it felt as if it had replaced the very blood in my veins, so intimate was it. It runs through families, clans and perhaps even in nations. It is the source of pleasure, pain and the highest state of oblivion. It is the body's bitter taste, whether attractive or repellent. It resides in our walls and our foundations, in our vaults and our domes, between our keys and our locks, forever sheltered in the structure of language and the poverty of human relations. It is in every drawer; no head is free of it and its stamp is on every literary text. Thus our Arab fear appears to be a multi-headed monster feeding on the poison which stems from our conditioning to submit, to fragment and to keep it all to ourselves. (Mamdūḥ in Faqir 71)

Mamdūḥ has written extensively about the presence of fear in her writing as a productive and creative element, even as a fundamental aspect of her Arab and Iraqi identity. It is the human force behind her linguistic re-placement strategies, an impetus towards transformation and appropriation. It is the emotional medium through which Mamdūḥ and her characters appropriate their power, their language, and their identity. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin do not discuss emotion and atmosphere in *The Empire Writes Back*, preferring to focus on the particulars of language use, but Mamdūḥ places a high value on the presence of fear in her work as a vehicle for her voice. I will discuss it here as an important facet of the setting and character development in *Ḥabbat al-naftālīn.*

Mamdūḥ intertwines the concepts of fear and her Arab identity in interviews, in her nonfiction, and in her fiction; when asked to describe herself in one word, she has chosen the word "fear." Her short autobiographical piece (part

of the collection of Arab women's writing in *In the House of Silence*) is called "Creatures of Arab Fear." Although it may be grounded in reality – fear of oppression, fear of death, fear of those more powerful, fear of losing freedom, fear of never regaining freedom – it ultimately transcends all reasons for it and becomes its own entity, without reason or source. She characterizes it variously as a spur to writing, an element of her identity, and a friend. For Mamdūḥ, it is the most fundamental feeling, the background for her life and the inner life of her characters. It is part of her identity and part of her psyche, as well as her stated reason for choosing her subject matter: "Extreme fear drives me to the darkest and most dangerous sites" (Mamdūḥ in Faqir 66). But Mamdūḥ does not view it negatively; for her it is not something to be avoided or overcome. She sees many positive aspects and outcomes of her fear. It is a creative spur, a motivation for writing. It is a fertile base from which all else comes, and it is part of her self. Since she cannot imagine a life or a world without fear, she has claimed it and made it her own, has made it her most private and cherished emotion. It has a very important place in *Ḥabbat al-naftālīn*, from the particulars of the characters' political fear to its place in the general atmosphere of unease. It ultimately becomes their incentive, their call to action, and their release into freedom.

There is a reason why Mamdūḥ titled her autobiographical chapter in *In the House of Silence* "Creatures of Arab Fear" instead of simply "Creatures of Fear." Fear is part of her identity as much as being an Arab or being an Iraqi, and it is bound up in those two identities. It is also interesting that she did not title it "Creatures of Iraqi Fear," as she could have. Using the word "Arab"

instead of "Iraqi" broadens the scope and posits fear as common to all Arabs, and her particular Iraqi fear as only one variety of it. In "Creatures of Arab Fear," she mentions her Iraqi identity many times. This parallels her choice to write *Ḥabbat al-naftālīn* in standard Arabic while occasionally using a colloquial Iraqi language: the text is first "Arab," but also incorporates Iraqi elements. The combination of these language variants posits the Iraqi identity as unique within the larger fabric of Arab identity.

Fear is the most pervasive emotion in *Ḥabbat al-naftālīn*, more pervasive even than love among members of Hudā's family, and it plays an important part in Mamdūḥ's abrogation of dominant structures and her appropriation of her particular narrative voice. There are concrete, historical reasons for this fear, and these play into issues of Iraqi and Arab identity and postcoloniality. Fear is what makes everything else make sense: the abrogation of binary language structures, the unconventional narrative style, the complex identities. Fear, as Mamdūḥ writes it, is as complex and multifaceted as her hybrid narrative. In addition, there is a strong relationship between fear, madness, and female characters' unconventional behavior. Fear leads to madness, and they are both productive influences in *Ḥabbat al-naftālīn*, opening up a space in which women can freely express themselves and seize agency where it may not otherwise have been available to them.

Fear and Politics: Elements of Setting

The setting of *Ḥabbat al-naftālīn* is imbued with fear from the very beginning, an atmosphere that disorients and feeds Hudā's childish observations and narrative style. The novel begins ominously, with a threatening image and an undefined ordeal in the future: "The clouds are over your head, and the test is always waiting for you"[42] (Mamdūḥ 7/1). Although Hudā goes on to describe domestic matters: members of her family, the courtyard of her house, her grandmother praying, the menace of that first sentence is not forgotten. The fear soon comes back in the form of her mother's coughing which "encircles"[43] Hudā and ʿĀdil and warns them of her poor health (Mamdūḥ 13/5). At the end of that first short chapter, after describing her brother, her aunts, her mother and her grandmother, and their house, the fear comes through again: "women: souls... at whom fear fires its incomparable rays"[44] (Mamdūḥ 15/7). At the same time as she sets the stage for her family's story, she plants the fear firmly in the novel from the outset so that it can recur again and again. Its constant presence in the background provides a setting in which concerns of the narrator's language and identity can be played out. It acts as a spur to the definition of her adolescent, female, Iraqi identity through all of the threats that surround and define it.

Political events are the source of much of the diffuse fear that Hudā absorbs from the adults around her. During the time period during which *Ḥabbat*

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[42] السحب فوق رأسك, والامتحان دائماً بانتظارك

[43] يحاصركما ذلك السعال

[44] نسوان... ويطلق عليهن الخوف أشعته التي لا تضاهى

al-naftālīn takes place, Iraq was struggling with the British, who maintained power even though technically their mandate was over. The people in Hudā's neighborhood are afraid of the British, of the government, and of being marked as politically seditious like Ḥūbī the butcher, who was taken away by the government. Hudā's community exists in a constant state of anxiety because of the turmoil and violence around them.

When Hudā refers to a major historical event, she never tells the reader everything, instead giving names and images which only a perceptive and educated reader can grasp. While standing on the "Old Bridge," she remembers "the voice of the corpses colliding: the English, Nuri al-Said, the demonstrations, the firing of bullets, bodies lying on the bridge while others fled into the river"[45] (Mamdūḥ 82/61). She is most likely referring to "al-Wathba" ("The Leap"), a 1948 Baghdad demonstration on Ma'mun Bridge that ended with many casualties. The demonstrations were fueled by opposition to the British-friendly Portsmouth treaty and unrest among workers. The demonstration culminated with the police firing machine guns into the crowd on the bridge (Batatu 551). Hudā remembers that the son of her neighborhood barber was brought to her house after he had been hit by bullets.

This event had a great impact on Hudā's neighborhood and family, and her allusion to it emphasizes that impact by showing rather than telling, by giving details rather than explaining. Rather than describe the event in detail

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[45] صوت ارتطام الجثث: الانكليز, ونوري السعيد, المظاهرات, وإطلاق الرصاص. أجسد تستلقي على الجسر وأخرى تقر إلى النهر.

and tell how she felt about it, she leaves much to the reader's imagination, letting the reader draw her own conclusions. Because her silences are the only transition between the turbulent historical events and mundane events, her constant switching between the two infuses the turbulent events with a certain amount of ordinariness. On the other hand, the proximity of the two gives a slight memory of fear to the mundane activities.

There are many other scenes in which Hudā uses names or details to refer to historical events and to set the atmosphere without explaining anything else. She hears a conversation over a coffeehouse game of backgammon: "The pensioners coughing mingled with mentions of the names of Nasser and Nuri al-Said, Salih Jabr, the mandate, the beautiful young king and the English, the demonstrations and the leaflets, the government and Voice of the Arabs Radio from Cairo"[46] (Mamdūḥ 120/92).[47] The names of Jabr and al-Said, so full of meaning at the time, shape the atmosphere in the coffeehouse so that it can only belong to one time period. It is a period of upheaval, of fear, of negotiating and crossing both personal and political boundaries. In this period of protest and repression, the Iraqi national identity is being consolidated, and Hudā must find her place within that identity.

This coffeehouse conversation illustrates the atmosphere in which Hudā forms her identity. Every day, she and the other characters hear these names in

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[46] سعال الرجال المتقاعدين تتداخل بأسماء عبد الناصر ونوري السعيد, صالح جبر والوصي, الملك الجميل الصغير والانكليز, المظاهرات, المناشير, الحكومة وإذاعة صوت العرب.

[47] Salih Jabr and Nuri al-Said were at the heart of Iraqi politics during the 1950s, both serving as Prime Ministers at different times. Both were closely allied with the British. Al-Said was especially known for his repression and non-tolerance of dissent (Elliot 116).

conjunction with some political event; the names are in the papers and on the radio and on everyone's lips. The names Jabr and al-Said serve as focal points for the community's fear and anchor Hudā's childhood in the 1950's. They are a large part of her child-consciousness, hanging like clouds over her head all the time, hinting at her transformation, at her self-discovery. The story depends heavily on its atmosphere, on the alleys and rooftops of the al-'Adhamīyya neighborhood, and on Iraq's postcolonial narrative. The fear opens up a space for Hudā's consciousness of these events and her eventual coming of age in their midst.

When Hudā describes these events in such a vague and impressionistic manner, she heightens the sense of uncertainty and anxiety that surrounds them, and her telling of history is inseparable from her telling of her own story. Her hints about public figures and demonstrations communicate an atmosphere particular to that historical time and reveal her growing political consciousness in response to her fear. It drives Hudā to her awakening as an adult and emphasizes her rebellion against those who wield power over her: her father, her aunts, the government. She uses her own postcolonial language, the "secret" language that Mamdūḥ has formed with her hybrid Arabic.

Mamdūḥ could have written these events explicitly into the narrative; Hudā could have said, "then I thought about al-Wathba, the massacre on the bridge" or "Nuri al-Said signed a treaty with Britain that is not good for Iraq." But instead, she uses the names as molds to shape and direct the story. This is similar to the way she uses Iraqi colloquial words to shape the language into a

complex and interesting language variant. Her style employs these words as hints, giving an Iraqi flavor to the Arabic, giving Iraqi history to the setting. Her style is innovative because it does not state anything explicitly, leaving room for a complex and dynamic setting that communicates the reality of life in Baghdad in the 1950's. It is an effective way to transmit Hudā's postcolonial experience and a parallel to the language variance discussed in Chapter Two.

Charged names like Nasser also contain much emotion. When Maḥmūd gives Hudā a leaflet, all she sees is the word "Nasser" (Mamdūḥ 189/145). It is presumably a political leaflet, appealing to Arab nationalism or perhaps dealing with the nationalization of the Suez Canal. During the 1950s, Nasser was a rallying figure for anti-colonial sentiments and pan-Arab nationalism throughout the Arab world. He forced the nationalization of the Suez Canal, taking it out of British hands and putting it under Egyptian control. The repercussions of this were felt throughout the Middle East and gave hope to other Arab nations who wished to weaken their ties to Western powers (Cleveland 297). Hudā mentions this event many times as she repeats the whispers and rumors in her neighborhood. The name "Nasser" contains all of this history and emotion, and the reader must understand it in order to understand Hudā.

In *Ḥabbat al-naftālīn,* Nasser's voice is revolutionary and incendiary, a symbol of freedom and rebellion that speaks to the Iraqi in Hudā as well as the teenager she is becoming. But while she identifies with the sentiment, she knows that it is dangerous. She knows, when she takes the leaflet, "that there was something like a bomb inside it, and if I touched it it would blow my hand

and head off"[48] (Mamdūḥ 189/145). Leaflets are a physical symbol of the fear and tension of the political situation. One man confides to another, stuttering quietly: "Yes, my sister's son has leaflets. It's driving her mad"[49] (Mamdūḥ 121/93). He describes the leaflets like a disease that infects everyone with fear. "Nasser" – the symbol for rebellion, political unrest, hope and terror – is what the leaflets contain.

Nasser is extremely important to Hudā's identity as an Arab, and it is in his name that she feels connected to a larger community of Arabs. She mentions him constantly, hearing his voice on the radio and saying that the people of her neighborhood "swore allegiance to him"[50] (Mamdūḥ 190/146). She takes the radio into her mother's room at night so that she can listen to his voice and to Voice of the Arabs Radio. She is inflamed by the pan-Arab, anti-Western sentiment she hears on Voice of the Arabs and Voice of Free Iraq, which urged Iraqis to rise up and kill Prime Minister Nuri al-Said and regent Abdulilah (Elliot 116). But she also feels a personal connection to him; she says to herself, "turn the dial to Voice of the Arabs from Cairo and enter Paradise with the voice of Nasser" (Mamdūḥ 111/85). His voice makes her happy on a purely emotional, not just ideological, level, in spite of the anxiety and uncertainty that his politics stir in her; her sentimental attachment to him makes him an antidote to the potential turmoil he represents. Thus the word "Nasser," just like the pan-Arab colloquial words, becomes a marker for one kind of identity: Arab; and names

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[48] كنت أعرف أن في داخله ما يشبه اللغم, إذا أمسكته سيكيش بيدي ورأسي.
[49] أي المناشير ابن أختي. أمه مثل المجنونة
[50] وادخلوا طاعته

specific to Iraq like "Nuri Al-Said" become a marker for another identity: Iraqi. Just as Hudā travels along the language continuum, not completely rejecting the dominant language but rather including it in her language spectrum along with many other variants, she includes the pan-Arab nationality in her political consciousness while also identifying as Iraqi. Her fear is present in both places.

All of the women characters express sentimental attachments to Nasser and to other public figures, who they often admire for their non-political qualities. The pictures of these public figures hang on the walls of the neighborhood houses and the characters feel as though they know them personally. Hudā's grandmother says of Nasser, "His voice – it's as though I've heard it before. It's like Abu Jamīl's voice"[51] (Mamdūḥ 189/145). She seems not to care what Nasser says, but likes him because his voice reminds her of her husband's voice. The nurse Rasmīya, likewise, keeps Nasser's picture in her purse and frequently kisses it. The women also express affection for the King of Iraq: "All the aunts and women of the neighborhood loved him: 'he's a dear. He's still young. All the troubles have come from his uncle Abdulilah and the English'"[52] (Mamdūḥ 191/146). The women of the neighborhood idealize Faisal II while they demonize Abdulilah and others, speaking the language of their time and their place.

These names, as the women mention them to each other, mean something very specific that is understood among the women. These names signify a

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[51] لكن صوته كأني أعرفه من قبل, يشبه صوت أبي جميل

[52] كانت الخالات, العمات, ونسوان الطرف يحببنه: "أي عيني بعده صغير, كل المصائب جاءت من خاله عبد الاله والانكليز."

complex of emotions shared by the community. The women's sentimental attachments to these public figures by virtue of voice, youth or charisma is a facet of their national consciousness, parallel with their shared fear. The characters look at the pictures every time they go into a room, and the names that they constantly mention are symbols that refer to a whole body of memories stored in the collective imagination. When they speak to each other, they speak with the implicit understanding of these memories. The shared emotion is what binds them together as a community with a language in common.

The psychological impact of this is important because the stimuli that bring up these memories belong only to certain groups – here, Iraqis. A name, a photograph, or a voice can signify "the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories" that Ernest Renan proposes as one of the components of the "spiritual principle" of a nation (Renan 19). So the names Nasser, al-Said, and Faisal II signify not only the political developments of the time, about which any reader can educate herself, but also a personal connection to these developments and a memory of them. Mamdūḥ needs to write only these names to refer to a communal history, and a communal complex of emotions, shared by Iraqis. Perhaps not all Iraqis would respond with fear, but most would likely respond with some kind of strong emotion.

However, there are two levels to Mamdūḥ's communal history, because she includes aspects of a more general Arab history as well as aspects of Iraqi history. Events like al-Wathba and the 1958 Revolution are particular to Iraq, along with the names Nuri al-Said and Salih Jabr. In order to locate these

historically, the reader must know Iraqi history specifically. But Nasser and the anti-imperialist, anti-colonial, anti-Zionist sentiments he represents have a far broader reach in Arab history. Nasser had a wide influence in the Arab world, as did colonialism and its opposition. Thus, just as Mamdūḥ writes in two Arabic codes, standard and colloquial, she writes in two historical codes as well: Arab and Iraqi.

Most narratives make reference to some kind of communal history. But Mamdūḥ's narrative relies on communal history for the complexity and hybridity of its postcolonial setting. Both Arab and Iraqi fear are important in the multilayered world of *Ḥabbat al-naftālīn.* The characters display a mixture of conflicting emotions toward public figures and political events, relating to them with joy, admiration, endearment, and anger, but mostly with fear. By feeling as if they know these people personally, they can humanize and sentimentalize them, while at other times, they can demonize them in order to feel united with their neighbors in misfortune. Most of the time, they just speak of them "in whispers, in fear"[53] (Mamdūḥ 120/92), and thus they can reject mainstream identities and come closer to their unique Iraqi identity. With these names and memories specific to Iraq, they can carry on a conversation that only they will understand, appropriating even the emotions behind the words.

The Baghdad 1950's setting that Mamdūḥ paints carries the weight of the Arab history with specific Iraqi elements that is so important to her characters' identities. Hudā grows up in fear, and the fear shapes her narrative and her

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[53] هامسة, خائفة

speech, as well as the speech of the other characters. The setting is full of gaps and silences, in which the particular elements of the characters' lives and personalities come through. The basic human emotion of fear leads to more complex emotions through which the characters can communicate their difference. They negotiate their place between Iraqi and Arab identity, not belonging to either group exclusively, but occupying a hybrid place between the two.

Postcolonial Fear

In his article "Of Algeria: Childhood and Fear," Mustapha Marrouchi writes of fear and an expatriate's issues of belonging neither to his home country, nor to his adopted country. He invents a character named Arrouj to represent the colonized Algerian childhood, and later, the expatriate. He discusses the various tyrannies to which Arrouj was subject as he attended *Le Grand College*, a school whose first rule was that any language other than French would not be tolerated. There he submitted to the whims and abuses of his French schoolmasters, who were more concerned with obedience and discipline than actual learning. This treatment affected Arrouj, who "became a timid, clumsy, speechless misfit...He was often tense and bored" (Marrouchi 8). The memory of this fear later spurs him to ponder questions of homeland, history and exile, returning to Algeria as an adult only to encounter further tyranny and fear.

There are important differences and similarities between his reaction and

Hudā's reaction. While for Arrouj, at least as a child, the fear is a silencer, causing him to withdraw into himself (only later reclaiming the word), fear makes Hudā defiant, rebellious, and ready to take on any of the adults. Fear causes her to open her mouth, drives her narration, and leads to indignant reactions and anger, as well as alliances with her brother and friends. The two characters are also different in terms of place: Arrouj's negotiates the differences between Canada and Algeria, while Hudā negotiates the world of adults and the world of children, and the world of women and the world of men.

For both characters, fear is instrumental in their self-image. It drives the complexity of their identities and recurs when they travel between the many worlds to which they belong. Hudā feels fear when she overhears the adults, trying to understand them, and when she dares to confront and disobey her father, thereby claiming an independent adult status. Arrouj feels fear in the French school, where he does not quite belong, and when he crosses the border to leave Algeria as a Canadian citizen. Both characters transgress accepted boundaries because of and in spite of their fear, because crossing these boundaries is integral to their personhood. Hudā must become an adult; Arrouj must return to Canada.

Marrouchi describes Arrouj as a synthesis of the identities that are all around him, and this could be an apt description for Hudā as well: "This is how he grew up: neither as a replica of his parents nor of the once colonial ruler" (Marrouchi 2). These two characters represent a fluid postcolonial identity, in which they are not fixed in any single identity. As an expatriate, Arrouj is no longer purely Algerian, but has not taken on a colonial identity either – rather, he

exists in the liminal space between the two. Hudā is purely Iraqi; her liminal space is the space between childhood and adulthood, in the story, and the space between standard and colloquial Arabic, in the language. Fear is the connector among all of these identities.

Fear's ability to exist concurrently with any other emotion allows it to be present in *Ḥabbat al-naftālīn* at all times, no matter what identity the characters inhabit at that moment. Fear is something that every character feels, an emotion that they live and breathe. Hudā both fears and loves her father, and Farīda embraces her wedding even though she is afraid. In each case, the fear facilitates the character's transformation and renegotiation of boundaries. Each character fears something different. Hudā is afraid of the adults, their punishments, and of losing her friend Maḥmūd. Jamīl is afraid of failure, afraid of not getting promoted, afraid of his responsibilities toward two households. Iqbāl is afraid of Jamīl, and the fear makes her cough and pound her chest "noiselessly"[54] (Mamdūḥ 40/27). Farīda's fear, the fear of the other aunts and of Hudā's grandmother is less clearly spelled out – are they afraid of the British? Of violent demonstrations? Of men? Of the uncertainty caused by the political turmoil that has taken over their neighborhood? It is this aspect of fear that is important, and not necessarily its object; this emotion goes so deeply to the core of the novel that at a certain point, exactly what the characters fear becomes irrelevant. It becomes a constant disorientation, a paradigm for existence, driving Hudā's disjointed narration and her self-image.

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[54] بلا صوت

Ḥabbat al-naftālīn's fear transcends naming and description. Mamdūḥ writes, "This fear might carry various labels: chivalry, friendliness, the bond of the womb and of an exclusive disdain" (Mamdūḥ in Burrell 39). For her, it is present behind all other expressions which serve as a mask for it. Its underlying tension is most important. It creates an atmosphere of constant threat, hints of subjugation and promises of oppression. Hudā does not know when her father will behave lovingly or violently, and the family does not know what changes will occur in their neighborhood, or what part of their life will be destroyed. Many changes occur in Hudā's adolescence, some expected and some unexpected: Maḥmūd dies, Ḥūbī disappears, Iqbāl goes to Syria and dies there. Hudā's family is forced to move out of their neighborhood because the government is going to destroy it. Ultimately, it is fear through which all of this is interpreted.

Hudā cannot imagine a life without fear, but her acceptance of it does not rob it of its impact. Instead, it makes it into something human and expected, a part of life. It is her most basic emotional unit, and after it come love and anger and other emotions, often in combination with fear. Arrouj and Hudā recognize that the fear is a part of themselves. Arrouj chooses to leave Algeria, but the fear stays with him, while Hudā incorporates it into her everyday life and accepts it as part of herself. She understands it as an integral part of her story, one of the most important components of the "trail made by our blood"[55] that unfurls out of all of her and her family's misery and trial (Mamdūḥ 212/162). In the end, Hudā comes to terms with her fear – she does not necessarily transcend it, but she

[55] خطوات دمنا تمتد مثل شريط

accepts it and the pain it foretells.

Could this be called "postcolonial fear"? I have argued that some part of the fear comes from real or perceived British oppression and the violence accompanying demonstrations and other political situations. In this sense, the Arab/Iraqi fear that Mamdūḥ describes stems from the events following decolonization – in the simplest and most literal terms, this is postcolonial. However, let us also examine fear using the linguistic paradigm – Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin's abrogation/appropriation strategy – which they use to describe literary techniques that "re-place" the language of the colonizer. These literary techniques allow the author using them to transcend traditional boundaries, achieving a complex, hybrid identity that may include attributes of the colonizer's culture, the native culture, and others (pan-Arab culture, for example). In this light, fear in *Ḥabbat al-naftālīn* attains the status of a literary technique, as it allows Hudā and Arrouj to negotiate the limits of their changing identities. It stems from their literal postcolonial status, and continues in their figurative search for the self.

Mamdūḥ herself refuses to name the fear or strictly define it: "To this very moment I do not know how to name it, but I am certain that it will appear as I write. For it lurks in the experiences of many years; it is there on the blank, white pages..." (Mamdūḥ in Burrell 39). Here, she describes it as indescribable. Mamdūḥ's definition and description of fear is thoroughly ambiguous, drawing sometimes from a bank of literal postcolonial fear, and other times from a more fluid, undefined source. But no matter where it comes from, it facilitates

symbolic travel between the margin and the center.

We can also contrast Mamdūḥ's ambiguity with other depictions of postcolonial fear, in which it is well-defined and has definite object: the natives. In Suvir Kaul's review of two books on women and English colonialists in India, "Colonial Figures and Postcolonial Reading," fear is the province of the British alone, who play out their colonial ambivalence with the stereotype of the Indian raping the white British woman. Here, rape is seen as "a figure for the resistance of an otherwise compliant colonized agent" (Kaul 87). Fear of the "dark" and "other" native is its one-sided manifestation from the point of view of the colonizers.

There are many other examples of the one-sided fear of the colonizers. In Paul Makeham's article "Fear and Desire *Under the Big Sky*: Brink Visual Theatre and the Post-Colonial Australian Landscape," the dark Other that is feared is simply the forbidding Australian landscape. Makeham holds that the European invaders and settlers saw it as a savage, wild, untamed place, empty – because it did not contain features common to European landscapes.

The fear described by Kaul and Makeham may well be described as postcolonial, as it challenges the expectations and identities of the colonizers when faced with the strange and unfamiliar "Other." However, they respond differently from Arrouj and Hudā. The response of the colonizers, writing from the center, is to name, know and subjugate the object of their fear without attempting to understand it and without undergoing change themselves. The response of Arrouj and Hudā, writing from the margins, is to accept and integrate

the fear into their own self-image. They allow themselves to be transformed and molded by it and make it into a source of narrative power.

When postcolonial literature discusses the white, colonial or Western settlers' fears of different landscapes and native people, it is re-iterating concerns of the dominant group without regard for the concerns of the colonized. It achieves a discursive colonization of the emotion of fear by privileging only one group with its expression, illustrating an imbalance in the attribution of agency to colonizers/dominant groups. Fear is agency, and she who fears at least possesses some agency, rather than being a passive object without emotions or responses. Fear is a basic human emotion, a sign of self-worth and concern for one's own well-being. In this literature only the colonizer is privileged with its expression.

Mamdūḥ counterbalances this discursive colonization in two ways. *Ḥabbat al-naftālīn* makes no mention of British fear, but rather focuses entirely on the Iraqis' fear, "indigenizing" it and giving all the power of its expression to the Iraqi characters. In addition, the fear in *Ḥabbat al-naftālīn* comes from multiple and complex sources. The British colonizers, the dominant and powerful, are only one thing that the characters fear. Each character's fear comes from multiple places, and most of it seems to have no source at all. The ever-present fear, when divorced from its post-colonial specificity and directed in other ways, becomes simply human, a basic instinct. So Mamdūḥ turns around the colonizers' fear of the natives and gives the power of this basic instinct back to the Iraqis.

Fear is part of the natural order of *Ḥabbat al-naftālīn*, a universal emotion experienced by everyone, regardless of gender. It allows the characters to negotiate their identities in relation to the world around them, allowing them to be, like Arrouj, "hopelessly paradoxical to [themselves]" (Marrouchi 2). It facilitates their travel through the different possibilities of their Iraqi/Arab identity. Mamdūḥ writes this fear as universal to all Iraqis and Arabs, and could perhaps be seen as a marker of their difference, a postcolonial fear that marks their identities as not fixed, shifting – a synthesis, like Arrouj, of their colonized past and their postcolonial present.

Women and Fear: Toward Madness or Freedom?

Fear can also be a spur to action. In *Ḥabbat al-naftālīn*, it creates a space in which the women can experience a sense of agency as affective human beings responding to the conditions of their lives. This comes from their response to two kinds of fear, concrete and existential. On the one hand, there is real fear stemming from events, threatening characters, death, and other common frightening things, and on the other hand, the unnamed, unspecified fear of life, of people, of something unknown, set in motion by concrete reasons and then perpetuated by its own momentum. It becomes the basis for all human emotions. The complexity and range of this emotion makes it possible for fear to be a door to freedom.

As I have discussed in Chapter Two, Marnia Lazreg's *The Eloquence of*

Silence: Algerian Women in Question shows how silence is both deadening and eloquent, focusing more on its eloquence. Here, I will focus also on its deadening effect: if the subaltern cannot speak, no one can speak in her stead. Lazreg writes of this silencing as the erasure of the complexity of Algerian women's history and their structural silencing as a form of "discursive injustice" (Lazreg 3). For her, the obscuring of women's voices is at first a negative and restrictive event which the women themselves then transform into a responsive eloquence. According to this theory, women who speak in public, who are active in their society, and especially women who write, transcend this silence by speaking out of it. Lazreg calls the silence itself "eloquent" because its initial deadening effect makes it the source and spur for this renewed voice, this response.

In a parallel way, the omnipresent fear in *Ḥabbat al-naftālīn* also begins as negative and restrictive, but ultimately spurs its characters to assert their agency, to speak in distinctive voices, and behave in unconventional ways. It can give her characters the discursive space to act in order to transcend their fears. When these kinds of actions come out of the fear, they make it eloquent and beautiful. Fear in *Ḥabbat al-naftālīn* begins as real-world fear of the British, the father, the pistol, and ends as pure existential fear – always under the surface, always a spur to motion and emotion. Strange, even mad, behaviors become slightly less astonishing when seen in this light, opening spaces that would be otherwise closed. Fear becomes a source of agency for the women, who refuse to become trapped in it, embracing it instead.

Farīda best demonstrates the power that fear gives her: "Only Farīda beat it before her, and did not speak to it without mocking it. She approached her fear with natural muscles and found it work in the end: to make Munīr stagger, with the rest looking on...madness returned to her face"[56] (Mamdūḥ 197/151). For her, it is a natural emotion, and she accepts it, embraces it, and makes it work for her. In the end it allows her the freedom of madness and she escapes from her responsibilities as a wife and as part of the household.

Madness and other socially proscribed behaviors have often been a positive source of strength for women in literature. Barbara Rigney, in *Madness and Sexual Politics in the Feminist Novel: Studies in Brontë, Woolf, Lessing, and Atwood*, writes of "the relationship between madness and the female condition," explaining madness as a natural feminine revolt against oppressive patriarchal structures (Rigney 3). In the books she examines, authors either use insane characters as foils to contrast with strong and liberated female characters, or they force their protagonists through the fire of insanity in order to realize the truth of their subjugated condition and to seize power over their own lives.

The "alienated female consciousnesses" that Rigney depicts "in opposition to a male society" (Rigney 11) could accurately describe many of the characters in *Ḥabbat al-naftālīn*, most notably Farīda. Madness, just like Lazreg's silence, is an unconventional resistance strategy. Before her wedding, she is described as joyful, in a generalized way that includes all women: "the

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[56] فريدة وحدها بعضلات طبيعية ووجدت له في الأخير عملاً: أن تدع منيراً يترنح والباقون يتفرجون...فعاد لوجهها جنونه.

female had craved this glory"[57] (Mamdūḥ 77/58) and the grandmother imagines that Farīda will now be protected for her whole life and "have virtuous children"[58] (Mamdūḥ 76/57). She enters into a socially acceptable union, but Munīr frustrates her desire to be respectable by disappearing without even consummating the marriage. She grows progressively more distressed, talking to herself, slapping Hudā, primping and putting on her pretty clothes, taking off her clothes, even entertaining suicide. "Farīda learnt to talk to herself for hours. She looked at herself in the mirror, took a long knife and began to pass it by her neck"[59] (Mamdūḥ 174/134). In the end, when Munīr finally returns, expecting to be given a king's welcome, she assaults him.

Farīda has been alienated by Munīr, a man who has left her alone. She has tried to enter acceptable society and has failed because her husband could not or would not fulfill his duties, although she appears to be safer and better off without him. Another woman in her family, Iqbāl, was abandoned by her husband and wasted away, unable to act, showing little anger. But Farīda shows anger and it is liberating. Her madness allows her to express anger assertively, even violently, in a kind of expression that is unusual for women. Iqbāl is meek and passive, loving and infirm; Farīda is assertive and expressive, angry and full of health. Her madness allows her this freedom; it is the space she has created for herself, where she can speak. It allows her to take revenge on the man who

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[57] وانتظرت الأنثى هذا المجد

[58] الأولاد الصالحين

[59] تعلّمت فريدة على الكلام الطويل وحدها. كانت تنظر إلى نفسها في المرآة, تأخذ سكيناً طويلة وتبدأ بالمشي على رقبتها.

has denied her her personhood in marriage, as a wife, and lets her appropriate a different kind of personhood. In the end, Iqbāl dies and her meek voice is silenced, as her character is unable to sustain the stresses placed on her by society. Unlike Farīda and Hudā's other aunts, Iqbāl does not have the strength of madness to hold her up. Even her fear is weak and gives way to illness instead of anger. Iqbāl is a woman who does not appropriate her agency, and suffers for it.

Dinah Manisty has written about women's madness in the character of the "monster woman," who represents a critique of sex-role stereotypes. The three Egyptian writers that she discusses use these types of characters to "identify one of the principal sites of female oppression – the voice. Silencing woman's voice is the result of a broader system of discursive power which constitutes the minds and bodies of individuals" (Manisty 167). The fear and silencing lead the women to madness and unconventional behavior, at the same time as their Iraqi voices are brought to the fore (see Chapter Two). Mamdūḥ's characters speak and act outside of their gender roles, and in doing so, "attempt to resist the forces which suppress her voice, even if she is forced ultimately to submit" (Manisty 167). The characters in *Ḥabbat al-naftālīn* accomplish this resistance to differing degrees of success – Najīa and Bahīja carry on their relationship without much censure, while Iqbāl dies – but all of them grapple with their own silencing and fear.

Sometimes the women characters appropriate their agency by rejecting socially accepted roles. While their behavior may not constitute madness per se,

it is still unconventional and unsanctioned. Hudā's two lesbian aunts, Najīa and Bahīja, show no interest in men or in being wives. They make no attempt to conceal their relationship from anyone, even when Hudā's grandmother scolds them, saying, "listen, Najīa, God help you"[60] (Mamdūḥ 14/6). Their behavior might be considered mad by some, as madness has been described as an extreme form of social deviance; it might also be considered a form of silence, since the women focus on a relationship with each other and not with the (mixed-gender) world at large. These women find their liberation in each other, and perhaps this is the most sensible solution to the problem of women's alienation.

In fact, Najīa and Bahīja are an extreme example of characters using the same strategy that is used throughout the novel by women: sticking together. The women-only spaces should be seen as homosocial spaces where women spend time with each other – these are not necessarily restrictive spaces in a patriarchal society. There, women speak and behave freely with each other and overcome their alienation. In the bathhouse Hudā can run around like a wild girl and the women can gossip and be naked. They have no inhibitions or restrictions, and there, they are also free of fear. When the women prepare Farīda for her wedding, although she is enduring pain in order to conform to social expectations, the women provide support for her.

Even Iqbāl, seemingly cut off from other women, finds a way out through unconventional behavior: she leaves her family and husband to go back to her native Syria, where she finally dies of tuberculosis. It seems fitting that she dies

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[60] اسمعي نجية الله يهديك

out of sight of the family, outside of the chaos and cruelty that it contains. Because of her illness, she could never fulfill her role to Jamīl or to her children, but in the end she is allowed to go back to her family, gaining some freedom, although not the same degree of freedom that the other characters gain.

The silencing and alienation described by Rigney, Manisty and Lazreg do not afflict only the women in *Ḥabbat al-naftālīn*, but also, at times, the men. Jamīl is a lonely character, neither requesting nor receiving sympathy or tenderness from anyone. He is on level footing with no one, except perhaps his mother, who is constantly angry with him for deserting his first family. As a prison guard in Karbala', he occupies a position of dominance over others, but he is afraid of his superiors; his visits fill the children with fear; and he takes his anger out on them and Iqbāl. His pistol becomes the symbol of this power: "Through it he became complete, generating terror and respect, thus disposing of his anxiety and sense of struggle"[61] (Mamdūḥ 39/25). But in spite of this dominance, he is beset by feelings of impotence, locked in a dismal job in which he cannot advance, seeing promotion as his only hope for happiness and security. He is a compulsive drinker, prone to attacks of anger and sentimentality. Once proud of his uniform and his ascent through the ranks, he now waits to add another star to his uniform, going mad when it does not come.

For him, there is no breakthrough and the madness is not regenerative or empowering, as it is for Farīda. After he burns his uniform, his family must care for him as a hopeless case; he has lost his job, his sanity, and everything except

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[61] به يكتمل هو فيوفّر الرعب والاحترام ويخلص عنده القلق والصراع

the family that he had rejected. Once he starts behaving in an unconventional way, there is no room for him in the family's hidden and exclusively feminine spaces that he has inhabited only superficially. Likewise, Munīr is only accepted by the family when he shows promise of being a husband, but when he does not behave as a husband should, the family does not protect him from Farīda's wrath. While it supports and protects the women who are silenced, mad or merely unconventional, the family fails to keep the men from ruin.

The women in *Ḥabbat al-naftālīn* use different strategies to claim their agency: strategies of silence, unconventional behavior and madness, and homosocial women's spaces. Fear underlies all of these strategies as the driving emotional force behind the characters' motivations. It gives them power, and from this place of power they are able to negotiate their complex identities as women and as human beings.

In conclusion, Mamdūḥ has made it clear that fear is of paramount importance in her writing, and she turns it into a source of strength. She calls it "Arab fear," making it a unique and particular type of fear, as well as a facet of her identity. The postcolonial setting of *Ḥabbat al-naftālīn* provides some concrete reasons for this fear. The characters are afraid of the British and the violence of the anti-British demonstrations; Hudā is also afraid of her father; and the women harbor a certain amount of fear and anxiety with respect to the men in their society, who are a "forbidden area"[62] (Mamdūḥ 23/13). The association

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[62] المناطق الحرام

of fear with these things gives *Ḥabbat al-naftālīn* its setting and its atmosphere, re-creating Hudā's Iraqi childhood at a volatile time in Iraqi history.

But as Mamdūḥ also writes, fear becomes such an integral part of life for these characters (as it has for her) that it becomes part of their identity. Perhaps this is why she has called it "Arab fear," universalizing it to include a larger community. According to her, fear is a basic part of the Arab postcolonial identity, and so it becomes essential to her literary project. It is essential, too, for her female characters, who act and draw their power in part from their fear. Through it they gain agency and freedom and it becomes a regenerative and positive force.

Fear is only part of the women's relationship to men, which is complex, neither adversarial nor dominant/submissive. The women fear the men because of their mystery and unknown power. The women of Hudā's household especially fear Jamīl because of his temper, his pistol, and his unpredictability. But the women do not let their fear rule them, and instead use it as a spur towards more productive things. They make their own spaces and imbue them with power, creating an alternative to the men's spaces from which they are excluded. Indeed, the women in *Ḥabbat al-naftālīn* end up with more power and agency than the men, to the point of being able to perpetrate violence against them, appropriating the freedom of their madness, their unconventional behavior, and their women-only spaces.

Fear, silence, and madness are all unconventional routes by which women can speak, act, and assert themselves as human beings. Each of these can have a

negative, silencing, deadening effect, but they also contain the potential for liberation. The women in *Ḥabbat al-naftāliīn* use these strategies to re-place the mainstream hegemonic discourse with their own voices, abrogating masculine control of the word by rejecting socially prescribed roles. The women's responses and behaviors allow them to appropriate a space of their own and reclaim their lives.

Conclusion

This thesis has not focused solely on social issues like feminism, oppression, patriarchy, power, or nationalism, although I have connected these issues to those of language. I did not wish to write about literature as though the expression of such issues was its only purpose; my view is that literature is best treated in relation to itself and its raw materials, that is, language and literary devices. Thus the main thrust of my argument has to do with the nuts and bolts of writing in *Ḥabbat al-naftālīn*: techniques, devices, conceits. Postcolonial, feminist, and other theories are tools, instruments of categorization and description, tools which I have used in order to augment and facilitate my project of understanding and enjoying ʻĀliya Mamdūḥ's language.

Apart from the importance I place upon the pleasure of reading fiction, I believe that it would be fruitless to have a discussion about postcoloniality, women's writing, identity and other overarching social theories without also discussing the literary techniques of the writing from which these theories originate. The form of a piece of creative writing is just as important as its content, and often, understanding literary techniques and structures is vital to understanding the goals and concerns of an author. A work whose form mirrors its content is far more effective than a work in which the reader must rely on content alone; thus the most successful writing is that in which both characteristics of a work can (and must) be analyzed.

Ḥabbat al-naftālīn is a work in which the formal aspects of the writing,

such as the circular narrative style, mirror the content of the story, such as Hudā's repetitive experience of life and childhood. By examining the narrative method, I aimed to shed light on its content. Likewise, I considered the particularities of Mamdūḥ's Arabic in order to deepen my understanding of the identities and characters in the story. Only then did I focus on larger issues like history, fear and madness, bringing them to bear in a fuller discussion of the themes of the novel.

I also chose this topic in order to expose some of the concerns and issues of language use in postcolonial literature written in Arabic. The field can benefit from more studies of Arabic literature and its specific language issues, as Arabic is complex and multifaceted. Arabic provides different avenues of exploration than English, and studies of Arabic literature based on postcolonial theory can form an enlightening branch of postcolonial studies. Theoretically informed analyses of the language of Arabic works are still in short supply, and I hope I have shown how fruitful a close reading can be.

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