Iraqi women’s stories: reading Iraqi women writers’ Arabic novels in English translation using analytical perspectives of feminist translation

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Abstract

This study offers a critical exploration of Iraqi women writers’ novels in Arabic-English translation as a body of work which reflects in many ways the impact of seismic political changes on the peoples of Iraq at different times and places. Iraqi women writers’ novels have been acclaimed for privileging localised gendered perspectives of everyday life over discourses of hegemonic politics in Iraq while negotiating the shifting effects of state censorship, violence, war and dislocation on Iraqi literary output, inside and outside of Iraq. With Iraq’s modern history of war, conflict and fluctuating political contexts, the strategies used to mediate Iraqi women writer’s novels in Arabic in English translation have been varied. In view of many Iraqi writers having to publish their novels outside of Iraq, the politics of Iraqi writers’ location – and that of their literary works - have emerged as potentially charged and fruitful points of debate in contemporary Iraqi activist scholarship. The strategies of translation used to mediate Iraqi women writers’ novels at different junctures thus raise interesting questions on how Iraqi women’s stories told from localised, gendered and distinctly Iraqi perspectives were translated into English, a language associated with and at times intertwining Iraq’s recent history of war, occupation and political instability. The aim of this study is to raise appreciation of Iraqi women writers’ novels as an important part of contemporary Iraqi and Arab literature by putting forward a new approach of reading how Iraqi women writers’ novels move across languages in shifting, charged frames of gendered geopolitical contexts.

In this study, then I analyse the different strategies used to mediate six Iraqi women writers’ novels and story-making in English translation. To do so, I use and interrogate analytical frameworks of feminist translation which are underpinned by the theoretical premises that all writing, including translation are (gendered) re-writings of socio-linguistic, gendered and intersectional dynamics of power. While these premises configure borders between (gendered) writing and translation as fluid, ambiguous and transformative in ways potentially salient to Iraqi women writers’ novels, paradigms of feminist translation are yet to be explored in depth alongside Iraqi and Arab women’s literature in English translation. The outcome of my study is two-fold: one, to draw critical attention to the innovative gendered writing strategies used in this tradition of Iraqi and Arab women’s literature in Arabic and English translation and two, to offer potentially new theoretical horizons for feminist translation studies and other academic fields critically engaging with Iraqi and Arab women’s literatures in translation.
Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

Some of the materials in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 have been drawn from two articles which have appeared in recently published collections (Abou Rached 2017 and Abou Rached 2018). This material cited in section 1.8 of Chapter 1 (Abou Rached 2017; Abou Rached 2018), section 2.3 and section 2.5 in Chapter 2 (Abou Rached 2017). I also make a brief reference to the both of these articles in the Conclusion chapter (Abou Rached 2017 and Abou Rached 2018). Both articles are listed as part of the Bibliography of this thesis.
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Note on Transliteration

For the transcription of Arabic, this study follows the style used by ALA-LC (American Library Association - Library of Congress).

<https://ijmes.chass.ncsu.edu/docs/TransChart.pdf>

For Arab authors with publications in a language other than Arabic, their names are kept in the form used with their publications. Arabic words or titles taken from authors’ quotations are kept in the form transcribed by them. The symbols used to transcribe Arabic sounds are as follows:

ء s
ش sh
ل m
ب b
ش š
ن n
ت t
صṣ
ن n
ث th
ضḍ
ه h
ج j
طṭ
و w
ح ḥ
ظẓ
ي y
خ kh
ع ā
ال al-
د d
غ gh
ة a
ذ dh
ف f
ر r
ق q
ي ī
ز z
ك k
و ū
أ a
ى i
ؤ u
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1: Overview

Despite the presence of “dictatorship and war” and “war and occupation” in the context of Iraq (Masmoudi 2015, 1), Iraqi literature has thrived (Alsagaaf 2018). A history of Iraqi state authority censorship combined with a disintegration of publishing infrastructure due to war, sanctions and political instability has however resulted in many Iraqi writers historically publishing outside of Iraq in Arabic and in translation (cooke 2007; Kassab 2011). Iraqi women’s literature reflects the impact of seismic political changes on the people of Iraq at different times: civil uprisings in the 1930s and 1940s after Iraq’s independence from the British Empire in 1932, the overthrow of the Iraqi monarchy in 1958; competing influences of pan-Arab and leftist political discourses leading to the Iraqi Ba’athist Party’s rise to power in the 1960s; three successive wars in 1980-1988, 1991 and 2003; international sanctions from the 1990s until 2003; US-led post-2003 occupation and withdrawal in 2011. Often situated from an Iraqi woman’s eye/I view, short stories and novels by Iraqi women writers are distinguished by a double motif of bearing witness to the profound effects of rapid political change on the Iraqi psyche from a gendered perspective, while negotiating the gendered and shifting effects of state censorship, repression and violence on Iraqi literary output. As this study explores and highlights, the strategies used to mediate stories by Iraqi women writers via English translation have been varied, and in many ways, reflect the commitment of Iraqi women writers to innovate in their story-telling as a way of connecting Iraqis, as well as themselves to wider readerships in fluctuating political contexts. Despite the clear impact of English translation on the international literary profile of Iraqi women writers – and Iraq’s high media profile in English language media (Jabra 2006) - no extensive study has focused on Iraqi women writers’ stories in Arabic-English translation, although an expanding critical field of
Scholarship on Arab women’s literature in English translation has emerged since the 1990s. This scholarship has raised salient points on how and why the strategies of mediating Arab women’s writing in English translation have, at times, risked ‘constructing’ Arab women writers (Amireh 1996; 2000), ‘Arab women’ (Hartman 2012) and the Arabic-English (woman) translator (Booth 2008; 2010; 2016) for new readerships in ways which reiterate, rather than challenge ‘Orientalist’ stereotypes about Muslim and Arabic-speaking societies (Kahf 2006). As a new field of inquiry, this thesis focuses on the translation strategies used to mediate five novels and one short story collection by Iraqi women writers in English to explore two questions: one, how different Iraqi women writers and their respective gendered politics of literary commitment have been mediated to new audiences in different ways and two, how the diverse presentations of Iraqi women writers’ novels and story-writing in English translation shed light on representations of translation as an act of collaborative mediation whose agency comprises of multiple authorships.

Iraqi women writers’ novels and short stories have been acclaimed for representing cross-boundary solidarity “between marginalised groups” (Ghazoul 2008, 198) by privileging localised gendered perspectives of everyday life over hyper-masculinist discourses of armed conflict which were particularly prevalent during and after the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war (Davis 2005; Rohde 2010; Khoury 2013). Aside from adding a distinctly Iraqi and gendered dimension to wider debates on the use of Arabic dialect alongside formal written Arabic in MENA (Middle East and North Africa) public discourse (Safouan 2007), Iraqi women’s literature also foregrounds gendered and regionalised perspectives as a challenge to the diverse dynamics of patriarchal political authorities operating inside and outside of Iraq. This in turn raises interesting questions on how stories told from localised, gendered and distinctly Iraqi perspectives were translated into English, a language whose mediators had a history of presenting Iraqi women - and Middle Eastern
women – as ‘victims’ (Denike 2008). As I discuss in the following chapters, Iraqi women writers’ representations of Iraq and Iraqis from gendered and localised perspectives clearly presented interesting challenges to and opportunities for being “re-written” in English translation in such volatile political contexts. I thus analyse the different strategies used to translate or ‘re-write’ Arabic novels by Iraqi women writers by drawing on feminist translation approaches whose theoretical premises are underpinned by the reflexive questioning, reconfiguring or transformation of translation as a gendered form of rewriting. Feminist translation analysis works from the premises that all writing, including translation is ‘re-writing’ what and who patriarchal language would over-write (Massardier-Kenney 1997; Godard 1989), meaning borders between writer, translator, publisher and readerships are often configured as potentially fluid, ambiguous and transformative (Castro and Ergun 2017; 2018). For this reason, I analyse the extent to which the English translation of Iraqi women writers’ stories first published in Arabic could be read as both a negotiation of complex power relationalities and mediating notions of ‘Iraq’ and ‘Iraqi people’ in the international sphere as well as the aesthetics of ‘re-writing’ localised, gendered voices to be read or heard differently. The rationale for my study is two-fold: one, to expand the emerging scholarship on Iraqi women’s literature as a transformative genre of Arab, Iraqi and women’s literature in English translation; and secondly to shed light on and question the relevance of feminist translation approaches as analytical frameworks of women-focused geopolitical inquiry in Iraqi and Arab women’s literary contexts.
1.2: Contexts of inquiry: Iraqi and Arab women’s literature and feminist translation

As Iraqi literary critic Farida Abu-Haidar (2005) argues, Iraqi women writers have worked within diverse literary and political contexts to situate their writing beyond “political and social restrictions to make their voices heard throughout the Arabic-speaking world” (2005, 193). Although the 2003 Gulf War marked a watershed in Iraq’s political history – leading it to arguably becoming the first ‘new’ neo/colonial Arab nation state of the 21st century (Ismael 2014; Al-Ali and Pratt 2009) – Iraqi women writers were writing and appearing in Arabic-English translation decades before the 2003 war and its aftermath (Ghazoul 2008). In this thesis, I critically engage with how Iraqi women writers’ novels enable voices of other women (as well as their own) to be ‘heard’ or ‘seen’ in English translation via strategies of translation in differing and intersecting geo-political contexts.

As my focal point in this thesis is how the literary-political agency of Iraqi women writers – and protagonists in their stories – are mediated as gendered and geo-politically situated, I am specifically interested in the strategies of Arabic-English translation used to re/construct gendered, cultural and political identities of different constituencies of Iraqi women in Iraqi women writers’ novels within and across shifting localised and transnational contexts. While I focus on how Iraqi women writers make their (and others’) voices read and heard inside and outside Arabic language receptions, my study highlights Iraqi women’s literature in English translation as a field of critical inquiry linked to (and fostering) fruitful critical dialogue between three dynamic disciplines: contemporary Iraqi women’s literature, Arab women’s literature in English translation and feminist translation studies. With Arabic once famously described to Edward Said as “a controversial language” by a US publisher (Said 1990, 34), this study of how Arabic story-writing by Iraqi women writers moves into English translation is relevant to all three fields of inquiry.
As the study of Iraqi women’s literature in Arabic-English translation is a new avenue of research contributing to all three fields, the aim of this first chapter is to set out the critical lines of engagement between contemporary Iraqi and Arab women’s literature in English translation alongside analytical frameworks of feminist translation. I do this by focusing first on why the analysis of Iraqi women writers’ novels in Arabic-English translation is a timely line of inquiry which contributes to new and existing fields of knowledge in relation to Iraqi women writers’ contemporary critical contexts and scholarship on Arab women’s literature in Arabic-English translation. I then explain why Iraqi women writers’ gendered representations of location, ethnicity, class and language in Arabic and in English translation invite engagement with (intersectional) analytical frameworks of feminist translation as a way of yielding new useful insights on these two gender- and geo-politically-focused literary bodies of work by engaging them alongside each other for the first time. For while the translation of feminist terminologies and ideologies in Arabic has been explored alongside feminist translation theory (Kamal 2016), no study has focused on the analysis of specific traditions of Arab wo/men’s literature – here, Iraqi women writers’ novels - using analytical frameworks of feminist translation (which were initially conceptualised in the geo-political contexts of European-origin languages). In this way, I explain how this study works to highlight how the praxes used to mediate Iraqi women’s novels in English translation from Arabic can inform, interrogate and even inspire further developments in feminist translation studies in ways relevant to the Arabic-English translation of Iraq women’s literature as well as other literatures in Arabic and potentially other languages. In this chapter’s final section, I explain the rationale for my choices of primary works and how the engaging of Iraqi women’s literature with feminist translation adds new insights to translation studies while furthering appreciation of Iraqi women’s literature in Arabic and English translation.
1.3: Critical contexts of Iraqi women writers’ story-writing

Iraqi women have a long history of being involved in Iraqi cultural life, starting with oral literary traditions: oral poetry, songs and prayers to help all generations of Iraqi make sense of the importance of Iraqi community occasions. Although Iraqi women have always played a crucial role in maintaining oral literature traditions as a bedrock of Iraqi cultural memory, the first actual writings by Iraqi women were most likely anonymous and unsigned (Al-Dulaimi 1999, 11 c.f. Ghazoul 2008, 181). Traceable writing by Iraqi women appeared in the early twentieth century in literary periodicals such as Layla (1923) (Efrati 2004, 158) although earlier writings by Iraqi women were often kept by their authors in private collections. Much of Salima al-Mala’ika’s poetry for example was published retrospectively, by her daughter Nazik al-Mala’ika, one of the most well-known Iraqi women poets in the 1950s (Ghazoul 2008, 181). As was the case with other emergent Arabic-speaking nation states of the Ottoman Empire (Fleischmann 1999), the situation of “women” in society was nonetheless a focal point of debate in Iraq from the beginning of the twentieth century. Iraqi poet Jamil al-Zahawi’s seminal article titled “المرأة والدفاع عنها”[Woman and her Defence]¹ (1910) published in the Egyptian newspaper al-Mu’āyyad (Bashkin 2011, 53) condemned the injustices and the legal impunity of patriarchal religious laws towards women in Iraq as symptomatic of long-standing traditions in Ottoman-ruled lands holding back Iraq’s progress. Poems by Ma’ruf al-Rusafī such as "المطلقة" [The Divorced Woman] and "الأرملة المرضعة" [The Widow with A New-Born Baby] from his collection ديوان الرصافي [Dīwān Al-Rusāfī] (al-Rusafī 1910/1949) situated poetry as an important public platform for articulating the injustices towards individual women and children as symptomatic of the oppressive frameworks of a colonial as well as tradition-

¹ The titles of Arabic publications and Arabic terms are back-translated or transliterated between brackets [ ]. All back translations are mine, unless the title or term already been established in English translation.
bound society. As al-Zahawi and al-Rusafi were both personally threatened by members of the (Ottoman-supported) Iraqi religious establishment for their writing about the situation of women (Zeidan 1995, 23), the act of Iraqi men writing about women in Iraq in the public sphere also emerged as a charged counter-colonial political issue (ibid, 24). Such polemics conversely thus established literature as a powerful vehicle of political commentary to burgeoning Iraqi literary audiences whose numbers had increased after the opening of more secondary schools in Iraq from the mid-nineteenth century (Ceylan 2011, 204-214).

Within these literary political contexts, story-writing evolved in the early twentieth century as an important new literary genre in Iraq (Talib 1971; Izz Ad-Din 1974) in a rapidly expanding Arabic language press. While according to Iraqi critic Umar Talib (1971), these stories should not be considered fiction but rather as "مقالات قصصية" (1971, 58) or journalistic articles in a story-like format, these writings were nonetheless the forerunners of the first “short stories” published in journals specialising in literature: such as مجلة الزنبق [The Water-Lily] (Izz Addin 1974, 55). The first publications by Iraqi women appeared in the form of articles in literary journals during the turbulent times of the British-imposed Iraqi monarchy of the 1920s and 1930s (Efrati 2004) during which Iraq was recognised as an independent nation state (in 1932). Dominated by the influence of the British Empire before, throughout and after World War Two, the first part of the twentieth century in Iraq was marked by (brutally quashed) civil uprisings alongside competing political discourses of leftism and nationalism, all of which led to many rapid changes of government until the overthrow of the Iraqi monarchy in 1958 (Davis 2005; Milich et al 2012). It was within these political contexts that the first story-writing by Iraqi women emerged in publication. The first short story collection by Dalal al-Safadi titled حوادث وعبر [Incidents and Lessons] was published in Basra, in 1937. The first novella was عقلي دليلي من الجاني [My Mind is My Guide] by Maliha Ishaq in 1948 (Ghazoul 2008) followed by...
[Who is the Culprit] by Harbiya Muhammad in 1954 (Kadhim 2013). As noted by Ghazoul (2008, 192), while the ‘crafting’ of these early stories would, stylistically, be greatly surpassed by Iraqi women story-writers of later generations, these stories are important markers of Iraqi women writers’ first story-writings in publication.

Although the eminent Iraqi woman poet Nazik al-Mala’ika had put Iraqi poetry on the literary map in the wider Arab world from the 1950s, the first Iraqi women writers to publish outside of Iraq were Daizy Al-Amir and Samira Al-Mana. Daizy Al-Amir’s first short story collection [The Distant Land That You Love] was published in 1964 in Beirut as was Samira Al-Mana’s novel [The Forerunners and the Followers] in 1972. By that time, "القصة العراقية" [the Iraqi story] and Iraqi literature in general had been already well established as a genre of writing associated with a politics of ‘social realism’ (Caiani and Cobham 2013). Suheil Idris, the editor of the influential literary journal [al-Ādāb] describes Iraqi literature in 1953 as follows:

[The literary output in Iraq has an important place within the story-making traditions of contemporary Arabic literature. It is a literature of struggle, resistance, revolution which, more than any other literature in Arab countries responds to the dynamic needs of a society in the throes of its own development. This is a literature aware of the task of connecting itself with life of its country…it moves from awareness of its own truth working constructively and fruitfully to bring about social and political improvements in its society].

(Idris 1953, 38)

Here Idris deemed ‘the Iraqi novel’ as embodying a political commitment which should be espoused by all Arab writers: to expose social injustices and colonial influences while putting forward visions for societal reform. He also had situated Iraqi literary outputs as a vital component of Iraq’s nascent nation-building, a discourse which resonated in the wider
Arab world (Bashkin 2011). While writing that she admired the iconic Iraqi writers of this era, Samira Al-Mana (1998) notes that she did not wish to imitate them: “I do not want to pick up crumbs from their table. I want to give my own opinion…My priorities are not theirs. Women’s evil is not the same as man’s” (1998, 78). Similarly, in a preface to her works, Daizy Al-Amir (1994) states that she writes from women’s perspectives as she understood women “more than men” (1994, xii). As the first generation of Iraqi women writers to first garner critical attention outside of Iraq, a sense of gendered specificity seemed to be the political inspiration for both Al-Mana’s and Al-Amir’s literary expression. Their literary works were amongst the first by Iraqi women writers to be published in English translation (Al-Mana 1985; Al-Amir 1994).²

Although the first short stories and novels written by the earlier generations of Iraqi women writers such as Al-Mana and Al-Amir do not present themselves as historical, many historical events in Iraq form their back-drop: the 1948 wathba uprisings; competing leftist and nationalist visions of Iraq from the 1950s; the 1958 Revolution led by General Abdel Karim Qassim which deposed the British Empire-installed monarch; the mob-led execution of Prime Minister Nuri Al-Said; the rise and demise of the Soviet Union; the Iraqi Ba’athist party’s rise to power in 1963 and again in 1968; the 1968-2003 Iraqi Ba’athist government’s operations of power; the changing dynamics of pan-Arab relations and the impact of the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war. Shaping contexts of Iraqi women’s writing from the 1960s was how Iraqi Ba’athist government apparatus involved itself with Iraqi literary production in various ways (Davis 2005, Rohde 2010; Khoury 2013; Moosavi 2015). During the 1970s oil boom, the Iraqi government funded many cultural initiatives: festivals, cultural centres, literary prizes, literary conferences and publishing houses specialising in literary translation such as Dar Al-Ma’mun. As part of its "مشروع إعادة التاريخ" [The Re-

² See Thesis Appendix for a full list of each writer’s stories in Arabic publication and English translation.
Writing History Plan] which set out ‘correct’ ‘false’ documentations of Iraqi history (Ali 2008, 216; Al-Musawi 2006, 82), Iraqi Ba’athist censorship directives stringently forbade Iraqi literature (published inside and outside of Iraq) from touching on the various themes: Communist/leftist thought; non-Sunni denominations of Islam; scholarship by ‘Orientalists’; scholarship on women’s liberation; Israel and its literatures; Persian literature (Ali 2008, 216). Any literature read by Iraqi state censors as “anti-totalitarian” was also banned (ibid), the elastic definition of which encompassed an ever-expanding range of literary works as well as the writer her/himself. As any literary text had effectively become a political para/text of a writer’s perceived positionality towards the government, writers of certain (usually Shi’a) backgrounds were obliged to adopt what Ali (2008, 217) terms “the role of Shehrazade to use their heads to save their lives” if they stayed in Iraq.

Although varied in style, content and context of publication, a common motif throughout Iraqi women’s literature is a belief (and hope) in the transformative possibilities of literature as a (gendered) mode of revival and survival in the face of such hegemonic oppression and decades of state censorship. Iraqi critic Saadi Simawe (2004) salutes Iraqi women writers for representing in their stories “an existentialism…mixed with humor alongside an unusual compassion for all humans.”3 By this, he means Iraqi women writers veer away from either/or representations of good and evil to reveal humour and empathy with the (many) anti-heroes of Iraqi society as well as women: informants; leftist intellectuals; black-market traders, war veterans; perpetrators of violence; rural migrants to urban centres of Iraq. In effect, Iraqi women writers’ stories have always told of everyday Iraqis making every-day ethical choices in the face of the interlocking effects of poverty, corruption and social injustice. Samira al-Mana’s novellaسلمان الفارسی [The Oppressors] (1997)

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tells of rural Iraqis during the 1960s and how women evade patriarchal oppression in ways that men seem unable – or unwilling – to do. The title of Al-Amir’s short story collection [The Happy Arab House] (1975) published post-1973 defeat of pan-Arab military forces by Israel invites wider readings of her stories ostensibly about a lone woman resolutely facing confusion and existential malaise.

After the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, Simawe (2004) also marvels how any Iraqi creativity – in Arabic - has survived the continual catastrophic political contexts:

It seems to me that literature and the arts live on disasters which, because they challenge our very existence, force us to think imaginatively and creatively. The African American experience produced the blues, the Jewish experience produced Kafka, and the Russian sorrows gave us Dostoevsky. Iraqis’ tragedies have produced profound literature that needs to be published. [...]there are now two Iraqi literatures: the literature of exile and the literature under fascism and war.

(Simawe 2004)4

For the purposes of this study, Simawe’s notion of apparent links between post-2003 literary creativity and disasters in Iraq invites closer discussion. For while the post-2003 violence has given rise to what Iraqi academic Hamid Fadhel calls “creative anarchy”5 amongst younger generations of Iraqis, conceptual linkage between creativity and disaster is not welcomed by all Iraqi writers. Hussain Al-Mozany cites why Professor Thamer Mahdi, lecturer at the Baghdad Arts Academy refuses to write about Iraq; “because what good would a handful of words do amidst this terrible destruction?” (c.f. Al-Mozany 2010, 16). Iraqi woman activist-writer Haifa Zangana described the post-2003 space surrounding Iraqi writers as akin to a “sterile, dark silence extend(ing) its shadow over the imaginary”

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leaving many Iraqi writers, herself included, feeling that “the cruel reality of occupation has turned writing fiction into a meaningless act” (Zangana 2004, xv) or reiterative of Iraqis’ contexts of catastrophe in some way. Iraqi woman writer Inaam Kachachi similarly distances any notion of violence as a source of her creativity:

Violence tires me, and my description of its mechanisms cannot match the skill with which it is being committed on the ground. Give me peace and I will describe it to you and furnish it with characters. Don’t you think that a warm, well-lit room conveys the darkness to us?

(Kachachi c.f. Najjar 2014)

While Zangana and Kachachi’s commentaries clearly communicate a refusal of co-optation to any discourse which equates any (creative) benefit with war and human suffering, Simawe’s commentary is nonetheless one thought-provoking point of departure for this study as he also foregrounds why the act of writing inside or outside of Iraq or pre- and post-2003 Iraqi Ba’athist government shapes Iraqi writers’ creative output. His sense of Iraqi literature’s connectivity to other traditions firstly, raises questions of how Iraqi literary creativity would be read beyond Iraq’s geographical borders, particularly in English translation, a language intertwined with ‘re-writing’ Iraq’s modern history in the context of war and retributive violence (Bocco and Tejel 2012). As observed by Iraqi writer Sinan Antoon (c.f. Gaul 2014), the act of translation for Iraqi writers is also an act of mourning, in that the demand of Iraqi literature (in the US) seems predicated on war and violence. Iraqi artist Wafaa Bilal (2013) discovered that in another context, spectators based in the US (post-2003 war in Iraq) were more than happy to fire paintballs at him at the click of a button during his interactive installation “Kill an Iraqi/ Domestic Tension.” Although his

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https://arablit.org/2014/04/18/inaam-kachachi-we-are-experiencing-a-true-upsurge-in-iraqi-fiction/
installation clearly invited direct embodied interactions from his audiences, the responses experienced by Bilal raise questions on the impact of gender on Iraqi literary creativity in such contexts. Iraqi women, for example, have been configured within US state discourses as “helping [to give] birth to freedom” (Wolfowitz 2004, c.f. Al-Ali and Pratt 2009, 83) in Iraq, the midwife being US army intervention and occupation. In this light, how Iraqi woman writers’ literary works move into English translation is a critical issue of negotiation not only of gendered, specifically geo-political locations and identities but also of others’ readings of Iraqi women writers’ standpoints.

This point brings me to the politics of reading Iraqi women writers’ representation as gendered. As summarised by Peggy Phelen (1993): “if representational visibility equals power, then almost-naked young white women would be running Western culture” (1993, 10). Phelen’s point (which emphasises the visual) is clearly illustrated in light of the charged discourses surrounding the post-2003 US occupation of Iraq, amongst them the US ‘Greater Middle East Initiative (2004) which configured increased (Middle Eastern) women’s political participation and liberation as brought about by US-style democracy. Shortly after the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, the US state apparatus bombarded the US public with images of Iraqi women voting in post-2003 Iraq elections (Winegar 2005) and US-funded feminist NGOs (Zangana 2005; 2013) purported to represent Iraqi women’s interests (Ismael 2014). This last point on Iraqi women’s representation and women’s visibility intersects with ongoing transnational debates on the ethics of using images of women - notably of Iraqi women ‘liberated’ by government change (Winegar 2015) - to justify (US) military action in Iraq or Afghanistan (Denike 2008). Such issues of gendered representation link to contemporary debates on the politics of location, mediation and patronage vis-à-vis Iraqi aesthetic production where Iraqi scholars ask where and how ‘authentic’ Iraqi aesthetic discourse takes place – inside or outside of Iraq (Badr 2013) or
via the role of (post-2003) US patronage in financing many forms of Iraqi aesthetic production (Shabout 2013). Though these questions may not directly address issues of Iraqi women’s literary works translated into English, such debates on asymmetrical power relations on ‘who’ makes ‘who’ visible highlight the risk of Iraqi women’s political identity becoming commodified and open to interpretation in English translation. Despite the role of (English) language in this dynamic, scholarship on how Iraqi women writers’ works were mediated via English translation is surprisingly scarce. This study aims to address this gap by focusing on how Iraqi women writers’ novels move across Arabic and English translations using analytical frameworks which focus on gendered and geo-political aspects of their translation as a point of reference.

Whereas scholarship on Iraqi women’s literature vis-à-vis Arabic-English translation is scarce, recent Iraqi scholar-led research has focused on "الرواية العراقية النسوية" [the Iraqi nisūwīyya novel] (Hatto 2013; Khodeir 2013; Kadhim 2016; Ahmad 2017). This scholarship has explored Iraqi women’s writing from various thematic perspectives: as "السرديات الكبرى" [hegemonic narratives] (Hatto 2013) and as operating at a distance from Iraqi men writers due to different (gendered) experiences of writing in patriarchal societies (Ahmad 2017).

While the adjective النسوية [al-nisūwīyya] in Arabic can mean “feminine” or “womanly” (Wehr 1994, 1130) as well as ‘woman-focussed’, ‘by a woman’ or ‘feminist’, the term in contexts of the Iraqi nisūwīyya novel is distinguished by its ongoing shifting terms of literary critical reference. Sa’eed Kadhim (2016) dedicates a whole chapter of his research to what Lutfiya Al-Dulaimi (2016) terms as: "ترجمة بين النسائي دون والنسوي وكتابة المرأة دون حسم نهائي لإرساء المصطلح" [his shifting oscillation between al-nisāʿi, al-nisūwī and women’s writing without categorically defining the term] due to "الشكالية مصطلح الأدب النسوي أو النسائي والنسائي damer المصطلح عربيا" [the ambiguity of al-nisūwīyya and al-nisāʿi literature’ as a term and
the dubious ambiguity of this term in Arabic.\footnote{Lutfiya Al-Dulaimi. 2016. “Hājis al-hawiyya fi al-rayya al-nisā’iyya al-‘irāqiyya.” Al-‘Arab, 20/06/2016. \url{http://www.alarab.co.uk/?id=84030} [Accessed 15/06/2018].} Al-Dulaimi, however, does not categorically define the term either. Hadil Ahmad (2017, 7), in contrast, defines critical engagement with \textit{nisuwī} literature\footnote{Nazik Al-Malai'ka Prize Winner for Literary Criticism on Iraqi Women’s Literature 2013 (Khitab 2014).} in more activist frames of gender politics:

[It is a well-known fact that whatever a woman writes in terms of literature has evoked – and continues to evoke – controversy and a sense of ambiguity which never ends….It starts with literature being labelled as ‘\textit{nisuwī}’, and how it goes on to relate to the specificities of feminine gendered experience in the face of masculinist hegemony and cultural stereotypes about women in Arab societies. It does not stop moreover at what is discussed in creative literary texts, meaning the very contexts which call for rebellion against the prevailing customs passed down through the generations and call for liberation from patriarchal authority].

(Ahmad 2017, 7)

Here we see Ahmad (2017) defining ambiguity in ‘\textit{nisuwī}’ literature as a useful strategic frame by which (Iraqi) women’s writing (and contexts of emergence) can be read as connecting to \textit{all} women’s differing lived experiences of patriarchy and oppression in some way, regardless of the themes covered in literary writings by women themselves. In this way, Ahmad situates any engagement with women’s writing – and its contexts of ambiguity - as a mutually gendered and activist act of solidarity. In her award-winning research, Majeda Hatto (2013) also defines the Iraqi \textit{nisūwiyya} novel as the poetics of women writing themselves (and others) in ways which go far beyond the discourses of being \textit{"بفبا ضلع رضوض من اضلاع الخطاب الدكوري"} [remains of a bruised rib within the rib-cage of masculinist discourse] (2013, 3) including those of nationalism (ibid). By this Hatto means that Iraqi
women writers express and represent gendered experiences, not historically reiterative masculinist myths of women’s (and Iraq’s) origin. These instances of recent Iraqi scholarship thus appear to be engaging with Iraqi women’s literature as a woman-focussed, intersectional and consciously gendered body of writing which resolutely refuses co-option into any ideology allied with oppressive practices of power or any categorical frames of literary reference. Not explored in this scholarship however is how the gendered critical frameworks clearly so specific to Iraqi women’s literature and its political terms of reference in Arabic move in (English) translation.

The potential impact of slippages across languages (Arabic and English) becomes subtly important and apparent when we consider the interaction – or lack thereof – between scholarship in Arabic and English on Iraqi women’s literature. I take Iraqi critic Mohammed Khodeir’s (2013) article in al-Ṣabāḥ newspaper on Iraqi women’s literature as one example.9 In this article, Khodeir expresses regret that Iraqi women’s literature is overlooked in critical scholarship on Arab women’s literature. He cites the scholarly work on Arab women’s literature published in Arabic by Lisa Majaj, Paula Sunderland and Therese Saliba (2009) as a recent example of this neglect. This collection however was first published in English as Intersections: Gender, Nation, and Community in Arab Women's Novels (2002), and clearly sets out to focus on Arab women writers from Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine and Algeria. The thrust of Khodeir’s critique is that this (2002) collection (only readable in Arabic in 2009) is symptomatic of an ongoing trend: Iraqi women’s literature being overlooked in Western and Arab world academies. Yet by 2013 when Khodeir published his article in Arabic, much more critical focus had been dedicated to Iraqi women’s novels, albeit this scholarship was published in English. Important

examples are Abir Hamdar (2012) and Dalya Abudi (2010) who interrogate the complexity of mother-daughter relations in the 1995 English version of Alia Mamdouh’s novel حبات النفتالي [Mothballs] (1986). Daphne Grace (2007) gives critical insights on Haifa Zangana’s prison memoir In the Vast Halls of Memory published in English in 1990. Brinda Mehta (2007) situates Nuha Al-Radi’s Baghdad Memoirs (2003) alongside her work as an artist as an embodied expression of lived activism. In this light, Khodeir (2013) seems to be writing (in Arabic) about the lack of attention dedicated to Iraqi women’s novels in the (Western) academy whilst other US/UK-based scholars are in fact writing (in English) about Iraqi women’s novels published in English translation, unaware of his concerns. So, while literary engagement with Iraqi women’s novels (in English) has been happening, perceptions of its reception and points of focus seem shaped by the powerful frames of a critic’s (as reader) own temporality and language – meeting and at times missing each other’s critical insights. While the language of scholarship is not the critical issue at hand, the impact of English translation on scholarship thus seems to be crucial to interpretations of Iraqi women’s writing. While this thesis does not purport to resolve the issue of languages in which scholarship on Iraqi women’s literature is published, what it will do is draw attention to the importance of translation as shaping pathways of readings and mediations of Iraqi women’s writings.

This point brings me to why this study focuses on Iraqi women writers’ novels in Arabic-English translation. This is a salient question in view of recent studies carried out by scholars working with the Arabic versions of Iraqi women’s writing while mediating their analysis (into English) in relation to political themes: trauma (Abdullah 2018), war (Masmoudi 2015; Kashou 2013), and social injustice (Ghazoul 2008). Shakir Mustafa (2008) has edited the first anthology dedicated to Iraqi literature, translating most of the short stories from Arabic to English himself. None of these scholars however refer to the
processes of translation at play in their own work. The lack of engagement with analytical frames of translation is not surprising as this pioneering scholarship prioritises the promoting of Iraqi women’s literature as a critical presence, re/writing Iraq and Iraqi women for readers located in (mainly) Western academic contexts. As many Iraqi women were – and continue to be - living rather than writing their individual stories of survival in extreme situations, Iraqi women’s novels and short stories present one of the few ways – certainly outside of Iraq - by which trauma of war, violence and political chaos in Iraq can be considered from situated and gendered perspectives (Abdullah 2016). Notable, but not explicitly stated by these scholars, is a consciousness that Iraqi literature risks being overlooked not only by the legacy of Ba’athist government censorship but also by the aftermath of the post-2003 war in Iraq (Al-Ali and Al-Najjar 2013, xvii). Ikram Masmoudi (2015) for example explains how “new Iraqi voices”, that is, Iraqi women writers, play a vital role in “the recording of intertwined histories: their own private histories and the modern history of their country” (2015, 19) – eliding while doing so. that many Iraqi women’s novels published in English translation after 2003 were written and published in Arabic well before 2003.

The elision of translation as vital point of mediation for Iraqi literature opens questions on how Iraqi women writers’ literary activism has been mediated at different times, which this study aims to explore. For example, how is a work read as ‘new’ or ‘different’ in a post-2003 English translation when it was written in Arabic many years previously? Also, to what extent are Iraqi women writers, Iraqi women and women protagonists read as intertwined or even conflated in this process of recording? While previous critical analyses on Iraqi wo/men’s literature have meticulously clarified the

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gendered and geopolitical connections between writer, novel and readers, the critical role of Arabic-English translation in the scholars’ own mediating of Iraqi women’s writing (for post-2003 readerships) requires much more attention. I am not arguing that this elision is a deliberate oversight in the contexts of critics’ thematic scope. I am however pointing out that this elision of attention to the translation processes downplays the stylistically innovative ways by which many Iraqi women writers – and the translators and publishers of their works - have re-presented their politics of writing via the medium of translation. In this light, the analysis of Arabic-English translation allows for the interrogation into how Iraqi women writers’ novels move across languages and audiences in shifting and charged frames of gendered and geopolitical contexts. This approach seems timely in view of the ongoing critical interest in Iraqi women’s literature as an acclaimed genre of activist writing mediated across languages, borders and readerships. With this perspective in mind, I now explain in more detail the changing literary contexts of Iraqi women’s literature in English translation to contextualise why Iraqi women writers’ novels in Arabic and English translation invite a gender-focused, transformative mode of translational analysis.

1.4: Key motifs of Iraqi women writers’ story-writing in Arabic publication

The gendered and geo-political positionality of the writer herself has been a key motif in the critical acclaim of literary works in Arabic and English translation. The 1968-2003 Iraqi Ba’athist government and its harsh methods of governance – with its longevity – however dominated the trajectories of their writing in Arabic and in English translation although many writers made considerable efforts not to be defined by it. The first examples of Iraqi literature translated into English were commissioned and funded by the cultural arms of the Iraqi government in the 1970s and 1980s (Rohde 2010). Short stories by Daizy Al-Amir, Lutfiya Al-Dulaimi, Maysalun Hadi and Samira Al-Mana featured in literary
anthologies of Iraqi short stories in English translation and literary journals such as *Ur, Iraq, Iraq Today* and *Gilgamesh* (Altoma 2004; 2010) under the auspices of a (then prosperous) Iraqi government seeking to promote Iraq as a cultural centre in the pan-Arab world. As pointed out by Salih Altoma (2004, 90), anthologies such as *Modern Iraqi Short Stories* (1971), *Modern Arab Short Stories* (1980) and *Iraqi Short Stories: An Anthology* (1988) give credit to individual translators with academic prestige inside and outside of Iraq such as Farida Abu-Haidar and Denys Johnson-Davies. This translation strategy suggests the anthologies were published to communicate transnational collaboration in translation as testament to the literary prestige of Iraqi literature to wider readerships and to Iraq as propagating a vibrant vision of pan-Arab cultural leadership. In the very short introduction of *Modern Arab Short Stories* (1980) for example, the Iraqi Cultural Centre is described by its editor Saad Al-Bazzaz as a promoter of “contemporary Arab literature and culture” (Al-Bazzaz 1980, 3). At the same time, Al-Bazzaz claims “It has been a time whose tempestuous events have generated a moral and social climate in which the writer found a rare and remarkable source for inspiration” (ibid). Al-Bazzaz does not elaborate further what this ‘climate’ is and seems to assume a shared understanding of the “moral and social climate” of Arab (mostly Iraqi) writers in this anthology. The gaps in his commentary leave much room for speculation on which ‘tempestuous events’ could be articulated in the public literary sphere in contexts of Iraq and which events could not.

This point brings me to the importance of foregrounding ‘silence’ as a distinct mode of engagement in Iraqi literature at that time for very specific reasons – namely, the increasingly pervasive informant culture in Iraq initiated by the Iraqi Ba’athist government from the 1970s onwards (Baram 1991; Rohde 2010; Ahmad 2017, 22). With the Iraqi president Saddam Hussein insisting “The pen and the barrel of a gun have one and the same opening” (Antoon 2010, 29), Iraqi writers and journalists were subjected to intense
state surveillance, at times carried out by family members, friends or colleagues. This made the boundary between private and public articulation disturbingly elastic and fluid and so eroded the lines of trust between Iraqis as writers, publishers and readers. At a talk in London in 1998, Haifa Zangana explained that for writers living under Iraqi Ba’athist rule, they had three options: one, to write according to Iraqi state directives; two, to not write at all or three, to use allegory to circumvent Iraqi state censors (c.f. Abu Haidar 2005, 193). According to Iraqi poet Raad Mushatat (1986), Iraqi poet Burhan Asshawi and short story writer Jihad Majid were tortured and poisoned in prison respectively for writing up critiques of the Iraqi Ba’athist government (1986, 29). Iraqi writer Abdul Sattir Nasir was subjected to solitary confinement and torture for his allegorical tale سيدنا الخليفه [Our Lord, The Caliph] in 1975 even before Saddam Hussein became the president of Iraq in 1979 (Mustafa 2008, 101; Moosavi 2015, 16). In these contexts, it is not surprising that deafeningly absent in Iraqi literature published in the 1970 and 1980s is reference to - let alone critique of - the Iraqi government and president, Saddam Hussein. This absence of reference contrasted starkly with Saddam Hussein’s all-pervasive presence in the Iraqi public political sphere on national TV, in every single newspaper, schools, work-place and billboard, as observed by Lebanese academic writer Su‘ad Joseph in her research visits to Iraq (Joseph 1991, 178). As many artists and writers had already suddenly ‘disappeared’ throughout the 1970s: through imprisonment, exile or co-option into “artistic consultant[s] for the Ministry of Information” (Mushatat 1986, 29), the act of writing in Iraq had become in effect a ‘subaltern’ act, elite and subservient. In such a punitive surveillance culture, Iraqi writers thus had to conceal any recourse to any literary expression which could be read as consciously going beyond Iraqi state directives. As mariam cooke (1996, 263) pointed out, understanding Iraqi literature of this era is to appreciate that many aspects of their meaning-making are “veiled” or opaque. Part of reading between the lines in Iraqi literature, then, is to understand that the lines of engagement are not always immediately
visible or readable. The obliqueness of early Iraqi women’s story-writing must, thus, be read as situated squarely within contexts of this political and social domain.

One way of critically engaging with the literary opacity at play in Iraqi women’s writing of that time is to why Iraqi women’s literature is distinguished by what Iraqi critic Nazik Al-Araji (1997) terms as “gravitation towards the world of women’s hardships” (c.f. Ghazoul 2008, 200): generational and gendered family dynamics, love, patriarchal injustices or everyday dreams of a different future. Women writing stories about women fulfilled a dual function in the earlier decades of the 1968-2003 Iraqi Ba’athist government rule: to avoid the state censor’s radar and to communicate gendered experiences of marginalities (and solidarities) which may not be pertaining only to women. Lutfiya Al-Dulaimi’s short story collection البشارى [Glad Tidings] (1974) for example shows ostensibly rich, privileged people living in an existentially dystopic world dominated by psychic uncertainty. In one story, women find themselves acting in a play they thought they were going to watch themselves. In another story, a woman feels happy to hear "البشارى" [the glad tidings] or ‘the good news’ that she has jumped a red traffic light (1974, 43). Whether she is happy to ‘be seen’ as crossing a red line, or to have identified what the red line/light is in the first place, is left open to interpretation. In the short story "الباقرية" [Weeping], Daizy Al-Amir writes of a woman identifying with forcibly re-planted trees with no power of speech. Maysalun Hadi’s short story "زينب على ارض الواقع" [Her Realm of the Real] (1994/2008) is about a talking mouse asking a woman novelist to write a story about his missing beloved, Zainab. Rather than openly refusing his request, the writer finds pretext after pretext not to write this story due to not wishing to upset “the critics” (2008, 72) but stops short of disclosing who the critics are. At their time of writing in Arabic, the political meaning/making of these stories would have been implicitly connective to their

11 See Thesis Appendix for the publication details of all three stories cited in this section.
readers’ own willingness to question why such ‘refractive’ or fantastical allegories of obscure metaphor functioned as such salient commentary in Iraq. The specificity of this writing (in Arabic) however raises questions on how intelligible such stories would read in English translation. For this reason, the identifying of analytical translational frameworks emerges as a key focus in my aim to foster understandings of such allegoric mediations in Iraqi women writers’ novels.

To clarify what I mean by this in contexts of English translation, I refer to the first Arabic-English translations of Iraqi women’s literature. Cooke (1994) as translator-editor presents two short stories by Aliya Tayib in the anthology Blood Into Ink (1994, 80), sent to her by the Iraqi Embassy in Washington DC as part of the War and Culture Series funded by the Iraqi government during the 1980-1988 war with Iran. After making clear that each story complies with Iraqi state censorship directives, Cooke advises readers that both stories require “careful reading” (1994, 80) but then gives no further explanation on how a reader should read ‘carefully.’ After stating that Talib could still be living in Iraq (ibid), Cooke’s silence seems to imply a covert recognition of different geo-political locations at play in this work, known and unknown – one being, that any misreading on her part could damage the life of a writer living elsewhere. Similarly, in Daizy Al-Amir’s The Waiting List: An Iraqi Woman’s Tale of Alienation (1994), no reference is made to the impact of Iraq’s international sanctions or why Al-Amir returned to Lebanon, not Iraq after living in the US during the 1991 US/Iraq war. The first novel by an Iraqi woman writer in English translation published in the US - A Sky So Close (2001) by Betool Khedairi - has no introduction at all. In contrast, academic editor Fadia Faqir very clearly articulates why she included Alia Mamdouh’s novel حبات النفتالين [Mothballs] (1986) in the Arab Women Writer’s Series (1995-1998), a transnational literary project which published Arab women writers’ novels in English. She cites her own personal anguish at seeing “the bombs falling
on Baghdad…” (Faqir 1995, v) and publishes this work preserving another memory of Iraq. It appears then that the earlier examples of Iraqi women’s literature in English translation reflect varying degrees of opacity, that is, concealment of political intention. Underpinning these earlier works in English translation seems to be a politics of solidarity with Iraqi women writers in relation to the specific contexts of publication as an English translation.

In such potentially differing translational contexts, Iraqi women writers themselves broach the issue of opacity and alterity in ways which raise questions not only about their ‘intelligibility’ in Arabic but also in English translation. In Iraqi literary scenes, Iraqi women’s literature has been acclaimed for expressing a politics of representing cross-boundary “solidarity of the subaltern” (Ghazoul 2008, 198) vis-à-vis culture, faith, class and location as well as gender. By focusing on the everyday lives of people living alongside each other in different contexts of marginality, such as rural poverty, war, exile and international sanctions, Betool Khedairi’s two novels [A Sky So Close] (1999/2001) and [Absent] (2004/2005) for example, serve as cutting commentary on the systematic abuse of different constituencies of Iraqis due to the environments of marginality in which they find themselves. In these specific contexts, Gayatri Spivak’s question of whether the subaltern ‘can’ speak (1988) or be ‘intelligible’ in dominant epistemes of knowledge is a useful one for us to situate the importance of Iraqi women writers’ representations of marginality or alterity in their Arabic publications. As both ‘subject’ and ‘subaltern,’ Iraqi writers’ writing of particular alterities in Iraqi culture and identity could for example be understood as a matter of ‘intelligible’ survival as well as political aesthetic choice. A novel about rural or urban women far from the political public sphere may not be read (by Iraqi censors) as a critique of the overwhelmingly hyper-masculine Ba’athist discourses of war. Yet a novel of women of specific religious affiliations in specific times and locations could be, as in Hadiya Hussein’s
Beyond Love (2004/2012) which tells of the Shi’a Iraqi experience of the 1991 uprisings in south Iraq. One question is how these representations ‘can’ be read and analysed and how attuned can we remain to the agency of marginalised groups (Spivak 1988, 104) in English translation. Thematic focus as a politics of writing thus carries important implications for the analysis of such Iraqi literature in English translation. Spivak’s question about whether a ‘subaltern’ can ‘speak’ about specific themes and about specific people is thus a useful critical framework by which to consider Iraqi (woman) writer subalternity (through the act of writing) as a specifically gendered as well as socially, culturally and politically situated situe of literary expression.

This brings me to how Iraqi women writers articulate the politics of their writing. Most novels by Iraqi women writers are told from the perspective of at least one Iraqi girl/woman through the gender marked formats of Arabic in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and at times Iraqi dialect. In this way, the predominance of the feminine voice - vocalising as well as telling her overtly gendered story - functions as a counter-language to the formal written Arabic used by the Iraqi state communications which at one point in Iraq’s history made anyone or anything other to the Iraqi (Ba’athist) public sphere unintelligible (Al-Ali 2007, 127). It is for this reason Iraqi poet Sa’adi Yusuf incorporated Iraqi dialect alongside MSA Arabic in his elegiac poetry to foreground Iraqi quotidian life in a way which poignantly showcased any survival of everyday life in Iraq “as a heroic act” (Simawe 1997, 173) and the possibility of MSA Arabic being meaningful, not (always) destructively meaningless to it. One emblematic refusal of hyper-masculine patriarchal language in Iraqi women’s literature is Mamdouh’s novel حبات النفتالين [Mothballs] (1986/2000) in which the feminine singular second person (you) dominates. In both English translations of this novel, the overtly gendered perspectives of the main girl protagonist whose voice engages with (to challenge) the MSA generic masculine could not
be rendered in the same way, due to the absence of the gendered ‘you’ in English, a challenge which invites further analysis of how gendered grammar operates as a politics of gendered force and suppression between languages. Similarly, voices of rural women are foregrounded in Iraqi women’s novels through Iraqi dialect and are thus, often used to ‘re-write’ or overwrite MSA phonetically in the spoken and regional tones they use. In this way, connective contextualised knowledge of Iraq is mediated not only by what the Iraqi women protagonists say in such novels, but the register in which they ‘read’ as saying it. As English cannot render these registers in the same way, a closer look is needed, in my view, at how these unwritten gendered literary traditions are reconfigured to resonate with new readerships - or if English translation risks conversely overwriting them.

1.5: The politics of Iraqi literary publication: negotiating alterity and integrity

At this point, it is important to highlight the diverse publication contexts for Iraqi women writers all of whom negotiated their relationality to Iraqi Ba’athist government censorship apparatus operating inside and outside of Iraq in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. Any work not conforming to Iraqi state directives referred to previously was blocked from circulation not only in Iraq but other Arabic-speaking countries as well, which resulted in the decreased likelihood of Iraqi literary works being known, reviewed, let alone translated (cooke 2007, 24). The potential of Iraqi literature remaining in circulation was why Iraqi writers began to publish stories in the wider diaspora, usually in journals that operated in a spirit of literary activist collaboration which required a sense of mutual trust and belief in writer integrity. In London, the literary journal [12] (1986-2002) looked to go beyond polarising "ائمحي وضدّي" [either with me or against me].

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mentalities (Al-Mana and Niazi 2002, 3) in order to build literary spaces where writers could write and publish in Arabic even if banned from circulating their works in the Arab world by Iraqi state sanctioned directives. The journal [The Woman Writer] (1993-1995) was the first to foreground Iraqi and Arab women’s writing within leftist literary frames. Although this journal had a limited publication run, it was deemed to be very important and explains why back-copies still circulate in some (leftist) Iraqi literary diaspora circles in London. To connect with English language readerships, Iraqi writer Samuel Shimon founded Banipal Magazine of Modern Arab Literature with Margaret Obank in 1998 “to encourage a wider readership of Arab writers and poets for their own sake, and for the particularity and the universality of their voices”, that is, a space to read Arabic literature beyond binary premises of hegemonic political oppression. In Banipal, we find short stories by Iraqi women writers such as Lutfiya Al-Dulaimi, Samira Al-Mana, Hadiya Hussein, Bouthayna Al-Nasiri, Inaam Kachachi and Salima Salih with literary translators of their works – among them, Denys Johnson-Davies, Marilyn Booth and Shakir Mustafa – as allies of Iraqi writers’ political integrity in English translation.

I also draw attention to the motif and importance of the inter-connectedness of trust, integrity and collaboration in these early instances of Iraqi diaspora literature (in London) as this helps to situate two important aspects of my study. The first aspect is that while the dynamic of trust and collaboration in the publication process distinguishes Iraqi women’s literature published in Arabic and English translation, extensive analysis of these strategies is at best nascent (Abou Rached 2017) despite Iraq’s profile in the international media (Jabbra 2006). The second point concerns notions of writer integrity as part of these novels’ politics of meaning-making. As explained earlier, in their earlier contexts of writing, Iraqi

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13. Many thanks to Dr. Azhar Hammadi for inviting me to attend the Iraqi diaspora community event on Iraqi writers held in Camden, London in 25th July 2015 and the event organisers for their welcome.
15. Publication information about Iraqi women writers’ stories in Banipal is listed in the Thesis Appendix.
women wrote their stories precisely to be read (by Arabic readers) as women-focussed commentary concealing to reveal in/direct or c/overt political critique. So, if a work read as ‘saying nothing’, this nothingness embodied a very strong political agency for readers to be aware that this nothingness was part of the (woman) writer’s survival, and thus the overall meaning-making of the work. By writing in allegorical ways whose representations of ‘normality’ or silence were consciously inauthentic (and thus authentic), this mode of writing assumes readership connectivity, to be understood as such. This mode of writing however carries risks of missing their very political point when read in other (political) situies. The somewhat categorical critiques of pre-2003 Iraqi literature (Starkey 2006, 149; Zeidel 2011) as overwhelmingly Ba’athist in political scope, for example demonstrate how earlier works by Iraqi writers have been categorically judged as acts of (authority) collaboration and propaganda when read in other geopolitical contexts. As the whole point of allegorical or ‘Aesopian’ writing (Loseff 1984) is that its very presence was not overtly signposted, it is perhaps for this reason that Shakir Mustafa (2008) warns that overt critique of the Iraqi government may not be easily discernible in the anthology of Iraqi writers’ fiction he edited (2008, xvi). What his commentary illustrates is that if readerships are expecting to find ‘something’ about Iraq – explicit reference to a totalitarian government for example – allegorical Iraqi writing could disappoint them. This last point on allegorical writing situates the reader-writer relationship as particularly dynamic and complex concerning Iraqi literature in Arabic-English translation.

The relationality of Iraqi writer integrity to publication contexts in the 1990s thus also emerged as a key factor for Iraqi women writers first publishing in English translation and the strategies they used – self-translation, co-collaborative correspondence and self-publication. Through the Vast Halls of Memory (1990) by Haifa Zangana is the first instance of a novel (and memoir) published in English translation before being published
in Arabic. This novel did not first begin in English – its first beginnings were initially individual chapters published in two Arabic diaspora journals: in Literature In Exile between 1986 and 1989, then The Woman Writer (Zangana 1995, 136). The first 1990 English version was translated and edited by Haifa Zangana herself with the support of surrealist artist Peter Wood alongside whom she had exhibited her own artwork in the 1970s and 1980s. The Waiting List: An Iraqi Woman’s Tales of Alienation (1994) by Daizy Al-Amir came about from the author and publishers (1994, vii; xiii) who arranged her visit to the US in 1989. Mamdouh’s novel Mothballs (1995) became part of the Garnet Series of Arab Women’s Writing in English translation (1995-1998) due to Faqir’s own sense of critical engagement with the political situation of Iraq post 1990 US/Iraq war (Faqir 1995, v). Similarly, Bouthayna Nasiri’s long term residence in Cairo led to eminent translator Denys Johnson-Davies re-packaging her short stories as one publication titled Final Night (2002) in English translation. Already blacklisted by the Iraqi government in 1979 for her novels, Al-Mana’s القامعون [The Oppressors] (1968/1997) was translated into English by Paul Starkey via the grass-roots literary group Exiled Writers Ink! in London, which organises regular events in cafés and literary writing projects for exiled writers.16

In the post-2003 war era in Iraq and in the subsequent US/Allied occupation, however, we see a shift of publication contexts for Iraqi women’s literature in Arabic-English translation – from academic/community diaspora settings mostly based in London to academic-commercial publishers based in or (at least partially) funded by an agency based in the US. The mediations of post-2003 (US) publications differ in that it is a given that their US target readers will have post-2003 politics of Iraq in mind. These readers are, after all, purchasing in a competitive (commercial) book market where literally hundreds of books about the 2003 war on Iraq by US war veterans, politicians, reporters and academics

16 Exiled Writers Ink: Writers In A Strange Land http://www.exiledwriters.co.uk/ [Accessed 15/06/2018].
are published and promoted in English (Lynx-Qualey 2014b). Nonetheless, the motif of collaboration at play in the translation of Iraqi women’s novels written in Arabic before and after 2003 seems maintained, with allies including academics and experts who feel some connection or affinity to Iraq, the writer and/or her mode of writing. For Alia Mamdouh’s *The Loved Ones* (2008), literary translator Marilyn Booth explains the novel’s “multilingual” and “transnational” themes reflected in its linguistic and cultural references (2008, 277) and credits Mamdouh herself for assisting with the translation of this “polyphonic” work (ibid). In Haifa Zangana’s *Dreaming of Baghdad* (2009), the writer of the Foreword, Hamid Dabishi (2009, viii), refers to Zangana as his “Iraqi sister” who “speaks for both Iraqis and Iranians of her generation” (ix). All four novels by Iraqi women writers published by the New York Feminist Press have a critical introduction and an afterword by academic experts – Hélène Cixous and Farida Abu-Haidar in the novels by Alia Mamdouh (2005, 2007), Hamid Dabishi and Ferial Ghazoul for Haifa Zangana’s *Dreaming of Baghdad* (2009) and Nadje Al-Ali for Iqbal Al-Qazwini’s novel *Zubaida’s Window* (2008), all of whom set out to contextualise each writer and respective novel vis-à-vis discourses of pre- and post-2003 Iraq. In this light, the critical understandings of Arabic and English versions of each novel therefore, seem to be potentially ever-shifting in relation to their political and temporal situe. This last point contextualises my argument in this thesis where I examine the processes of meaning-making in Iraqi women writers’ novels in English translation and how they remain connected, while remaining different, to their Arabic versions in publication.

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17 Barnes and Noble’s online “Iraq War, 2003” category in 2018 comprises of more than 1,300 books. [https://www.barnesandnoble.com/b/books/iraqi-politics/iraq-war-2003/ /N-29Z8q8Z16z0] [15/06/2018].
1.6: Critical intersections: Arab women’s literature in English translation

The diversity of Iraqi women writers’ novel publication contexts certainly invites closer analysis from the perspectives of translation studies not only to enhance the appreciation of Iraqi women’s literature in Arabic-English translation as a new line of scholarship but to enrich the already diverse field of scholarship focusing on Arabic women’s literature. It is important to bear in mind that the dynamics of Arabic-English translation have impacted on Arab women writers differently. For this reason, I set out in this section the lines of divergence as well as connection between Iraqi and Arab women’s literature in Arabic-English translation. As a field of research intersecting Arabic and postcolonial studies (Elsadda 2012), critical debates on Arab women’s literature (in general) take as point of departure something akin to Edward Said’s question (1983): “how can knowledge…non-dominative and non-coercive be produced in a setting that is deeply inscribed with the politics…of power” (1983, 2). In other words, who is mediating whom and what are the politics of the mediators involved. Scholarship here is not limited to discursive mediations of works by Middle Eastern women writers but includes the marketing of literary works which could be read as appearing to confirm, not challenge neo-colonial political agendas in the Middle East (Valassopoulos 2007; Whitlock 2007; Dabishi 2006). With an ethos of building, configuring and interrogating the (literary and political) premises of Arab women’s literature as a critical field of inquiry, transnational in focus (Elsadda 2012, xxviii), scholarship on Arab women’s literature in English translation focuses on how and why novels by particular Arab women writers seem to have been mediated in specific ways using literary, philosophical and thematic, rather than translation-focussed frames of analysis (Elsadda 2012; Grace 2004; Gauch 2004; Majaj et al 2002; Mehta 2007; Moore 2008; Valassopoulos 2007).
One critical line of inquiry for most scholars of Arab women’s literature then is the risk of “Orientalism” (Said 1978) as first defined by Said, “a style of thought based on ontological and epistemological distinction made between ‘the Orient’ and (most of the time) ‘the Occident’...the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for...a ‘field’” (Said 1978/1995, 88). In the context of Arab women’s literature, scholars interrogate the binary bases of East/West by which Arab women writers’ works of fiction are mediated: why and how particular writings by individual Arab women writers read as ‘representing’ or ‘standing in’ for other Arab women, whether they write to do so or not. To avoid reiterating similarly homogenous generalisations, scholars focusing on Arab women writers’ works in Arabic-English translation tend to draw on case studies to make their points. Rim Hassane (2009) critiques how Algerian woman writer Assia Djebar’s gendered colonial-resistant voices in her Francophone novel *Loin de Médine* (1991) risks being over-written by ‘gender neutral’ markers of English in its French-English translation. Michelle Hartman (2012) interrogates how nuances of register in Arabic become ‘flattened’ in English translationese for the purposes of ‘easy’, non-reflective reading, an interesting discussion in the changing publishing contexts of different (constituencies of) Arab women writers. Marilyn Booth (2007; 2010; 2016) identifies how novels by ‘the celebrity Arab (Muslim) author’ in Arabic-English translation have risen to more prominence in global publishing markets due to a combination of factors underpinned by assumptions of East/West binaries: first, the emergence of a generation of social media-engaged Arab women writers (not necessarily identifying as activists or political exiles) aware of growing commercial publisher interest in Arab women’s literature (Booth 2010, 210); second, that US readerships want to know about Arab women’s lives by feeling they are vicariously living them as a personal eye/I experience (2010, ibid). Referring to Rajaa Alsanea’s novel *Girls of Riyadh* (2005) in English translation, Booth believes that the publisher’s decision to agree to the author’s request of register – a flattened
‘translationese’ - was not solely a response to readers wishing to ‘live’ the novel but the publisher wishing to profit from this phenomenon. Alsanea’s move could also be read as simultaneously reiterating, subverting or mocking the Orientalising frames which frame her, her work and other Arab women writers’ literature.

Yet not all (Arab women) writers or translators have had the space or freedom to ‘play’ orientalising ideologies on different terms. Some Arab women writers’ works in translation have been subject to critique (albeit not necessarily censorship) by their government as well as by Arabic readers. Referring to her own contexts, Egyptian woman writer Nawal El-Saadawi (1997) explains: “During the eighties, when my books were being translated, the authorities claimed I was writing for Western consumption. They made this claim even though I always wrote in Arabic and all first editions of my books were published in Cairo” (1997, 3). In this vein, while an Arab woman writer can find herself welcomed by some readerships as “Escapee...or Victim” (from the ‘East’) based on essentialised assumptions of her “Arab/Muslim woman author authenticity”, she can, as was El-Saadawi, find herself condemned by “Islamocentric readers” on suspicion of her betrayal of “source” culture (Kahf 2006, 4) regardless of the intentions of her work. Although El-Saadawi was not imprisoned in Egypt for her works in translation (but for her publications in Arabic), her commentary shows a feeling of obligation to articulate the impact of the political effects of translation on herself and her different receptions, as one way of connectively configuring her writer integrity as part of her politics of meaning-making - in Arabic and in English translation.

Although the constituencies of readership and writers have changed since El-Saadawi was (along with her literary works) mediated in English translation, the desire, especially in the US commercial book market, to read works which ‘show’ the Arab woman writer communicating directly with (English-reading) readerships may have not subsided.
As pointed out by Mojha Kahf (2006), “cluelessness” of the various agents involved in publishing will inevitably play its part in the commodification or misrepresentation of Arab women writers in English translation to different audiences, including Arabic readers (2006, 1). The issue of cluelessness – as well as the critical interrogation of which (orientalising) ideologies may (still) be driving interest in Arab women’s literature in English translation - remain relevant to the (political) contexts of Iraqi women writers. As explained earlier, Iraqi women writers wrote precisely to be read as writing stories sociological or ‘anthropological’ in focus as one way of concealing to reveal the potential for their works to be read as in/direct or c/overt political critique. Earlier allegorical ways of writing also c/overtly rather than overtly worked to show their subaltern status of being an Iraqi woman writer. This consciously opaque mode of writing raises questions on how it could be framed in another language and literary landscape.

As one point of departure in my study, I want to argue that those involved in mediating Iraqi women writers’ literary works are anything but ‘clueless’ about the risks of acting as mediator for these writers, their novels, their translators and readerships. A large part of my inquiry then is to question how and why this is the case. In the specific contexts of Iraq and Iraqi women (diaspora) writers, the critical interrogation of which ideologies may be driving the interest in Arab women’s literature in English translation is vital particularly in view of potential slippages between notions of ‘post/colonial’ and ‘neo-colonial’ terminologies in the Western (US) academy (Shohat 1992). Recovering potentially hegemonic slippages of terminology is not new in wider contexts of Arab women’s writing published in English translation. In their introduction to Opening the Gates: An Anthology of Arab Feminist Writing (1990/2004), for example, editors Margot Badran and mariam cooke (1990/2004) explicitly articulate the first pioneering Arab women activists writing and calling for reform along gendered lines as ‘نسائي’ [nisā‘] or
‘feminist’ decades before this term was used to define women’s activism were coined in European political contexts (1994/2004; xxv-xxvi). In this way, this first English language Anthology on Arab women’s writing titled positions itself as situating Arab women’s activisms within their actual localised Arabic terms of reference.

These early attempts to bring Arab women’s writing in English translation to new readerships however have not come without risks. In the anthology Blood Into Ink (1994) (on war writing by South Asian and Middle Eastern women), cooke in partnership with Roshni Tustomji-Kerns clarifies more explicitly why women mediating other women in contexts of the Western academy (1994, xxi) often involves an uneasy relationality between two charged camps of academia: “Arab and Iranian women scholars claiming privileged access to the lives of Middle Eastern women” (ibid) and “European and American (scholars) who felt their work (on Middle Eastern women) had a place” (ibid). Although discussed two decades ago, the politics of the ‘tri-nary’ (three-way) agencies of writer, translator and publisher/editor as potentially configuring and challenging East/West binaries is still an ongoing conversation. Such charged debates help situate why reading Iraqi women writers’ novels in Arabic-English translation using analytical perspectives of feminist translation emerge as involving the negotiation of ‘risks’ and solidarities whose (geo/political) angles and (gendered) locations I now explain further.

1.7: Critical contexts of methodological framework: feminist translation approaches

Although this study focuses on Iraqi women’s literature in English translation as a nascent field of inquiry, it is important to note that translation studies and feminist translation studies as academic disciplines and fields of enquiry are also still in stages of emergence. Although an established discipline in its own right (Baker 2009, 1), translation studies often reflects the movement of language and communication itself and so is cited
by Mona Baker as “falling within or crossing” many other academic disciplines such as literary criticism, philosophy, sociology, anthropology, as well as that of linguistics (ibid).

In an increasingly globalised digital age, the role and impact of translation as academic, activist and communicative practice mediating pre-configurative societies has pre-occupied contemporary scholarship within translation studies and thus has called into question notions of definitive borders between languages, genres and agents of communication. The focus of these questions however are distinguished by an overt focus on the politics of presence – of conflict (Salama-Carr 2008; Baker 2007); activism (Baker 2017); ‘the translator’ (Chesterman 2009); the translated work’s ‘materiality’ (Littau 2016); the multi-modality and inter-semioticity of translation (Pérez-González 2016); the *habitus* of translator and translation (Vorderobermeier 2013) and what ‘is’ translation from a perspective of “post-translation” (Genzler 2017). Critical linkages between translation studies and the study of gender and sexuality (Larkosh 2011; Stryker and Currah 2015; Gairola 2016; Baer and Kaindl 2017; Epstein and Gillet 2017) inspired by feminist translation approaches first developed in Quebec (Godard 1989; De Lotbinière-Harwood 1991; Flotow 1996; Simon 1996) however have helped configure critical space for considering the translator as a specifically gendered social actor, the apparent absence and presence of sexuality of whom in translation powerfully interrogates the premises of articulated identity (*not* read/able in translation. In this scholarship, not only are binary notions of hegemony called into question, but the premises of who - and what - is “left out” by the privilege attributed to articulation or intelligibility (Baer and Kaindl 2017, 3). The premises of gender construction in texts, for example, help articulate absence as presence in translation in ways which are potentially relevant to Iraqi women writers’ representations of absences or partialized liminal presence, making the purported ‘invisibility’ of a translator take on critical significance.
This last point is particularly salient in arguments by Booth (2007; 2010; 2016) on the neo/colonial East/West politics underpinning some strategies of translation used to mediate some literary works by Arab women writers - at least in the US. Relevant to this study is the importance of distinguishing between feminist translation analytical praxes and historical examples of feminist ideologies mediated via (English) translation. For the latter, Gayatri Spivak (1993, 177) summarises how ‘easy to read’ translations of “Third World” (women) writers’ works for readerships she describes as “First World feminists” purport little “intimate” engagement between the translator and the literary text. By “intimate” engagement, Spivak meant the way “the feminist translator” could responsibly engage with the way a work has been written (and published) as “a clue to the gendered workings of the text” (1993, 177) which includes engaging with and showing the possible asymmetries of power across languages and translation. As a response – and attempt – to engage with the multiple gendered politics and agencies mediating Iraqi women’s novels, this thesis compelled me to consider the extent that different feminist translation approaches could be useful to my analysis of Iraqi women’s novels in Arabic-English translation, and why.

One approach I take is to consider what the premises of feminist translation are in the first place and to consider their relevance in the contexts of Iraqi women’s literature in Arabic-English translation. Here I am not talking about how terminologies referring to how ideological configurations of ‘feminism’ or re/definitions of gender move from European-origin languages to Arabic language discourses of women-focussed political activism (Kamal 2008; 2016).18 Rather, I refer to feminist translation as a praxis, or method of consciously gendered (and geopolitical) activist engagement with women’s gendered

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18 Within critical Gender Studies scholarship in (and on) MENA regions, the term “gender” in Arabic has been extensively debated, with the following terms not fully accepted or categorically rejected: “الجنسية” [al-janïsâ] (Ghazoul 1999) based on the Arabic root of ج ن س [jīn nūn sīn] which denotes “sex” or “sort” (Wehr 1994, 167); "النوع" [al-nû’a] from the French term ’le genre’ (ElSadda 2013); and "الجند" [al-jandar], a transliteration of the English term ‘gender’ (Mehrez 2007; Kamal 2016).
experience in language/s moving across different literary and political contexts. Although practices of feminist translation as engagement with patriarchal premises of language and writing have existed throughout history (Flotow 1997; Simon 1996), feminist translation as an academic discipline initially came about where translators identifying as feminist in post/colonial Quebec began to question why the texts – and languages – they were working on configure women and translation as derivative, ‘other’ or ‘different’ in ways which seem to reflexively shape how women are seen in the world (Godard 1989, De Lotbinière-Harwood 1991; Flotow 1996; Simon 1996). By making connections between the (patriarchally) constructed status of women and that of translation (Chamberlain 1988), feminist translators first considered how to engage with translating between (patriarchal) languages within their specific activist (feminist) language locations. Elaborating on notions of *l’écriture féminine* articulated by Hélène Cixous (1975) and Luce Irigaray (1993), Barbara Godard (1989) proposed that women could re/write their – and perhaps other marginalised groups’ – gendered, ambivalent experiences with/in patriarchal language by working to expose the derivative nature of language itself as one way of subverting and so transforming the dominant discourses of (hegemonic) authority. If all writing is simply an act of re-writing words already articulated or written in a different context, all ‘original’ writing is then no less of a simulcra than the act of translation which purports to ‘carry over’ the equivalence of one language to another language (ibid, 49). In this way the “originality” or creative distinction of the act of re/writing (and so translation) lies in its context of mediation, which includes its mode of articulation, expression, performance and reception – or, in Godard’s words, its “transformance” (ibid, 46). In this light, language itself is configured as a mimesis and cipher for the (gendered) contexts of its interpretation as a reflexively activist process of meaning-making in ways, a paradigm which makes feminist translation analysis relevant to Iraqi women’s literature in Arabic-English translation.
Feminist translation approaches thus emerged through and represented an intellectual and institutional “alliance” between translation studies, deconstruction and feminist literary thought which developed through and via “the (common) distrust of traditional hierarchies…deep suspicion of rule defining fidelity and the questioning of universal standards of meaning and value” (Simon 1996, 8). By exposing and interrogating the (gendered) terms and status of translation and women as marginalised, non-original or derivative, feminist translation analysis first worked to challenge hierarchal oppression in society through a variety of translational engagements, mostly in contexts of languages with shared etymological roots: gendered neologisms such as ‘aut/her’ and ‘aut/hership’ as a challenge to notions of ‘authorship’ predicated on patriarchal authority in contexts of translation (De Lotbinière-Harwood 1991; Scott 1984); challenging the privilege attributed to visual renditions of written language by configuring “mimetic” or aural performances of translation (Flotow 2004); the translator “woman-handling”, “flaunting” or making overt her/his presence and interventions in the text via footnotes, prefaces or afterwords (Godard 1989, 50); recovering women’s presence in language by translating texts in ways which re-claim or ‘hijack’ patriarchal language for overtly declared feminist purposes (Flotow 1991; Levine 1991). Overtness of activist praxis has thus emerged so far as a key premise of feminist translation: a translator needs to make her/his political agenda known somewhere in the text as part of the text’s meaning-making to avoid simply repeating patriarchal traditions of invisibly over-writing a text (Massardier-Kenney 1997). Inspired by Spivak’s call for “intimate” translation in postcolonial contexts (1993), Shread (2007, 2014) and Flotow (2009, 2014) have worked to re-configure (feminist) activist engagements with translation as a political act which carries different meanings and agendas that do not assume acceptance, rejection or, in fact any unified static positionality. Although engaging with many literary traditions and languages of translation, none of these praxes of feminist
translation have been situated, to my knowledge, alongside the localised and global publication contexts of Iraqi/Arab women writers’ novels in Arabic-English translation.

From an intersectional post/colonial perspective, such a feminist translation engagement with genres of Arab women’s writing in my view is timely as feminist translators often challenge linguistic (neo/colonial) power relations by translating texts (by women or about women and other marginalised identity groups) from less translated languages or literary canons, highlighting its importance in a preface or afterword (Shread 2011, 287). It is important to note here that a (feminist) translator’s declaration of her/his activist agenda does not mean all texts or writers s/he translates are claimed or identified as having a defined feminist ideology. This distinction is particularly crucial to make in contexts of Iraqi women’s writing and the relationalities of Iraqi women to different ideologies of feminism. Tensions between feminist ideologies in post-2003 Iraq for example were highlighted by Zangana (2005; 2013) when she opened debates on how “colonial feminists,” which she terms in Arabic as "النسويات المستعمرات" [colonialist/s feminist/s] (2013, 213) in the form of US-state funded feminist NGOs were operating to serve US state interests, not the needs of Iraqi women in post-2003 Iraq. In transnational literary contexts, Iraqi women writers have thus historically faced marginalisation from global publishing markets for all the reasons of censorship cited earlier on in this introduction. With the specific contexts of Iraqi women writers in mind (which are also shared by many other writers), intersectional perspectives of feminist translation emerge as potentially useful. As well as focusing on gender, intersectional approaches seek to interrogate the power relations between the different situes (as well as different constituencies) of women and other marginalised identities to challenge and highlight “the many different types of discriminations a person suffers, mitigating the effect of ‘gender’ as the single identity factor” (Flotow 2012, 131), which include the premises of barriers to
mutual intelligibility (Hills Collins 2017, xi). In this way, the many volatile political contexts impacting on (gendered notions of) communication are crucial to interrogate from an intersectional perspective of feminist translation, a point which is particularly relevant in contexts of Iraqi women’s writing in Arabic-English translation.

Recognising the potential impact of transnational and localised power relations within and across languages, intersectional feminist translation scholars thus interrogate the boundaries and gendered notions of writing and translation from various critical perspectives: as gendered power constructs, gendered mediations of lived experiences and linguistic relations of power as well as geopolitical location. Sherry Simon, Kathy Mezai and Luise von Flotow (2014) for example configure (and interrogate) diverse hierarchies underpinning the politics of translation in Quebec. They ask why linguistic interactions in the public sphere in Quebec purport to promote equality when “realities of cultural life are saturated with the conflicting forces of inequality and violence, resistance and redress” (2014, 3), particularly in contexts of First Nation Canadians. The hegemony of English has also been interrogated in contexts of transnational feminist activism (Reimóndez 2017; Álvarez 2014; Costa 2014). Carolyn Shread (2011, 289) cites “Third World and Black women’s movements and literatures” being “sidelined, conscripted or erased by feminists from hegemonic nations” to illustrate this point. Intersectional perspectives of feminist translation thus explicitly work to “problematize mono-linguistic, oppositional and binary approach(es) to feminism” (Castro and Ergun 2018, 125) to challenge interlocking (gendered) systems of domination which include “racism, capitalism, colonialism, heteronormativity, ableism and so forth” (ibid).

As ‘invisible’ translation or ‘fake familiarity’ is antithetical to any feminist translator practice per se, intersectional (and postcolonial) feminist translation approaches often seek to respond to what Shread (2007) terms as “the fundamental alterity” (2007, 218)
of translating a text and so seek to re/read translated texts in ways which go beyond the “presence/absence binary” (ibid, 220). One way of interrogating this binary is to ask what or who makes a text, a question through which boundaries between notions of translator/reader, translator/writer, text/paratext emerge as potentially blurred yet significant intersecting sites of inter/action where the meaning (making) of a translated work takes place. Such a question involves exploring the role of the many agents involved in mediating translated works as well as writers and translators: reviewers, publishers and editors as well as readers, most of whom are not recognised, or at least not cited (on a book’s ISBN page for example) as part of a translated work’s meaning-making. In these critical contexts, an ‘intimate reading’ of Iraqi women’s literature - involving recognition that mediations of alterity (in Iraqi literature) are already diffuse and connectively emergent to each work’s contexts of gendered geo-political identity and location - could thus be useful. The inter-flow between the Iraqi woman writer, her story, the changing political contexts of Iraq and their shifting readerships means that far more than one writer and one translator are mediating her work, which in turn blurs definitive distinctions between text and paratext in Iraqi women’s stories.

This last point brings me to paratexts. By paratexts I mean what surrounds a text that leads to its transformation into a publication, which Gérard Genette (1987/1997) divides into two categories: book covers, titles, font settings, blurbs, epigraphs etc. as well as prefaces and afterwords called “peritexts” (1997, 5). Importantly for Iraqi and Arab women’s literature in English translation, peritexts include glossaries and additional notes (Abou Rached 2018, 58). According to Genette (1997, 344), “epitexts” are any paratextual elements not materially appended to the text but circulating outside of it, such as book reviews and articles etc. Historically, feminist translators configure paratexts as sites in the work where they show themselves as co-producers (or co-aut/hers) of meaning in the
translated work and as political agents pursuing their agendas in the textual creation process (Massardier-Kenney 1997, 63). The translation of “paratexts” of translated works is called “paratranslation” (Garrido 2005; Frías 2012). The study of paratranslation involves analysing the discourses – aesthetic, political, ideological and cultural – underpinning peritexts and epitexts used to frame a translated text for its readers in its new settings (Frías 2012, 118). According to Xoán Garrido (2005), paratranslation is never neutral as each paratext is adapted for specific ideological reasons (2005, 31). As paratexts are multiple in formats as peritexts and epitexts, their mediation can be influenced by diverse “intermediaries” or “paratranslators” (Garrido 2011, 88) as well as the translator and author: editors, publishers and reviewers. As the premises of a definitive line between texts and paratexts in Iraqi women writers’ novels often blurs, I return to connective formats of mediation in the English translations of their works later.

Before I do so, I make brief reference to the shifting paratexts or ‘epitexts’ surrounding the term النسوية [al-nisūwiyya] in Arabic vis-à-vis Iraqi women and Iraqi women’s literature. In contexts of Iraqi women’s activism, this term seems deeply couched in Iraq’s shifting charged political contexts. While the presence of US/UK funded ‘feminist’ NGOs in Iraq have indeed created a negative ‘paratext’ for what Zangana (2013, 213) terms as "النسويات [al-nisūwiyyāt], ‘feminists’ and ‘feminisms,’ the term النسوية [al-nisūwiyya] in Arabic is also used when describing the حركة النسوية في العراق [the nisūwiyya movement in Iraq] the decades of activist work carried out by Iraqi women throughout Iraq’s recent history (Efrati 2012; Al-Ali and Pratt 2009). In Iraqi literary scholarship which frames Iraqi women’s literature from various critical perspectives (Hatto 2013; Al-Dulaimi; Ahmed 2017) suggest that the shifting, ambiguous and non-categorical frames of the terminology النسوية [al-nisūwiyya] could provide gendered-political leverages by which critical insights on Iraqi women’s literature can be further expanded: as a genre of writing
with gendered positionality at the centre of its politics which historically has consciously refused co-optation within any hegemonic frame of reference, including any categorical definition of feminist ideology. I thus engage with intersectional frameworks of feminist translation analysis which seek to interrogate “interlocking systems of domination” (Castro and Ergun 2018, 125) to shed light on how Iraqi women’s traditions of story-telling work to re/write (to interrogate) (cross-constituency) oppression published in Arabic move into English translation. I explore, then, intersectional feminist translation approaches on the basis that they invite transformative analytical perspectives towards the many intersecting geo/political issues at play in the mediations of writers and novels in translation.

This study thus has as its critical focus how six instances of Iraqi women writers’ story-making move across Arabic-English translation, with translation considered as a form of gendered and geo-politically (re)situated re/writing: حبل السرة [The Umbilical Cord] (1990/2005) by Samira Al-Mana، على لائحة الانتظار [On the Waiting List] (1988/1994) by Daizy Al-Amir، الحفيدة الأميركية [The American Granddaughter] (2009/2011) by Inaam Kachachi، حبات النفتالين [Mothballs] (1986 (2000)/1995//2005) by Alia Mamdouh and ما بعد الحب [Beyond Love] (2004/2012) by Hadiya Hussein. By intersectionality, I take Kimberlé Crenshaw’s (1989/1991) conceptualisation of different marginalisations (such as ethnicity, race and class) as intersecting within interlocking dynamics of power as a point of departure to situate Iraqi women’s stories as communicating representations of different constituencies of Iraqi women within (to bypass, resist and transform) neo/colonial, state-sponsored and localised politics of (gendered) violence and oppression: through, via and in Arabic and English translation. As no previous scholarship, to my knowledge, has focused on Iraqi women’s literature in Arabic-English translation using reflexively re-configurative modes of (intersectional) feminist translation, I analyse Iraqi women writers’ novels in Arabic-
English translation as initiating and inviting engagements with feminist translation studies as well as showcasing this body of work as an innovative genre of re/writing.

1.8: Thesis structure: research questions, critical approaches and chapter themes

I wish to contribute insights on Iraqi women writers’ novels in Arabic publication and English translation analysed alongside each other for the first time. One line of inquiry threading throughout this study is the relevance of feminist translation as a praxis-led analytical framework in Iraqi women writers’ (intersectional) contexts of gendered alterity as a resistant and specifically gendered mode of writing in differing critical contexts. Alongside various analytical frameworks of feminist translation, I draw on notions of ‘the Uncanny’ in postcolonial literature (Bhabha 1994), ‘listening’ translation approaches (Kolias 1990), connectivity (Joseph 1993), ‘alterity’ (Levinas 1987) and matrixial feminist psychoanalysis (Ettinger 1992). I draw on these frames of reference to explore how Iraqi women writers’ innovative story-telling in English translation are mediated to connect Iraqis, as well as their writers to wider, changing readerships in fluctuating political contexts. I also explore how the strategies and contexts of mediation of Iraqi women’s literary works invite reconfigurations of the feminist translation approaches themselves, with useful critical implications for wider contexts of Arab women’s literature (and potentially other literary traditions) in translation.

This line of thinking has led me to configure an analytical framework of ‘feminist paratranslation’ (Abou Rached 2017) inspired by the modes of mediation at play in the novels themselves which involve many kinds of collaborative authorship and mediation. Drawing on the critical premises of feminist translation (which interrogates the borders between translation and re/writing) and paratranslation analysis (Garrido 2005; Frías
2012), which focuses on how the ‘paratexts’ of translated works, a paradigm of ‘feminist paratranslation’ analysis not only questions and blurs boundaries between writing and translation, but borders between translation and paratranslation, translator and paratranslator, text and paratext (ibid, 199). Such a paradigm suggests that notions of ‘authorship’ in contexts of translation could be radically reconfigured: instead of one or two writers (author and translator), the para/translated book could be analysed as having multiple authors mediating its meanings and voices – publishers, editors, reviewers and crucially readerships with their own epi-texts of cultural, linguistic and political vocabularies and discourses (ibid, 200). As definitive boundaries between the many “authors” who are collaborating to mediate a work ostensibly by one Iraqi woman author are, at times, difficult to discern, I find the word ‘au/their/ship’ as well as ‘para/translation’ useful in contexts of this study. Initially, this paradigm suggests a somewhat nebulous framework of engaging with the potentially multiple agencies of ‘au/their/ships’ involved in mediating what is ostensibly ‘one’ (Iraqi woman) writer’s work, whose multiple, if not infinite interpretations would not be easy to quantify, let alone draw insights and findings from. By questioning the borders between text and paratext, translation and paratranslation, this analytical framework nonetheless still allows space to interpret absence and partialised agencies beyond binary configurations of unitary or ‘fully’ articulated presence or text, all of which are particularly salient in contexts of Iraqi women’s literature. No Iraqi woman writer for example identifies herself explicitly as feminist but a number of their books are translated by overtly feminist publishers. Reviewer commentaries are foregrounded as the first ‘presenters’ or ‘paratranslators’ of novels by Iraqi women writers published in English translation to new publics but are not cited on the ISBN pages as part of the work’s ‘au/their/ship.’ The presence of real world events in the ostensibly fictional worlds of many novels by Iraqi women writers – dictatorship, war, sanctions, war, occupation – also create space to consider and question who is mediating which part of which story. For this reason,
how the differently agencies of mediation in Iraqi women’s literature are re-situated in English translation needs to be considered and explored as part of this body of work. I thus engage with Iraqi women’s literature and feminist translation praxes as subjects of research and thus analyse the novels from a transformative critical perspective.

As this thesis engages with overlapping fields of Iraqi and Arab women’s literature alongside feminist translation and translation studies, I have chosen six novels which reflect the diverse contexts in which Iraqi women writers have published in Arabic and English translation: حبل السرة [The Umbilical Cord] (1990/2005) by Samira Al-Mana, على لائحة الانتظار [On the Waiting List] (1988/1994) by Daizy Al-Amir, [The American Granddaughter] (2009/2011) by Inaam Kachachi, [Mothballs] (1986/2000/1995/2005) by Alia Mamdouh and كم بدت السماء قريبة! [A Sky So Close!] (1999/2001) by Betool Khedairi, حبات النفتالين and ما بعد الحب [Beyond Love] (2004/2012) by Hadiya Hussein. I chose these works to cover a wide range of timelines in Iraqi women’s story-writing. I also chose them as particular aspects of their mediation in English translation evoke critical issues of concern for feminist translation studies. Novels and short stories in Arabic-English translation by eminent Iraqi women writers – such as Ibtisam Abdullah, Lutfiya Al-Dulaimi, Maysalun Hadi, Bouthayna Al-Nasiri, Iqbal Al-Qazwini, May Muzaffar, Salima Salih and Haifa Zangana – were not omitted lightly, and for this reason, I make mention of these writers in this introduction and at times throughout this study.19 Shahed Al-Rawi’s novel ساعة بغداد [The Baghdad Clock] (2016) which made the 2018 International Prize for Arabic Fiction (IPAF) or ‘the Arab Booker’ Shortlist augures a new generation of Iraqi women writers, and its English translation (published shortly before this study’s completion) certainly calls for future critical engagement. This thesis draws attention to the strategies by which Iraqi women writers’ novels have been mediated in Arabic-English translation

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19 All publications by the Iraqi women writers cited in this thesis are listed in the Thesis Appendix.
over nearly three decades - co-collaborative partnership, self-publication, commercial, re-translation – to showcase how each work is mediated by its many ‘para/translators’ to engage in each writer’s (often charged) political and gendered contexts. I thus consider this study a contribution to a growing field of scholarship on Iraqi women’s literature.

The Arabic publications explored and analysed in this study span three decades, starting from the 1980s. In English translation, the six novels range over a two-decade time-period but with varying time-lags in relation to the Arabic versions. They each present a range of gendered perspectives and locations from Iraqi (and other) intersectional perspectives as: itinerant woman traveller; 1980s diaspora Iraqi communities; women in the post-2003 (US) military; rural women; women of mixed ethnic heritage; women living in endemic poverty; Shi’a Muslim women. To raise appreciation of the variety of writing styles in Iraqi women’s writing in Arabic, I chose stories in which writers have used Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), Iraqi dialect and at times (US) English as (gendered) language of mediation. As I focus on Iraqi women writers’ story-making in Arabic-English translation, I did not include literary works by Iraqi women writers written directly in English such as Nuha Al-Radi’s *Baghdad Diaries* (2003) or the blog by Riverbend (2005) – although their modes of self-reflexive writing question boundaries between self-writing and self-translation and invite future research.

As this study engages modes of feminist translation analysis alongside Iraqi women’s literature for the first time, I chose Iraq women writers’ stories which offer opportunity for this thesis to interrogate analytical approaches in feminist translation studies that have received less critical attention or are recently emergent: ‘author/translator-centred’ (Massardier-Kenney 1997); ‘mimetic’ (Flotow 2004); ‘polyphonic’ (Reimóndez 2017) and ‘metamorphic’ feminist translation approaches (Flotow and Shread 2014). In this respect, I explore how Iraqi women writers’ novels offer new perspectives to the very
analytical frameworks on which I draw on to contribute increased knowledge and appreciation of these works in Arabic publication and English translation as well as the usefulness of these translational paradigms. In doing so, I critically engage with how Iraqi women writers’ novels make voices of other Iraqis ‘heard’ or ‘seen’ in English translation via strategies which configure possibilities of confrontation, solidarity and transformation within specific geo-political contexts.

In this introduction, I have given an overview of Iraqi women writers’ critical contexts in Arabic and English translation to frame my praxis-led mode of feminist translation analysis. In Chapter 2, I analyse حبل السرة [The Umbilical Cord] (1990) translated under the title of The Umbilical Cord (2005) by Samira Al-Mana and Daizy Al-Amir’s [On the Waiting List] (1988) translated into English as The Waiting List: An Iraqi Woman’s Tales of Alienation (1994) as examples of Iraqi women writers’ allegorical writing prevalent in the late 1980s, few of which have been published in English translation (cooke 2007, 24). By drawing on Homi Bhabha’s notions of ‘the Uncanny’ (1994) in postcolonial literature alongside feminist paratranslation, I explore the different c/overt strategies used to mediate both works’ stories about diverse experiences of ‘alienation’ and censorship inside and outside of Iraq within contexts of Iraqi state censorship. Interrogating the premise of ‘overt’ translator agency in feminist translation as the only credible mode of activist translation is too limiting, I argue that consciously liminal modes of translator agency in both works need to be recognised as part of each version’s politics of translation, and important aspect of its meaning-making.

In Chapter 3, I explore الحفيدة الأمريكية [The American Granddaughter] (2009/ 2011) by Inaam Kachachi, the only novel by an Iraqi woman writer to focus on the gendered and geopolitical positionality of Iraqi women translators working with the US army in post-2003 Iraq. As a story of different women’s voices in MSA, Iraqi dialect and at times, US
English, I explore how these voices are re-located or re-orientated in English translation/s by two different translators, William Hutchins and Nariman Youssef. To do so, I draw on translation approaches which focus on the audibility of a translated work – listening approaches of translation (Kolias 1990) and mimetic frames of feminist translation (Flotow 2004) to discuss the extent that each English translation engages with the different registers of language which Kachachi uses as post-2003 ‘tools’ of resistance to US occupation. I thus explore and draw attention to how such analytical frameworks of feminist translation can help us ‘read’ the ‘audible’ translation activism in this work.

In Chapter 4, I discuss كم بدت السماء قريبة! [A Sky So Close] (1999/2001) by Betool Khodeiri, a story which is recounted in three parts by an unnamed girl who lives in rural Iraq in the 1970s, in Baghdad during the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s, and in London during the 1991 war. Drawing on notions of ‘connectivity’ (Joseph 1994) and ‘alterity’ (Levinas 1987) alongside “polyphonic” notions of feminist translation (Reimόndez 2017), I explore how the novel’s mediations of class and ethnic injustice in Iraq shift between the Arabic and English versions in ways which appear to separate the two versions but leave traces by which the two versions could be read as opening connective conversations with different readerships. I also argue that the novel’s (gendered) representations of rurality and black Iraqi identity were mediated to be, in part, configured by each reader’s individual responses to the novel, in ways which call for its ongoing re-reading.

politics of solidarity in each novel’s ‘re-packaging’ in English translation could be read as a call (to post-2003 readerships) to consider why some binary premises of I/other conflict in contexts of Iraq are not tenable, but at the same time, not easily resolvable.

The conclusion argues how a praxis-based critical approach of engaging Iraqi women writers’ novels in Arabic and English translation alongside feminist translation approaches of re/writing offers new critical perspectives to existing scholarship, contributing new knowledge and potential directions for future research in Iraqi and Arab (women’s) literature and translation studies alongside other related academic fields, such as gender studies and feminist postcolonial literary critique.
Chapter 2: Translating ‘the Uncanny’: Samira Al-Mana and Daizy Al-Amir

2.1: Overview

Both born in 1935, Samira Al-Mana and Daizy Al-Amir grew up during times of seismic social political changes in Iraq: independence from the British Empire, civil uprisings during and after World War Two, political unions of regional Arab identity, increasing leftist influence (Ismael 2007), the over-throw of the Iraqi monarchy in 1958, and the Iraqi Ba’ath Party’s rise to power in the 1960s. Shakir Mustafa (2004) likens Al-Mana’s writing style to a “modern-day Sheherazade intrigued by story-telling but mindful of the risks it involves” (2004, 129). By this he means that Al-Mana situates stories within stories whose connective format ‘conceals-to-reveal’ a sharp critique towards political oppression while mediating at times her own contexts of publication as a writer in exile. Al-Amir is acclaimed for expressing the voices and silences of women from a psychological and social perspective (Ghazoul 2008, 193), their sense of unease and alienation often communicated through metaphors of travel, transit and (forced) departure. Often distinguished by the double motif of bearing witness to profound effects of rapid political changes on the psyche of Iraqi women and men, and negotiating of Iraqi state censorship on literary output, many stories by Al-Mana and Al-Amir read as allegorically presenting an ‘uncanny’ sense of alienation from Iraq without overtly stating this is the case. As meaning (making) of their stories seems connective to the Arabic reader’s understanding of the political situations in Iraq in the 1980s, it is not surprising the literary works by Al-Amir and Al-Mana present differently in English translation.

In this chapter, I analyse how حبل السرة [The Umbilical Cord] (1990) by Samira Al-Mana and Daizy Al-Amir’s على لائحة الانتظار [On the Waiting List] (1988) move into English translation to gain insights into how each writer’s allegorical modes of writing were innovatively mediated in their respective publication contexts. To contextualise my reading
of both works, I give a brief overview of ‘the Uncanny’ (Ghazoul 2004) and "الإغتراب" [al-ightirāb] or ‘alienation’ as two important allegorical motifs of writing in Iraqi literature. I also explain why feminist translation approaches focusing on “author-” and “translator-centred” agency (Massardier-Kenney 1997) could be useful frames of reference when exploring allegorical modes of Iraqi women’s writing in translation. In my analysis of Al-Mana’s novel, I consider how this novel’s re/writing of how diaspora Iraqis tell their stories of being at home and الإغتراب [al-ightirāb] puts forward a reiteratively transformative approach to the act of story-telling and the act of its own re/writing in English self/translation (2005). In my analysis of Al-Amir’s [On the Waiting List] (1988), I explore how and why the stories’ c/overt silences in Arabic seem re/mediated allegorically through co-collaborative para/texts of woman author-focussed solidarity. Although representations of translator agency initially appear liminal in each work, I argue that analytical perspectives of feminist translation can help us to analyse the c/overt or liminal translator agencies at play as integral to each work’s (activist) meaning/making in English translation. I thus work to show how the specificity of each work’s contexts of publication open space to re-consider notions of ‘overt’ translation agency in feminist translation theories (developed outside Iraqi literary contexts of censorship) differently through (and in) the translation strategies used to mediate each writer’s politics of writing.

2.2: ‘The Uncanny’ as home and الإغتراب [al-ightirāb] in Iraqi literature

According to Sigmund Freud (1919, 240), ‘the Unfamiliar’ or ‘Uncanny’ was "an emotional impulse" related to a fear or an anxiety repressed, yet somehow coming to light in another way in the human psyche. When a person sees or experiences something odd or ‘off-tilt’ as strangely familiar, traces of this experience remain in their psyche even if s/he
represses it as unwelcomed or not intelligible. Homi Bhabha (1992; 1994) argued such notions of ‘the Uncanny’ can help us configure and explore how literary representations of ambivalence or of something ‘off-tilt’ by individual writers in “the house of fiction” (1992, 141) ‘uncannily’ connect to wider asymmetrical dynamics of political oppression underpinning the meaning-making of their works and their contexts of mediation (1994, 15). Such representations could include c/overt references to or liminal traces of languages, literary traditions and histories erased, distorted or muted by colonisation or totalitarian rule. These traces can also be discerned when, for example, a writer ostensibly writes to mimetically conform to totalitarian or colonial directives, but somehow doesn’t read, in her/his particular contexts, as ‘quite right’ - or in the postcolonial contexts of India that Bhabha was referring to, as “white” (1994/2004, 128). The ambivalence of situe in turn facilitates, enables and even obliges alternative interpretations or alternative readings to even the most authoritative of texts (1994/2004, 138). Manifestations of this ambivalence are not always intelligible to all people, which is why a literary work can communicate ambivalence, c/overt resistance or mockery towards operations of repressive modes of authority without overtly articulating it.

Bhabha’s (1994/2004) reconfiguring of Freud’s ‘Uncanny’ has invited consideration of what it means for a writer to write in what he has termed as “the house of fiction” (1994/2004, 18), when any definitive border between ‘personal’ and ‘collective’ as well as ‘private’ and ‘public’ is in effect blurred due to particular contexts of public expression. Such notions of the Uncanny have been productively used to conceptualise how different literary traditions working to decolonise configure their own ambivalent frames of resistance to hegemonic and neo/colonial influences – as “a net made of holes” in Chicano literature (Martín Rodríguez 2001, 1); “ethnographic fictionality” in the Creole Novel (Izzo 2013, 92); “rooted in the soil” for Aboriginal literatures (Mudrooroo 1995, 228). Although
very different literary traditions, their common frames of critical reference are how the inter-connections between the contexts of a literary canon’s emergence, its modes of circulation and what writers write are often manifested in c/overt allegorical ways. By fusing elements of the impossible, the strange and the everyday in a story for example, writers can evoke themes, personnages and events which resonate as all-too-strangely familiar with real-world events without openly stating that this is their political intention or that their work should be read in specific ways. Iraqi writers have also historically drawn on the literary traditions of allegory, parable, sci-fi and magic realism to represent the ‘Unfamiliar’ as (all too) uncannily ‘Familiar.’ Iraqi writer Hassan Blasim (2016) describes Iraqi writers making recourse to this style of writing as testimony to the collectiveness of Iraqis’ “long saga of wars, death, destruction, population displacement, imprisonment, torture, ruin and tragedies” (2016, v). Not only will the strangeness of events in any (Iraqi) story read as all too familiar to most (Iraqi) readers – permutations of the events themselves are often recognised as experienced by them or others they know (of).

As pointed out by Simawe (2009, 129), allegory has long “proved to be a highly pointed, hard to misappropriate and aesthetically appealing” writing technique during shifting contexts of governance and increasingly repressive permutations of censorship in Iraq, particular during the 1968-2003 Iraqi Ba’athist era. As Iraqi writer Nejem Wali drily noted (2007, 52) “even those who chose to quit writing saw themselves forced to write something which did not rile the dictator, because even silence was considered a crime.” As pointed out by Alia Mamdouh, mediations of silence have thus emerged as crucial spaces by which Iraqi writers negotiated “the ban on speaking and the obligation to speak” (c.f. Chollet 2002): inscribing resistance to being banned from speaking and defying fear

of authority directives by writing between the lines of such directives. The sheer directiveness of Iraqi Ba’athist state censorship often resulted in writers writing the “red lines” through mimetically conforming to state directives as “an aesthetic expression of a complex and disturbing reality” (Ghazoul 2004, 1). As this “complex and disturbing reality” often involved a strong fear of state surveillance in the public sphere, writers thus found themselves working to conceal their awareness of its potential effects on their writing – that is, they could not overtly use allegorical modes of writing. In these contexts, the literary motif of الإغتراب [al-ightirāb] in Arabic became a prevalent theme in Iraqi literature due to its dual meanings: being separated from one’s country or homeland (Wehr 1994, 784) as well as feeling strange within one’s society, life and oneself. Its literal meaning allowed a writer to overtly express their sense of الإغتراب [al-ightirāb] as a patriotic emblem of identification with the ‘homeland’ with its psychic frames of reference overtly functioning as an allegory of writers (and many Iraqis in general) feeling ‘strange’ and alienated, whether they were inside or outside of Iraq.

Intersecting such ambivalent and political contexts of allegorical writing in Iraq was the issue of gender. In an Iraq dominated by overtly masculinised political representations of authority - president, soldier, martyr (Khoury 2013; Rohde 2010; Mousavi 2015) during wartime - Iraqi women writers, according to Samira Al-Mana, benefited from a gendered Aesopian-like insignificance21 by which they could write " بصورة أشمل و أكثر وضوحا" [in a more universal and clearer way] (Al-Mana 2002, 37). What Al-Mana means is that Iraqi women writers had the (critical) space in which they could mimetically write the gendered ambiguity of الإغتراب [al-ightirāb] as women with less fear of attracting critical (censor) attention, and of contravening any Iraqi state surveillance directives. This did not mean that

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21 “Fable 175 -The Great and the Little Fishes.” “The little fish escaped unnoticed through the meshes of the fisherman’s net. The big fish were all caught and hauled into the ship. MORAL: Our insignificance is often the cause of our safety.” (James 1872, 24).
Iraqi women writers’ stories were necessarily understood and appreciated in Iraq on this basis. As observed by Achim Rohde (2010, 144), what little critical attention directed towards writers—such as Lutfiya Al-Dulaimi—during the Iran-Iraq war focussed on the thematic failings, rather than the innovative stylistic techniques of these works—that is, the ways that women writers did not ‘write war’ categorically or ‘heroically’ enough. Although Iraqi women writers were publishing prolifically at this time, the absenting of Iraqi women writers’ works from the public literary spheres had had a powerful effect. Salah Ali (2008, 219) claims, that in 1980s Iraq, “women…could hardly express themselves,” in poetry and that if they did, they “followed in the footsteps of their peers in eulogizing the virtues of heroic martyrdom” (2008, 217). Ali situating 1980s Iraqi women’s literature solely in contexts of poetry is also another interesting reflection of Iraqi women’s story-writing being critically ignored, reflected further by its subsequent scarcity in Arabic-English translation (cooke 2007).

One reason for lack of Iraqi critical attention to the ‘gendered’ uncanny of Iraqi women’s literature is a question of Iraqi publication contexts. As pointed out by Iraqi-Palestinian writer Jabra Mohammed Jabra, novels about the Iran-Iraq war by men writers published in Iraq were certainly more prolific in number during the 1980s (c.f. Masmoudi 2015, 33), partly due to men often being sent away to the battlefront as soldiers or reporters on the war. Although Iraqi women writers were certainly subject to state censorship—the Iraqi Embassy directive banning all literature by Samira Al-Mana in 1979 for one reference to Israel in her novels is one example of this—Iraqi women’s preclusion from the battlefield meant that literary works by women writers could not attract the same critical attention in Iraq during an era of hyper-masculine discourses of war in the 1980s. Iraqi women writers’ الإختراب [al-ightirāb] or marginality within the Iraqi literary public sphere did not mean that they did not write. Drawing on Bhabha’s notions of ‘the Uncanny’ in ‘the house of fiction’,
the presence of so many works ignored functions as an oblique, but overwhelmingly strong commentary on the ambivalence of the position of Iraqi women writers in Iraqi literary scenes. The lack of critical attention in non-Iraqi scholarship to Iraqi women writers in the 1980s arose, however, for different reasons. One reason was the sheer lack of access to Iraqi writing published outside of Iraq (cooke 1996). The second reason related to the restrictions imposed on Iraqis, including writers, to travel outside of Iraq to show their work to others. This point provides valuable historical context to the eagerness of Texas University Press editor, Annes McGann-Baker to publishing Daizy Al-Amir’s stories after meeting with her in the US in 1989 (McGann-Baker 1994, vii). By the 1990s Iraqi women writers’ works were being published in English translation with carefully worded introductions. In her introduction to Aliya Tayib’s stories, cooke (1994), as stated earlier, meticulously explains she is working with many unknowns concerning the writer and her location (1994, 80). Similarly, in his introduction to Bouthayna Al-Nasiri’s short story collection, the translator Denys Johnson-Davies (2001, 1) notes that Al-Nasiri’s pre-1980s writing “the style is “more direct and relaxed” but does not expand further. In both instances, the translators’ framings of the stories gave little critical insight into how readers should critically engage with each writer’s politics of writing, let alone translation.

This point returns me to Samira Al-Mana’s observation that Iraqi women could write differently to Iraqi men (Al-Mana 2002, 37), as one way to survive the all-pervasiveness of the Iraqi state discourses of war and political repression. As this commentary highlights, in my view, a clear sense of importance that Al-Mana attaches to these works being read as well as written, the dearth of Iraqi women’s story-writing of the 1980s actually published in English translation – other than than short stories to be found in anthologies - is striking. Two ‘full’ instances of story-writing by Iraqi women writers written in the 1980s have been published in English translation حبل السرة [The Umbilical Cord] (1990/2005) by Samira Al-
Mana and Daizy Al-Amir’s [On The Waiting List] (1988). Although very different in style and content, the motif of [al-ightirāb] clearly frames each work, although the literary and political contexts of each writer differ. In 1990, Al-Mana published [The Umbilical Cord] (1990) in Arabic and in London as one way of articulating and defying the very state authority seeking to block her voice from circulating in Arabic anywhere in the Arab world during the 1980s. The English version, published in 2005, was self-translated by the writer herself and edited by Charles Lewis. Al-Amir’s The Waiting List: An Iraqi Woman’s Tales of Alienation (1994) was the first ‘full’ literary work by one Iraqi woman writer to be published in the US in English translation. Shared by both works, however, is a motif of ‘uncanny’ ambivalence: not only in terms of the stylistic and thematic focus of each novel, but in how each work’s contexts of ambivalence seem to intertwine its new meaning-making in English translation. In this next section, I explain how ambivalence in Al-Mana’s حبل السرة [The Umbilical Cord] (1990) and in Al-Amir’s [On The Waiting List] (1988) moves into English translation, using (and interrogating) analytical frameworks of feminist translation focusing on translator agency.

2.3: Feminist translation approaches and ‘overt’ translator activist agency

With its premise of questioning the borders between writing and translation, questions on the ambivalent premises and dynamics of writer and translator working within frameworks of (patriarchal) hegemonic repression are not new to feminist translation scholarship. Historically, feminist translators have engaged for example with gendered ambivalence vis-à-vis the censorship of gendered marginality in ways, which are, for the most, part ‘author-centred’ and ‘translator-centred.’ According to Françoise Massardier-Kenney (1997), ‘author-centred’ approaches involve translators working to “recover” a marginalised writer, work or canon (or all three) to widen and shape the canon in which
s/he writes and is read, usually explaining the significance of author and work in prefaces, afterwords and footnotes (1997, 59-60) and why s/he was or could be overlooked in would-be hegemonic epistemes of knowledge (ibid). This last point resonates with the contexts by which Iraqi women’s literature first appeared in English translation largely through the efforts of literary academic scholars such as Shakir Mustafa, Ferial Ghazoul, Farida Abu-Haidar and miriam cooke. Massardier-Kenney (1997, 58) explains that “author-centred” feminist translation approaches aiming to establish or recover (women) writers in new readerships in ways which resonate with the target audience in hand entail explaining the politics of the work’s translation in explicit terms. This perspective of explaining explicitly raises questions about how to ‘read’ the two works by Al-Mana and Al-Amir in English translation as the liminal politics of expression in both works are not easy to discern in Arabic, let alone in English.

The issue of explicit activist agency in feminist translation scholarship was, importantly, initially situated in contexts of the processes and ideologies in which (reception of) the work in target contexts emerges in translation. Massiardney-Kenney (1997) cited ‘translator-centred’ feminist translation approaches as working to make visible the role of the (collaborative) processes of translation (1997, 62). In this way, each agent thus shows her/himself as co-producer of meaning and a political agent pursuing their agendas in the textual creation process (Castro 2009). One example of this praxis is how feminist translator Carol Maier situates herself in her Afterword (1994) to Memoirs of Leticia Valle: she not only provides critical perspectives on the Spanish version of the novel for new readerships but sets out the different translation strategies she used to negotiate a literary work which was about one woman seeking to subvert patriarchy, often in ambiguously linguistic terms (1994, 188). As such interventions into a text could mean a praxis which is far from linguistic ‘equivalence,’ the feminist translator, according to
Massardier-Kenney (1997), makes clear her/his own role as co-producer in the translated work to ensure that her/his interventions “mean more than moving into new territory and acting exactly as the male tradition has acted” (1997, 63). In this way, the feminist translator works to ensure s/he is not co-opting herself (or being co-opted) into the socio-linguistic systems of domination s/he works to challenge. This last point raises interesting questions on how to engage with Iraqi women’s literature written (in Arabic) during an era when to be published in Iraq was, in effect, to be co-opted by (state) authority. Any activist element of the writer (and her allies) was made manifest, in many cases, by overtly showing the politics of co-option, often through silence, not articulation.

The politics of unintelligibility and ambivalence have been raised in more recent feminist translation scholarship, with a focus on ambivalent as well as overt, gendered position of the translator. Barbara Godard’s configuration (2002, 65) of “the translator” as the “differend” between/across languages inscribes the very ambivalence of the translator as part of a text’s meaning-making, and variant in its manifestation:

La traductrice souligne la différence — le différend même - entre les contextes de «l’original» et de la traduction, délimite paramètres du processus de transfert et explique la modalité de circulation du texte traduit dans son nouvel environnement.

[The woman translator underscores the difference – the differend even – between contexts of «the original » and the translation. She sets out the parameters of the tranfer process and explains the translated text’s mode of circulation in its new environment].

(Godard 2002, 65)

The notion of ‘the difference’ as ‘the differend’ configures the prospect of moving across languages possible, yet not fully graspable in terms of equivalence. Such a notion of translation is particularly useful when considering, for example, mutual intelligibilities in terms of expression of activist agency. As Hills Collins (2017, xi) points out, there are many expressions of (activist) translator or writer agency which may not always be
readable in the ways s/he intends due to dissonant epistemes of intelligibility. As the translator’s agency as a ‘differend’ is configured as marginal without categorical assumptions of how s/he manifests her/his marginality being set out, translator agency could operate in a number of ways, including consciously taking on a politics of silence – as cooke (1994) may have done in contexts of translating the short stories of Aliya Talib – out of solidarity with the writer’s contexts of mediation. In this light, the agency of “the translator” could thus be configured as multi-locational and diverse in expression of political agency, which also situates ‘feminist paratranslation’ as a useful frame of analysis.

As stated earlier, feminist paratranslation analysis (Abou Rached 2017) not only calls into question borders between text and paratext, but interrogates boundaries between translation and paratranslation, translator and paratranslator, and so radically sets out to pluralise and diversify unitary notions of ‘authorship’ (ibid, 200). Rather than having only one or two writers (the author and the translator), multiple authors (or ‘autheirs’) mediating a literary work’s processes of meaning-making can be recognised, thus diversifying the voices of agency at play in its mediation. These ‘autheirs’ could thus be publishers, editors, illustrators, reviewers and readers (as well as writers and translators), each of whom brings to the paratranslated text their own epitexts of preexisting cultural vocabularies and discourses (ibid). In my view, a paradigm of feminist para/translation analysis offers scope to consider the many agencies involved in mediating literary works from an intersectional perspective, as well as the potential ambivalence of ‘differends’ of agency at play in its mediation as a para/text or para/translation. In the following section, I thus consider how the ‘uncanny’ meaning-making in the Arabic versions in the two works by Al-Mana and Al-Amir moves into English (para) translation via the mediations of its respective para/translators by exploring how the literary motifs of [al-ightirāb] (alienation) intersect each work’s contexts of mediation. Using analytical perspectives of feminist
paratranslation and paradigms of ‘author-centred’ and ‘translator-centred’ agency, I also discuss the extent that we can read ‘c/overt’ Arabic-English translation strategies used in these two works as ‘overt’ and specific to their (political) sities of production.

2.4: حبل السرة [The Umbilical Cord] and Samira Al-Mana: critical themes

Born in 1935 in a small village near Basra, Samira Al-Mana has lived more than thirty years outside of Iraq (Mustafa 2003, 129), mostly in London. She has written six novels, three collections of short stories and one play.22 Her earlier works are acclaimed – along with the writing of iconic writers Fu’ad Al-Tarkarli, Mahdi Isa Al-Saqr and Gha'ib Tu'ma Farman – for taking Iraqi literature beyond “الأطر التقليدية” [“traditional frames”] of writing in the 1960s and 1970s (Thamer 2004, 7). The political perspectives of her novels are mediated by women who as noted by Mustafa (2003) “vary in their psychological make-up and in the forces that shape them” (2003, 129). As Al-Mana’s literary output however was blacklisted by the Iraqi state authorities in 1979,23 Al-Mana’s works were blockaded from circulation in other Arab countries as well as in Iraq from that time. As a response to the ban, Al-Mana and her husband, Iraqi poet Salah Niazi set up the Iraqi literary journal الإغتراب الأدبي [Literature In Exile] (1985-2002) to provide a literary platform for diaspora writers and literary translators, banned or otherwise. Her esteemed status in the diaspora Iraqi community in London is reflected by the Lifetime Achievement award presented to her in London by The Humanitarian Dialogue Foundation in May 2018.

The motif of الإغتراب [al-ightirāb] threads through all of Al-Mana’s literary works, and حبل السرة [The Umbilical Cord] (1990) is no exception. The novel is about a community

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22 See Thesis Appendix for a list of Al-Mana’s novels and short stories in Arabic and English translation.
23 Samira Al-Mana kindly showed me a copy of the 1979 edict to her issued from the Iraqi Embassy in London during an informal interview which took place in London, 17/08/2017.
of diaspora Iraqis living in London during the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988), with most chapters situated from the perspective of two Iraqi women Medeha and Afaf. The novel’s title: حبل السرة [The Umbilical Cord] (1990) refers to what Afaf describes as the attachment that Iraqis feel towards their country Iraq, despite the war and state directives creating fear and distrust between Iraqis (1990/2005, 22). While most events in the novel take place in London, this novel is also about Iraq as a ‘mother’ whose faraway children fear will become “something...being sifted and dissolved in the rivers of their country, as henna hair dye turns yellow and vanishes” (2005, 66). The context of fear of Iraq disappearing in the 1980s was many-fold: fear for sons during the 1980-1988 war; fear of informants; fear of state recriminations towards themselves and their families. When in Iraq, Afaf remembers her relatives warning her: “You must only look, only look without comment” (2005, 30). This novel presents how this climate of “looking without comment” has resulted in Iraqis feeling that their ‘home’ has become exile, and their ‘real’ الإغتراب [al-ightirāb] or exile is in Iraq.

As a mosaic of stories of Iraqis telling stories, this novel conversely counter-acts this warning by imbibing the act of story-telling with a politics of hope: that by talking through fear by story-telling, the all-emcompassing frames of fear can be fissured, or even broken.

As this is the first novel by an Iraqi woman writer to openly write of the Iran-Iraq war and the climate of Iraqi surveillance fear at the height of its operations inside and outside of Iraq, it is not a typical ‘uncanny’ Iraqi novel. In contexts of ‘Aesopian’ writing in Russia, Levi Loseff (1984) points out that the whole point of writing in opaque ways is for the writer to hide recourse to this mode of writing, particularly from “the Censor” (1984, 6). Al-Mana’s novel, in contrast, abounds with stories about Iraq’s history of leftist thought, references to Orientalists’ publications on Iraq; critiques of state corruption and shared historical bonds between Iraq and Iran with absolutely no premise of concealment. The stories told by Iraqis to other Iraqis tell of horrific abuses towards particular ethnic groups...
in 1980s Iraq: how Iraqis deemed of Iranian (read: Shi’a Muslim) heritage are deported and the massacre of Kurdish Iraqis in Halebcha. With Iraqi directives banning her work, Al-Mana clearly felt able to write about the very themes she would otherwise have been forbidden to write about otherwise. An undercurrent of fear nonetheless runs through the novel which often disrupts the ‘flow’ of individual stories. Some stories end abruptly in the middle of one chapter; longer stories overlap across sequential chapters; some stories ‘jump’ over chapters only to continue later in the novel. Seemingly unconnected moments of solidarity in one story however also emerge again in another. This suggests that this mode of story-telling is communicating that while moments of fear are connective, so are moments of solidarity. The novel in this respect reiterates and challenges Mustafa’s (2003, 129) likening of Al-Mana’s story-telling to Sheherzade’s. While the novel reads as a ‘1001 Nights-like’ format – that is, stories inside stories - no one in this novel is telling stories for the benefit of any authority figure. As the stories are told by many different people, this novel could be read as a collection of stories by and for the very people ignored by the very Iraqi state apparatus which banned Al-Mana’s writing from circulation.

The ways by which the novel could be read as ‘uncanny’ are however connected to the materiality of the novel’s processes and agencies of production. The English version reiterates the Arabic novel’s own motif of story-telling within story-telling due to Al-Mana’s own translation strategy: self-translating her own work into English herself, with the editing carried out in collaboration with a non-Arabic-reading editor, Charles Lewis. While a similarly co-collaborative self-translator/editor strategy was used by Haifa Zangana to publish In the Vast Halls of Memory (1990/1991), Al-Mana’s strategy differed: she did not write a first draft of her English translation but read from the Arabic

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24 Haifa Zangana wrote the first draft of her Arabic-English translation of this work to then, co-edit it with Paul Hammond, who knew no Arabic. E-mail correspondence with Haifa Zangana, 15/06/2016.
version out loud to Lewis in English, for him to transcribe what he heard of Al-Mana’s voiced self-translation in English. In this way, Al-Mana re/told the story in aural self-translation and Lewis ‘re-told’ the story again through English-English transcription. As Lewis died suddenly before the editing work was completed, Al-Mana did not alter Lewis’ editing work (ibid). While the embodied co-collaborative processes of the work’s production are not explained in the English version, Lewis’ (absent) presence however frames the novel through the one-line epigraph situated at the beginning - IN MEMORY OF THE LATE CHARLES N LEWIS - the bold capitals presenting his importance. As I show in this chapter, traces of the co-collaborative process of mediation are however readable in the English version by editing strategies which ‘conceal to reveal’ something of this novel’s meaning-making as a para/text in Arabic and English. As this mode of co-collaborative (self) translation is somewhat unique to Iraqi women writers’ writing as a body of work, my readings of this novel thus focus on two liminal acts of recovery at play in this novel, neither of which are discursively explained to the reader. One of them is how Al-Mana attests to Lewis’ (lost) presence and her novel’s (political) contexts of mediation in English self/translation in subtle, liminal ways. The second is how Al-Mana co-collaboratively re-situates the motif of story-telling in the English version to re/frame or ‘recover’ the first Arabic representations of Iraq diaspora fear and الإغتراب [al-ghtirāb] retrospectively fifteen years later. From an author-centred translation approaches which seeks to ‘recover’ stories and authors otherwise marginalised by hegemonic frames of discourse, I consider how this novel alludes to the presence of future readerships as part of its own reiterative politics of solidarity through its multi-faceted modes of story-telling.

From a perspective of feminist paratranslation (Abou Rached 2017), I begin my reading of the novel’s outer front cover or jacket as key site of analysis. The same image of a latticed window is used on both versions. The 1990 cover however depicts opaque blackness behind the window; in the 2005 English version a mixture of warm colours. While the difference could be due to practical formatting reasons, the impact is striking: the black and white version (1990) intimates a bleak space; the English, a potential home-space. In both versions however, the reader-window relationality is ambivalent as the reader could be outside looking in or vice versa. The jacket of the Arabic version gives no contextual information, apart from a brief authorial biography of Al-Mana and her picture. The back jacket of the English version introduces the two main Iraqi women protagonists Afaf and Medeha as “uprooted from the home because of the troubled events in the recent history of Iraq” and then explains the story is set during the Iran-Iraq war. The back cover explains: “Afaf and Madeha learn through the British media how thousands of their people are being slaughtered and their country destroyed.” On one hand, this state refers to the geographical location of where both women would receive news of Iraq - London – in a pre-digital media era while obliquely alluding to how Iraqi state media only represented reports of heroic victories, no matter how devastating the defeat (Khoury 2013, Rohde 2010). The slightly disjointed sentences describing each woman’s character on the back cover also reflects a trace of Lewis’ editorial absence:

One like a mirror, accurately reflecting all that is happening in the Middle East. Looking upon her own people with a mixture of sympathy and disgust. The other, moralistic and idealistic, with a desire to change the world. To rid it of greed, deceit, fanaticism and hatred.
With the outer cover image attributed to Al-Mana’s daughter Sarah Niazi in the inner cover page, the trace of orality in register alludes to a trace of the self-publication processes by which the English version was produced, while situating this novel for the (English language) reader as women-centred in perspective from its very outset. It is not clear however which ‘one’ woman is the ‘mirror’ and which is ‘the more idealistic other.’

As the story unfolds, the ‘mirror’ woman protagonist soon emerges as Madeha, the wife of a diplomat who encounters Iraqis in London in the diaspora public sphere. She translates for Iraqi publishing houses based in London. She attends Arab women’s cultural events. She holds soirées for diaspora Iraqis. She acts as an interpreter for Iraqis visiting London for medical appointments. The novel first opens with Madeha accompanying an Iraqi man for whom she has just interpreted on his visit to a colleague in London, before he returns to Iraq. As it dawns on Madeha that the sole aim of the man’s visit is to spy on this colleague, this scene presents how Iraqis’ long-standing culture of hospitality, family and friendship are exploited by Iraqi systems of surveillance and how others, such as Medaha, become part of them without even realising it. With a new sense that no Iraqi is safe from surveillance, even when receiving friends and guests in their own home, Medeha finds her interactions with most Iraqis, with the exception of her friend Afaf, dominated by a sense of collective powerlessness in the face of this fear. Publishing house editor Abu Saifayn, “the father of two swords” - a wry reference to Saddam Hussein’s *Arc of Victory* monument – fears repercussions from “الجماعة” [the gang] (1990, 87; 2005, 87) when he commissions literary works published in English for translation into Arabic. As a Kurdish Iraqi woman talking of Halebcha at an Arab Women’s Union conference funded by Arab world embassies is led quietly away and effectively silenced, Madeha, like all the other women present, looks on in fear but does nothing (1990, 98; 2005, 102). If Iraqi politics are raised at her soirées, Madeha deftly changes the subject “as easily as diplomats move
from country to country” (1990, 50; 2005, 47). As a ‘mirror’, Madeha is shown as all too accustomed to self-censoring as a means of self-preservation.

While her fear of censorship seems based on her and others’ lived experience and regard for her and others’ safety, Madeha’s eye/I is also shown as destructive as she (unintentionally) co-opts others as well as herself into the very system of surveillance she is represented as fearing. Based on what her experience of seeing the Iraqi informant in action at the beginning of the novel, Madeha suspects the next Iraqi acquaintance she meets, Talal, to be an informant although he is a family friend. When Talal later tells Medeha how upset he was by her suspicious attitude towards him, she tries to justify her fear by assuming he (and all Iraqis) share and accept her epitexts of understanding:

من الاعتقاد أننا صدى لما نسمع وما نراه. لقد كشفتني شفافتك في مكان وزمان يتردد فيه من الحديث السياسي حتى لأقرب الأصدقاء إليه. كنت فائقة وبلغت على أولادنا أكثر مما كنت فائقة على نفسي. انت تعرف ذلك ولست جاهلًا بالوضع العام.

(1990, 60-61)

“Believe me, we’re all echoes of what we hear and see. And you opened your heart to me in your candid way in a time and place where one would be hesitant to enter into political discussion even with one’s nearest and dearest. I was frightened for my sons more than for myself. You know what I mean, you’re not unaware of the general situation.”

(2005, 60)

What Medaha is referring to is the connective effect of fear and surveillance in the specific contexts of the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war, where military inscription made young men the most vulnerable constituency of Iraq in the 1980s, a motif I return to shortly. In the Arabic version, Madeha’s explanation is followed immediately by her friend’s Talal’s reply (1990, 61) who reiterates how hurt he was by her behaviour (1990, 61) and that he

26 Throughout this chapter, I provide no additional back translation when the English version literally follows the published Arabic version. This is to avoid unnecessary repetition of the same wording.
does not accept that shared contexts of fear in 1980s Iraq do justify her foregoing of trust with other Iraqis in the diaspora. In the English version, which closely follows the Arabic version however, a distinct paragraph break follows Madeha’s words before Talal’s words appear. The break creates a ‘pause-for-effect’ scenario in the English version before the same conversation resumes as the ‘new’ scene begins. As pointed out by US writer Aaron Elkins, a break in a chapter has a distinct function: to ‘show’ as well as ‘tell’ the reader that there has been a significant change of some kind: “It jogs your reader’s mind, telling him that it’s time for a reorientation, a retaking of his bearings” (Elkins 2011). In Al-Mana’s novel, this gap suggests that the reader is invited to reflect more on what Madeha means by ‘the general situation’ which, in turn, seems to reiterates the notion of shared epitexts of understanding as a fundamental part of the novel’s meaning-making in English translation as it is in the Arabic version.

Other editorial changes in the English version allude to traces of para/translatory collaboration which situate the editor Lewis and the reader also as active participants in the meaning-making of this novel which is one of recovery: a recovery of stories about Iraqis telling other Iraqis stories so that these stories – and the acts of their story-telling - can be read by other audiences. As there is no overt declaration of translator agency or strategy to be found in this novel, the impact of self/translation-transcriber collaboration in the English translation is difficult to pick up on as many of its traces are not apparent upon first reading. One way of exploring the potentially transformative impact of the co-collaborative processes involved in this rare instance of read-aloud self/translation in Iraqi women’s literature is by comparative translation analysis of shift or exegeses in translation. Such traces are particularly discernible in scenes involving Medeha’s friend, Afaf “the idealist”

becoming consciously aware of the importance of story-telling. I thus focus my discussion on the subtle shifts in agency vis-à-vis Afaf in English translation.

Like Madeha, Afaf works in London with other diaspora Arabs. Unlike Madeha who is married to a diplomat working in the Iraqi Embassy, Afaf has been long divorced from her husband Jalal who we learn later in the novel is a leftist political activist. This novel tells of the story how Afaf’s increasing awareness of the gendered ramifications of Iraq’s political oppression contributed to the breakdown of her marriage. The first instance of her awareness occurs first considers when her uncle, a retired state employee, reminisces over his youth at the turn of the twentieth century - mixing with friends in the newly established coffee-houses in Baghdad while his sisters and mother had to deal with his father’s authoritarian behaviours (1990, 42; 2005, 38). After hearing the stories about localised injustices towards Iraqi women in her family, Afaf then begins to imagine (in Arabic) how Iraqi women in wider society may have lived their marriages in silence:

بالقديم، لم يسمعوا زوجاتهم ينادينهم باسماتهم الصريح او غير الصريح طيلة حياتهم الزوجية معهم بسبب الخوف والرهبة.

[In the old times, they (men) never heard their wives call them by their direct or indirect names during their whole married life with them due to fear and intimidation].

(1990, 76)

In the Arabic version, the Iraqi men present as verbally present and agents of action – it is they who never hear their wives addressing them directly within “fear” and “intimidation as whose sources are unnamed and unexplained (ibid). In the English version, exegesis to the Arabic version, however, situates women as the agents of action:

In bygone days, many an Iraqi wife went through her entire married life without calling her husband anything at all – neither his first name nor the child’s name – owing to the fear and loathing induced by his intimidating demeanour.

(2005, 74)
The shift in verbal agency now names the perpetrators of patriarchal injustice: individual men with “intimidating demeanours.” The change of verb in effect re-situates the active agents of gendered injustice. In English para/translation, women are presented as *participating* in their married lives by verbs of action: addressing, calling, going through life, albeit silently. Read comparatively alongside the Arabic version, the English version’s explanation of patriarchal naming traditions suggests a liminal trace of co-collaborative translatorial agency being documented here: the moments when Al-Mana explains to Lewis the cultural contexts of naming, perhaps implicitly much clearer within many Arabic-readerships accustomed to such naming practices. Transcribed here seems to be a clearer explanation in English translation. Although this particular example does not cause a dramatic shift in the novel’s meaning making, its presence highlights the importance of reading what appear to be innocuous para/textual mediations as an echo of what we may miss in this novel’s complex web of co-collaborative meaning-making.

In both versions, gaining knowledge of the injustices perpetrated towards her foremothers is shown as helping Afaf reconsider the present-day behaviours of her own husband, Jalal in a new light, with important political effects. Blurring the borders between past and present, Afaf in the following example remembers *herself* remembering with bitterness how Jalal did not care for her when they lived in Moscow: she nearly broke her back due to repairing a curtain that he would not repair, due to his pre-occupation with wider (leftist) political problems of the world (1990, 81; 2005, 82). She remembers how the tension between her and husband comes to a head after Afaf falls ill again, and Jalal called her to account for not preparing any food for him. At this point, her sense of connection with her foremothers’ sufferings in different temporal contexts of patriarchy is shown as a source of power which Afaf did not think she had had before:
On the bed prepared, she was looking for a reason and a thousand and one reasons came to her. It was as if she were defending (all) persecuted women, muted throughout their life. Remembering the injustice, tyranny and deprivation, avenging her grandmothers and their grandmothers who had died tyrannised and withered away without uttering a word, she gave to him what she could of the situation of women, her (sense of) raging anger, her hunger, her exploitation and her youth slipping away.

(1990, 82)

In the Arabic version, Afaf calls on her foremothers’ histories to give her “a thousand and one reasons” – an echo of Shehrazade – to pre-emptively defend herself against her husband’s anger. She thus links her own very personal battle for herself to a wider battle of setting things right for her fore-mothers, by giving them a presence in her memory years after their death. In the English version, an important shift occurs in terms of Afaf’s agency which alludes to something of the novel’s co-collaborative processes of self/translation taking place. In other words, the English version changes through retrospective readings of the Arabic (on the part of Al-Mana and Lewis) which seem to re SHAPE the story’s subsequent re/writing in English translation:

She sat on the bed like a tiger waiting to pounce, and as she looked for a reason she found a thousand and one reasons coming to her. She was an advocate there to defend women forced to remain mute and under wraps all their lives, there to remember the tyranny and oppression, to avenge her mother, her grandmother, her great-grandmother, all of them withered by the endless injustice without ever uttering a word. And she spoke as an enraged, exploited and angry woman who could see her youth slipping away.

(2005, 84)

Here Afaf is configured in new metaphors of strength: the aggression of a tiger waiting to attack, not to defend and as “an advocate” to avenge all women – not just her
family - in the public sphere. After a series of arguments and counter-arguments about the personal duties towards each other as spouses, Afaf shocks Jalal by linking the injustices of men towards women in the domestic sphere to wider contexts of Iraq’s political oppression: “Any man who cannot appreciate the woman’s burden has is it in him to be a tyrant, a dictator” (1990, 82; 2005, 85). She then accuses him – and his leftist allies – of resorting to the same paradigms of oppression as do the Iraqi government. Afaf then articulates how the act of “someone” writing about such injustices, will eventually expose and call him and other patriarchal “tyrants” to account for their injustices towards women:

كفي تهربا. لا تغيّر الموضوع. لا تغيّر الموضوع. سيأتي اليوم الذي يكتب فيه هذا الكلام بأغلب اللغات أجلاً ام عاجلاً

(1990, 83)

“You’re changing the subject. Don’t run away. One day someone is going to write about these things in many, many languages. It’s bound to happen sooner or later.”

(2005, 84)

Clearly, this speech appearing in the novel itself creates a *mise-en-abime* effect (Dällenbach 1989) in both versions of the novel: a representation of the novel’s own modes and themes of representation, once in Arabic, and once again in English. The reference to “many, many languages” uncannily pre-empts the novel’s own emergence in (English) translation. From a perspective of author-centred feminist translation, Afaf’s articulation of “someone” writing on her behalf para/translate a politics of recovery which augures hope, that the experiences of marginalised women will emerge in some way, however unknowable in agency, via (future) albeit potentially unknown mediators. In this respect, Al-Mana presents herself as collaborating with Afaf to *make known* the unknown agencies of previous generations of Iraqi women who never documented their past experiences in writing, in Arabic and again in English translation. At this point, Jalal absents himself from
the scene. The after-effects of the confrontation for Afaf also change and broaden in political scope in English translation:

[By merely completing her sentence, he left the room in confusion…she remembers what was said…she repeats what she said between her and her self and finds she is full with coolness and not retreating an ant’s pace back].

(1990, 80)

The case for prosecution concluded, he got up distraught and left the room. …She recall(ed) what had passed between them and repeated to herself all she had said…now full up, cool, and determined never to retreat one inch.

(2005, 85-86)

In the Arabic version, Jalal leaves as he is confused about what Afaf has just said. In the English version, “the case for prosecution” transforms the ‘domestic’ argument as a *public* court of retributive justice, making ‘the personal’ *publically* political. In this space, Jalal’s has no defence against Afaf who is now re-configured in English as an advocate to *record* as well as *avenge* her own present and her foremothers via the knowledge by her foremothers bequeathed to her via her uncle. Importantly Afaf’s final act of repeating the scene between her and her self represents another allegorical *mise-en-abime* of the story within the story, crucial to the politics of its telling: Afaf is witnessed as *self*-witnessing her own engendered avengement *and* her emergent sense of doing justice to others’ historic traumas (on which she drew to fight) retrospectively. Writing as a mode of retrospective witnessing of lost women’s voices is not unique to Al-Mana in Arab women’s literature. As noted by Hanadi Al-Samman (2010), many themes prevalent in Arab women writers could be read as allegories of recording of (to resist) women’s fear of death, confinement
or [الواد] (being buried alive) within patriarchal frameworks of gendered oppression. Al-Samman (2010) cites Arab women writers’ recurrent use of metaphors which communicate “enclosure, isolation and non-movement in prisons, rooms, the body itself” (2010, 85). Even if particular, localised instances of individual Arab women’s writing do not claim to represent all (MENA) women’s experiences and histories, this mode of writing, according to Al-Samman, enacts an important politics of recovery—by ensuring that (Arab) women’s experience does not go unnoticed in dominant (patriarchal) epistemes of knowledge (ibid). In this respect, Al-Mana’s novel emerges as an important example of this writing of recovery: the novel openly works to recover traces of unknown women’s experiences through making para/textual reference to its own (hoped-for) contexts of mediation, including to its own future presence in (English) translation.

If we consider this novel then as a para/text of recovery, the shifts in Arabic-English translation, however liminal in agency, can be read as literally documenting the impact of Al-Mana’s own re/reading of Afaf’s engagement with stories of her foremothers, resulting in Afaf being transformed from consciously gendered engaged fighter into public advocate. To ensure the cycle of Iraqi foremothers’ silence is not (re)buried in any language, the representation of this scene thus engages the reader, writer and transcriber in both versions of the novel as liminal witnesses to, (and part of) the fabric of Afaf’s act of self-witness to them and herself—regardless of potentially different epitexts of understandings between readerships. The liminal shifts in English translation foreground and enact the politics of the novel: repeating stories and making known their (repeated) telling in new contexts in the hope that the meanings of these stories could be grasped retrospectively. As Afaf’s sense of her own transformation seems connective to the novel’s own contexts of mediation,

28 A practice of girl infanticide referred to and condemned in The Holy Qu’ran when the burying of girls was a way of men mitigating their sense shame towards the birth of girls instead of boys. *Sura* 16.58-59.
where and how para/translator agency appears to have been mediated emerge as important aspects of this novel’s (gendered) meaning-making. The co-collaborative mediation of Al-Mana (and Lewis) literally documents its act of (self) translation and editing in/as (political, transformative) *action* in terms of recovering potentially unknown stories of Iraqi women.

The influence of her Iraqi foremothers on Afaf does not stop at this point in the novel. Having gained confidence from one act of recovery, Afaf then begins to make a link between the impact of others on her life and the impact her individual choices of action could have on other Iraqis. She wears a turquoise ring from Iran at a diaspora party to inspire other Iraqis to recall the shared cultural histories between Iraq and Iran prior to the Iran-Iraq war – alongside the horror at the mass deportations of Shi’a Iraqis to Iran during the war (1990, 50). After the party, Afaf also gains the courage to interrogate her uncle – a former Iraqi state employee - about *other* Iraqis who have ‘disappeared’ in Iraq: a neighbour’s son Faisal Al-Agog arrested for holding leftist political views (1990, 125); how former President Qassem’s dead body was shown on live television (1990, 127) in the wake of the Iraqi Ba’athist seizure of power in 1968. By starkly showing how events in the story actually refer to actual lived historical realities of Iraq, this scene is the first instance in Iraqi women’s literature where individual Iraqi citizens are represented as directly holding (former) agents of the Iraqi Ba’athist state to account in Arabic publication. In 2005 English translation, this scene also debunks any myth that all Iraqis were part of Iraqi Ba’athist state ideology before and during the Iran-Iraq war.

Afaq’s calling the Iraqi state to account quickly moves beyond a simple reversing of the binary (gendered) power dynamics between her and her uncle, with important implications in English translation. This vital distinction between the Iraqi individual as part of a state apparatus and an individual perpetrating its operations of oppression emerges more clearly after her uncle experiences a *‘mokhabbarat’* or ‘secret police’ scare – he was
worried that he would be accused of smuggling money out of Iraq via a Lebanese businessman about whose existence he had been unaware. After the ‘scare’ is resolved, the elderly man then suddenly bursts into tears in front of Afaf. At first, the reason for his outburst seems unclear. He then begins telling Afaf of how Iraqi President Saddam Hussein ‘pardoned’ a father who had killed his own son for fleeing the battle front during the 1980-1988 war by publically presenting the father a medal. Whether the father killed his son to save him (and the whole family) from brutal treatment from agents of the Iraqi state or in genuine anger at his son’s act of desertion, this incident is reported to have occurred in Iraq in 1982 (Faust 2015, 3). Recognising that her uncle - state employee or not – is living with a constant sense of fear as much as are other Iraqis, women and men, Afaf expresses empathy by literally reaching out to him:

She put her (two) palms on his saddened brow/forehead and massaged it with her delicate fingers, with the same hand which clapped and danced the ‘Freedom Song that day, adorned with a turquoise ring, its blue colour like the whole clarity of the universe when peaceful, free and happy. She (thus) was a witness and in solidarity with him that he had not killed and will not kill a son].

Here the hand is presented as a non-discursive witness bringing more comfort than a multitude of words could do. While this scene suggests that embodied acts of solidarity between Iraqis are not limited to words alone, not all acts of solidarity in the novel mean the same thing to individual Iraqis. In other words, full mutual intelligibility cannot always be achieved and the occurrence of one incident should not be a ‘mirror’ by which to discern and judge others. In this instance, the uncle needs his niece’s ears and eyes to witness and understand his fear but does not assign any importance to the ring. That one family member can count as a witness is also a testament to the power of insidious informant culture for
many Iraqis during the 1980s, in that its connective loop of fear seems to blur all sense of public and private sphere whether someone is inside Iraq or not.

The ‘uncanny’ para/text emergent in the novel in Arabic is how Afaf is presented as witnessing two stories at play at the end of this scene. This first story is about how the uncle’s fear for his sons during the Iran-Iraq war was shared by many Iraqis, men and women. The second story is how and why many Iraqis, including (former) Iraqi Ba’athist state employees, need spaces of safety in a 1980s climate of insidious fear in a future Iraq yet to be articulated and (pre)configured. In English translation, however, her role seems to change, in ways which suggest that retrospective readings of Al-Mana are at play:

She put her hand to his sad brow and massaged it with her delicate fingers. It was the same hand that once clapped and danced the “Freedom song” and had worn a turquoise ring, its blue colour resembling the whole clear universe at peace, free and happy. She was a witness and she could testify that he could not and would not kill any one of his sons.

(2005, 133)

Here we see that a third story is being added to the first two stories: Afaf’s consciousness of herself as witness able to give a public act of testimony, both in the present and future. Read in 2005, this passages uncannily foreshadows the retributive frames of justice facing many Iraqi state employees after the overthrow of the Iraqi Ba’athist government in 2003 (Al-Marashi and Keskin 2008). In these charged political contexts, Afaf testifies to what the uncle would not do, but what he would not have done during the 1980s– that is, kill his own sons in service of the Iraqi Ba’athist state. Here the roles of recovery in are shown as connective and cross-constituency in process. It was her uncle, the patriarch who “recovered” the presence of Afaf’s Iraqi foremothers without awareness of the effect these stories would have on his niece (in Arabic and English). Similarly, Afaf reaches out to
ensure the silent suffering of one Iraqi man is also recovered, not only for his present, without, ostensibly, being aware that her act would later be ‘read’ in Arabic and English.

Other subtle translation shifts make this chapter’s finale compellingly open-ended as a political para/text of its own mediation. As the uncle stops crying, he asks a question ostensibly to Afaf:

رويدا رويدا, ظهرت شخصيته الحقيقية وجهه النظيف اللا مرائي مرددا خلاصة رأي وتجربته الطويلة بالحياة ما أهمية الوطن دون الأولاد. ما أهمية العراق دون أولادي؟

[His true character gradually, bit by bit revealed his invisible un-hypocritical face bringing forth his final opinion and long experience of life. “What is the importance of the homeland without children/boys? What is the importance of Iraq without my children/boys?”]

(1990, 133)

In Arabic, the strength of the political commentary at this juncture is not repressed: a former Iraqi (Ba’athist) employee is openly asking questions of Iraq’s credibility as a nation. He also articulates a b/latent resistance to the prospect of any Iraqi son ‘belonging’ to the state as agent of war. The uncanny tragedy of this juncture lies in how the relationality of اللا مرائي [the invisible] to his face and character is mediated as emergent. Situated under an outside mask of fear, the ‘true’ face of this man is only apparent once the mask is peeled (or cried) off by emotional authenticity of expression. The ‘un-see-ability’ of the uncle’s authenticity as a transient movement into, not state of authenticity thus communicates the devastating and embodied impact of self-censorship. For while this emergence shows that the Iraqi state apparatus cannot appropriate what it cannot perceive as existing, its culture of fear– on a micro-level here – seems to permeate the very skin of its people. In the English version, a subtle sleight takes place:
His true character showed in his clear, un-hypocritical face as he repeated a conclusion grounded in the experience of one who has lived a long life. “What is the meaning of a homeland without one’s sons? What is the importance of Iraq without my boys?”

(2005, 132)

While there is no fundamental shift in the meaning of this passage in English translation, the uncle’s “true character” and “clear, un-hypocritical face” (ibid) is mediated as already present, thus eliding the uncanniness of its transient emergence in the Arabic version. The generic masculine term الاولاد (which can mean ‘children’ as well as ‘boys’ in Arabic) is shifted to the plural masculine to situate the uncle’s question as pertaining to his sons (rather than “children”, which could include daughters and girls). With the translation strategies not explained in this novel, many reasons could underpin this shift. Al-Mana could have read out loud her own literal translation of الاولاد as ‘boys’ and Lewis simply transcribed it without question. Al-Mana and Lewis may have decided to foreground the vulnerability of young Iraqi men as a constituency during the Iran-Iraq war as most men were obliged to accept military conscription in a way which resulted in hundreds of thousands of deaths and injuries (Davis 2005, 192). In view of the uncle’s advanced age, Al-Mana may have considered that this patriarchal man was referring to ‘boys’ and ‘sons’ rather than ‘children’ in Arabic in the first place. Without para/textual explication of the slippages between each version, the comparative translation analysis can draw attention to the possibilities of different interpretations, but like the reader cannot categorically stipulating or overwriting one (gendered) reading over another.

To conclude this section, I consider that Al-Mana was faced with three choices after Lewis’ death: not publishing the novel in English translation; erasing part of Lewis’ work by further editing; or publishing the English version as Lewis left it. As Al-Mana chose the third option, we can read the novel’s very un-finishedness alongside the traces of liminal
co-collaborative interaction between Al-Mana and Lewis as bearing witness and recovering what could have been lost if the novel was mediated otherwise: traces of Lewis listening to Al-Mana’s re-telling of the many stories of Iraqis living different permutations of [العتراب] in her 1990 Arabic novel in her own voice. Read as a para/translation, the novel’s own contexts of mediation in English operate as another story within its own Sheherazade-like modes of story-telling. As an Arabic publication, this novel para/translates Al-Mana’s refusal as a writer to accept the erasure of her voice – and voices of many Iraqis – from circulation by Iraqi state directives and epistemes of patriarchy. As a para/translator, Al-Mana similarly refuses to erase traces of her collaborator’s work (Lewis). Through focusing on this particular novel’s politics of recovery and its uncanny frames of mediation, I have shown the usefulness of an analytical framework of author-centred translation analysis (combined within feminist para/translation) when analysing a novel such as حبل السرة [The Umbilical Cord] – a novel which reiterates the ambivalent contexts of its own liminal way of co-collaborative story-telling.

2.6 على لائحة الانتظار: [On The Waiting List] and Daizy Al-Amir: critical contexts

Like Samira Al-Mana, Daizy Al-Amir was also born in 1935 and spent part of her early adulthood in Basra, southern Iraq. As a prolific short story writer in the 1960s, 70s and 80s Al-Amir was in contact with prominent Arab poets and writers in Basra, she met with Iraqi poets Nazik Al-Mala’ika, Badr Shakir Al-Sayyab and Abdul Wahab Al-Bayyati, in Beirut Syrian writer Ghada Al-Samman and Lebanese poet Khalil Al-Hawi (Ghazoul 2008, 193). In Beirut, Al-Amir worked in the Iraqi Embassy as the cultural attaché from

29 See Thesis Appendix for a list of Al-Amir’s literary works published in Arabic and English translation.
1962 until 1985. For this reason, she states that she never identified (or was forced to identify) as “exile” or “emigré” writer (Al-Amir 1994, x). Al-Amir has always situated her representations of gendered alienation of الإغتراب [al-ightirāb] as a key aspect of her storytelling due to painful incidents in her own life as a woman at the mercy of patriarchal agents around her, namely her father and step-mother (cf. Al-Muhsin 2008). Al-Amir’s stories have always resonated with critical readerships in different contexts. In the 1960s, lyricist Said Aqal likened Al-Amir to the iconic Lebanese singer Fairuz (c.f. Al-Muhsin 2008) for evoking the "عالم الغيب" or ‘the unworldly’ through the magical melancholy tones of her (literary) voice. In the 1970s, one Arab critic commented: “This author has no house. Her main character is the car or the street” (c.f. Al-Amir 1994, x). Her (allegorical) response to this veiled critique of her stories’ apparent lack of attention to human agency was to publish a new collection with the title [The Happy Arab House] in the wake of pan-Arab military defeats post-1967 and 1973 wars with Israel and the war in Lebanon.

In [On The Waiting List] (1988), the theme of transit takes centre-stage as each woman protagonist in each story moves between Beirut and Baghdad, occasionally stopping off at unnamed towns, hotels and places. Under the new title The Waiting List: An Iraqi Woman’s Tales of Alienation (1994) in English translation, themes of transit and ‘alienation’ or الإغتراب [al-ightirāb] appear initially more foregrounded as the central motif in this work. As the stories unfold, however, it emerges that ‘somewhere’ or ‘something’ other than the state of itinerance is why each ‘Iraqi woman’ tells of her sense of alienation as transit makes each woman feel like ‘home.’ Her home is conversely where she feels alienation. As the new title in English translation suggests that the stories are all told by ‘one’ woman (rather than multiple women each telling a short story), the collection

reads as a somewhat uncanny or ‘fractured’ novella, which is why it is included in this study, particularly as it is the first ‘full’ literary work by one Iraqi woman (outside of a literary anthology) published in the US. Published in 1988, Al-Amir’s work is also an emblematic example of what Ghazoul (2004) terms ‘the Uncanny’ in Iraqi story-writing. The focus of my discussion is then how the uncanny gendered perspectives underpinning this literary work moves across (or not) in English translation.

Under the new title *The Waiting List: An Iraqi Woman’s Tales of Alienation* (1994), Al-Amir’s literary work in English translation presents very differently to Al-Mana’s novel. The work is an academic publication published by the Centre for Middle Eastern Studies, University of Texas Press. The stories are translated, as the book editor states, by an “Arabic translation expert” (McGann-Baker 1994, vii). The book includes two prefaces by Daizy Al-Amir in which she sets out her longstanding literary trajectory, one dated in 1989 before the outbreak of the 1990 US/Iraq Gulf War and in 1994, after Al-Amir’s return to Beirut. There is a critical introduction by Iraqi woman poet Mona Mikhail (1994) which situates Al-Amir’s work within contemporary traditions of Iraqi literature and embodied modes of women’s literary activism in general. The short editorial introduction by Annes McGann-Baker also gives a brief but detailed explanation about who was involved in this “transnational” (McGann-Baker 1994, vii) publication: Al-Amir the writer, Parmenter the translator, Mikhail the introduction author and the illustrators. The final copyediting looks complete, and the Arabic-English translation is flawlessly close to the Arabic and in idiomatic, perfectly grammatical English. The outer cover image of the Beirut Corniche is an iconic image of Beirut and Lebanon. The etching-like illustrations which precede each chapter communicate the exact and precise style of language used in each short story. So, all in all, as noted by one academic reviewer (Gallagher 1995, 63), this collection is professionally and “beautifully presented” as a publication. The work thus appears to be
exactly what the editor McGann-Baker presents it to be – “international collaboration of effort” (ibid) facilitated by many co-collaborators. My discussion of Al-Amir’s work thus, starts out with an exploration of the co-collaborative processes of (para)translation which appear to be ‘overtly’ taking place in its journey from Arabic into English translation.


Viewed from a perspective of feminist paratranslation, I first consider Al-Amir’s work in Arabic publication as a key site of departure for contextualising the collection’s co-collaborative re-packaging in English para/translation. As a small book made up of 64 pages about the size of a small leaflet, [On The Waiting List] (1988) has a striking but minimal paratext. The outer cover has an arresting abstract image of intensely marked black and white inked scrawlings alongside a red flower and blue indented heart by Iraqi artist Ali Talib. There is no preface at all. The only information explaining anything about the collection is the contents page of chapter at the back of the work (1988, 68). Otherwise the stories stand alone and together, brought together by the title’s premise of waiting. The first story is told by a woman reading letters of the past before she moves to an unknown destination. The other stories tell of women arriving in one destination before moving or being moved on elsewhere. The collection ends with the story of a woman committing suicide, the final line of the story emblematic of Al-Amir’s elliptical style of writing: "لَمْ تَأخذْ سَرِّهَا مَعَهَا وَلَكَنْ لَمْ يَقُلْ أُحَدٌ: ‘كَمْ كَانَتْ تَحبُّ الْحَيَاةُ?!'" / [She did not take her secret with her, and yet no one said, ‘How much she loved life!’] (1988, 64; 1994, 62). Such disorientating turns of phrase alludes to something which cannot be stated overtly and a malaise about why these phrases cannot be read as intelligible.
With the only para/text of the Arabic version being a tense, arresting outer cover the Arabic reader is literally left alone to read the meaning of/into the stories. In each story, the unknown woman asks questions in her uneasy places of transit: auctions, hotels, waiting rooms, airports. Two dialogue scenes seem to function as interludes – as well as commentary on gendered relations - at different junctures in the Arabic version to separate the remaining eight stories into three phases: the first phase one woman leaving Lebanon; the second, a woman’s return to Iraq; and three, a lack of acclimatisation to life (in Iraq) ending in loneliness, sadness and suicide. The experience of reading this work in Arabic reads as somewhat disorientating by each story’s ostensible lack of connection to the other, as any sense of their connectedness is often dispelled by their very transitoriness and lack of definitive frame of reference. In contrast, the English version of the work overtly seeks to help the reader understand the stories’ frame of reference, right from its title: Daizy Al-Amir, Iraqi woman writer telling her tales of alienation. A plethora of discursive and non-discursive paratexts preceding and surrounding the individual stories construct the work as a para/translation of Al-Amir’s literary contexts: a large iconic image of Beirut on the front outer jacket, the city where Al-Amir spent two decades of her life (Al-Amir 1989/1994, x); a small paragraph on the back outer jacket which foregrounds the Lebanese Civil War (not Iraq) as Al-Amir’s political backdrop; an illustration preceding each chapter; a detailed acknowledgements page, a four-page introduction to Al-Amir’s work as an emblematic example of women’s writing by Iraqi literary critic Mona Mikhail and a two-part preface by Al-Amir (1989/1994) in which she explains her own experience of writing. This collection is thus presented as stories brought together and underpinned by Al-Amir’s contexts of gendered الإغتراب [al-ightirāb] rather than a collection of disparate stories.

From a perspective of feminist para/translation which interrogates the premise of text and paratext delineations, each of these chapters by Annes McCann-Baker, Daizy Al-
Amir and Mona Mikhail play a vital role in the mediation of the para/translated work. Considering the Acknowledgement page by McCann-Baker (1994, vii) as a chapter helps us focus on the key importance of the interactions involved in bringing Al-Amir as a long-established iconic writer in the Middle East to US readerships for the first time: Parmenter is situated as “expert Arabic translator” (1994: ix); Al-Amir is credited with helping Parmenter with the translation (ibid); Mona Mikhail is situated as a key para/translator of a “fine introduction” (ibid). By setting out the lines of collaboration so overtly, McGann-Baker’s chapter also helps us consider the more ‘liminal’ and ‘silent’ aspects of this work’s re-construction in English translation: the delay between Al-Amir’s 1989 and 1994 preface; the rationale for adding the title strapline: *An Iraqi Woman’s Tales of Alienation*. Another silent significant para/text is the change in chapter order. As pointed out by American short-story writer David Jauss (2011, 150) the order in which short stories are ordered or “bump” alongside each other configure how the literary work is ‘staged’ as well as constructed: that is, there is some purpose to the order of each story. So while the chapter order in Al-Amir’s collection is likely to have been agreed with Al-Amir herself in view of the collaborative interactions to present Al-Amir described by McGann-Baker (1994, ibid), its rationale is glossed over which seems puzzling in view of its significance, a point I return to very shortly. That the work was completed in two phases - the first phase in 1989, before the 1990 Gulf War and the second phrase in 1994 after the Gulf War – also seems obviated yet overtly marked. The hiatus in the work’s production and publication is made overtly apparent by Al-Amir herself situating her preface in two parts. The first part titled “Author’s Preface” (1994, ix) ends with “Baghdad, Autumn 1989” (xiii). The second part titled as “Author’s Update” (xiii) ends with “Beirut, March 1994.” With McGann-Baker stating Al-Amir’s 1988 Arabic collection was to be published in English translation “as soon as possible” (McGann-Baker 1994, vii), Al-Amir’s prefaces bring into sharp relief her own and McGann-Baker’s silence on the hiatus between 1989 and 1994. The copyright
information in the ISBN page moreover lists the whole English version as “by the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Texas in Austin” (1994, iv), not by Al-Amir (or Parmenter). This ISBN information thus joins, blurs and absents definitive relationalities between the different ‘authors’ of this para/translated work, particularly as this book frames Al-Amir as an Iraqi woman writer presenting ‘her’ story to new audiences.

As one way of reflecting further on these points, I begin by considering the translated work as a para/text in para/translation to help situate how the stories bump alongside each other, without assuming that one para/translatory agency is solely responsible for some aspects of the work’s mediation in English para/translation. In the English version, for example, the two dialogue stories are placed at the end of the work in an epilogue-like format. This means the collection seems to end not once but twice. The ‘first’ end story in the English version titled ‘Weeping’ is about a woman identifying with a tree which dies from being uprooted from the place it had first grown. The ‘second’ end story is a dialogue story called ‘The Cake’ which is about a couple discussing “the cakes” burning while their hungry son is crying on an empty stomach. In English, the story ends in the following way:

She said: If you don’t try to put it aside, your anger will explode even more, and its fire will spread.
He said: Yes, and all the cakes will be in danger of burning.

(1994, 79)

In view of the plethora of additional chapters accompanying the English version, this dialogue seems to be important as its final words are literally the final words of the collection. As nothing else follows this story, what seems to be left to a reader is silence of her/her own interpretation. As para/translatory silences, including the rationale for the chapter order change, seem to be part of the work’s meaning-making in English para/translation, I explore why the lack of overt explanation of the collection’s meanings
could shed light on the ‘uncanny’ politics of this work and the importance of recognising ‘opacity’ of translation strategy as part of this collection’s (political) meaning-making.

To situate and draw meaning from the uncanniness at play in this work, I begin with whose agency is apparent in the English version of the book. I note that the English version has several co-collaborative authors literally surrounding and framing the (re-ordered) stories of *The Waiting List: An Iraqi Women’s Tales of Alienation* (1994). As stated previously, many collaborators are cited, six in the Editor’s Acknowledgements (vii): Al-Amir the writer; Parmenter the translator, Mikhail “author and scholar of Arabic literature” (ibid); Caroline Williams as photograph contributor, Doug Rouh as illustrator and McCann Baker as editor. In the ISBN page, Diane Watts and Virginia Howell are clearly credited for cover design and formatting. Al-Amir’s two additional chapters – the prefaces of 1989 and 1994 – show Al-Amir clearly explaining how moving between Lebanon, Iraq, the US and back to Lebanon had a great influence on her writing. At times however, there are other unexplained gaps and ‘jarrings’, and not only in aspects of the collection credited by McGann-Baker. In her critical introduction, for example, Mikhail (1994) gives a very detailed trajectory of the politics of Iraqi literature up until 1967 but makes no reference to any dates or significant events taking place (in Iraq and elsewhere) after this date. She also (1994, 3) situates Al-Amir as part of Iraq’s long-standing writing traditions whose writers took “the aftermath of the 1967 setback” as a trigger for “forcefully expressing disenchantment with the ruling regimes and the endemic lack of freedom in societies” (ibid). While Mikhail is referring the date marking the first pan-Arab defeat by Israel, part of this ‘aftermath’ was the Iraqi Ba’athist government categorically assuming power in Iraq in 1968. Mikhail also draws on the words of Syrian woman novelist Ghada Al-Samman (1981) published a decade earlier to explain why Arab women’s writing mediates the (gendered) الاختبآرِ [al-ightirāb] of men in the public sphere as well as that of women:
As an Arab citizen, a woman suffers from all the constraints imposed on any of her compatriots….in addition the attempt by women to restore their rights is part of the attempt by Arab individuals to restore their very humanity. (al-Qabila tastajwib al-Qatila, Ghada Samaan, 1981)

(c.f. Mikhail 1994, 4)

Here Ghada Al-Samman is referring the possibility of cross-constituency solidarity between Arab men and women in the face of dehumanising operations of patriarchal political governance in the Arab world during the early 1980s. As an acclaimed writer of the Arab world, Mikhail could have written a very similar phrase herself about the gendered politics of Iraqi and Arab women’s writing in the 1990s. On one hand, Mikhail is clearly citing Al-Samman to make cross-border and cross-literary connections between different Arab women’s writers in multi-valent ways: Mikhail presents as the voice of a woman from the past (Al-Samman) as current and relevant to new readers in (Mikhail’s) back-translation. Re/situated in contexts of Al-Amir’s work, Al-Samman’s comment ciphered by Mikhail nonetheless helps ‘stage’ each story of gendered alienation in Al-Amir’s work not as a state of mind of one woman or writer, but as a potential cipher for representing “an Arab every-(wo)man” living a sense of “humiliation,” as “Arab individuals.” By creating links in this way, Mikhail alludes to (by enacting) the ciphering needed to tell the stories of political repression of men as well as that of different women.

I have used the word ‘staging’ consciously in this section as Al-Amir uses this word in her 1989 preface as a way of explaining why she has always situated her story-writing within gendered frames of reference: “The main character was always a woman because I understand women more than men, although they certainly play their roles to perfection on life’s stage – men with false bravado and women with chronic fear” (Al-Amir 1989/1994, xii). While Al-Amir does not clarify what this ‘stage’ is, her work does seem uncannily set up or ‘staged’ in English translation in ways which resonate with Al-Samman’s
commentary on the role of Arab women’s writing. By this I mean, that each aspect of this book in English translation seems to have a particular, but unstated purpose. The first page of the book, the iconic picture of Beirut Corniche in Lebanon taken by “Middle Eastern architect scholar Caroline Williams” does not depict blue skies and crystal-clear waters depicted in most pictures focusing on Lebanon as a tourist destination. Instead, we see heavy grey clouds with a glimmer of sunshine hanging over the iconic curve of the coastline with grey choppy waters coming up onto rocks – not golden sand. This non-discursive ‘staging’ of an ambivalent coastline is the background to the new title: *The Waiting List: An Iraqi Woman’s Tales of Alienation* which re-situates the English version within distinctly singular gendered frames, across an image of foreboding.

All other discursive mediations of the book on the outer cover reiterate the motif of a lone woman in the personal-as-political sphere. The back cover jacket states: “Iraqi author Daisy Al-Amir, in all her stories, seems to be standing in line, waiting for admission, for denial, for a change of place. Against the background of the Lebanese Civil War….in a world usually dominated by men and extended families.” This introduction ‘fits’ with Al-Amir’s two prefaces (1989/1994) in which she cites difficult personal family issues as why she spent decades in Lebanon. None of the stories however focus on extended families at all. The only ‘family’ encountered in the work is in a story about when a woman buys an old family album at an auction and quickly disposes of it as she feels the weight of the unknown past of this family is too heavy for her to bear. So, while the stories are framed in the novel’s introductory para/texts as pertaining to Al-Amir’s own sense of gendered alienation in her personal life, other dissonant confluences of Al-Amir with her stories also emerge upon the reading of the stories themselves.

The motif of ‘staging’ as a particularly ‘uncanny’ allegory of Al-Amir’s (Arabic) writing is mediated yet ‘concealed’ in the English version. This motif is discernible upon
closer reading of the actual translation strategies used to mediate the short stories. While Al-Amir’s two prefaces (1989/1994) are not cited as translated, the register of the prefaces resonates with the idiomatic fluent register of the stories cited as translated by Barbara Parmenter. Al-Amir’s stylistic register is also sign-posted by Mona Mikhail (1994) as seamless: “Whether she uses the narrative ‘I’ or the conventional third person, Al-Amir is transparently narrating her present itinerant reality” (1994, 5). In effect, this motif of transparency in these stories’ narrations overtly testifies to the invisibility of Parmenter’s presence as an ‘uncanny’ cipher for Al-Amir. Mikhail also situates Al-Amir as communicating directly to the (US version) reader: “A certain minimalism and terseness in her style speaks directly and convincingly to a hurried and on-the-go urbanised reader who is probably also on a ‘waiting list’ at a Wag Wag airport” (1994, 5). Again, Mikhail bypasses the role of translation in the mediation of this collection to ‘stage’ a premise of transparency towards an ‘assumed’, unknown (and unknowing) English language reader.

While each story in the English version is a close rendering of the Arabic version, some uncanny slippages nonetheless occur which are clearly the active choices of writer, translator or editor. One of the most spectacular examples of this slippage is in the short story which overtly references the word ‘staging’: ‘Wag Wag Airport.’ This is a story about two women waiting at an airport for their flight call. Mikhail (1994) situates the story of ‘Wag Wag Airport’ as one way of connecting the collection and Al-Amir to the (English) reader. Al-Amir’s elliptical mode of writing (ventriloquized by Parmenter) is described by Mikhail (1994, 5) as having something in common with the fast pace of life, interrupted at times by the administrative chaos of a busy airport – such as Wag Wag airport. In the English version, the meaning of “Wag Wag” in Arabic folklore – a clear para/text of this story - is however not explained. In brief, “WaQ Waq Island” refers to a mythical island with trees bearing fruit which look like naked women making the sound ‘WaQ Waq’ (Malti-
During the Islamic Empire era, ‘Wag Wag Island’ represented a real island and “inverted world” (Kruk 1993, 226) where warrior women ruled and enforced law, and men “carry out handiwork” (ibid, 216). Believed to be in the Indian ocean or the Far East (Toorawa 2007) this island, thus, became synonymous within former Islamic Empire folklore with the "conceptual limit of the known world" (2007, 57). In this way, the chapter title in Arabic gives this story a mythic another-worldliness of inversion alongside a more familiar worldly scene of an airport.

Although Mikhail (1994, 5) claims this story would speak to “hurried” reader, her rationale seems difficult to understand as only bizarre and tragic events happen in this story. At the airport, the woman and her friend observe how the airport employees call flight passengers to one flight gate to then redirect them to another gate for no particular reason. The tragedy of the story is how the employees openly laugh between themselves as the passengers run to change the gates. Significant in this story is how the woman makes commentary on her sense of rage towards the employees’ open mockery as she is now not travelling alone. The meaning of her words is not always clear as both she and her friend speak in obtuse metaphors mutually intelligible to both women, but not to anyone else. The uncanniness of this story in Arabic is amplified by the apparently “transparent” translation which on closer readering works to ‘stage’ the story quite differently in the English version which I show in the following examples. In the Arabic version, the woman first wonders how the employees consider "المأساة" [the tragedy] of this scene as staged "إخراجها وتأليفها" [its direction/staging and its authorship/composition] as "كوميديا"[comedy] (1988, 39):
She said: Everyone knew what was happening except the actors themselves.
I answered her: They saved them the humiliation of memorising their role.
She said: They eliminated the role of the prompter.
I said, No, he was there to prompt life.

In the women’s conversation (1988, 40), an un/canny connectivity between being ‘moved’ at will from position to position by those in authority seems at play. By using the third person plural “they” and not “we”, the Arabic version does not make clear how or if the women are detached from the humiliation or whether believe that they are spared from it. The expression “to prompt life” frames a fear that – like the myth of Waq Waq Island - there is no escape from life being staged or a mirage in some way. At the same time, the motif “life” seems to be given a personalised agency all of its own. In the English version, however a significant but unexplained shift in meaning takes place:

She then said: “Everyone knew what was going to happen except the actors themselves.”
“So, they were spared the trouble of memorising their roles.” I replied.
And the role of the prompter was eliminated,” she said.
“No,” I said, he was there to prompt the witnesses.”

The term of “witnesses” (1994, 49) parachuted suddenly into the story creates a very different dynamic of dread. In the Arabic version, coercion of actors is implied by the presence of the prompter. In English, the prompter is reframed as another ‘worker’ in the scenario which has more than one witness – which pre-empts the woman, her friend or the
reader from exclusion from the ‘staging.’ The reader - and women – cannot then know if their conversation is part of this prompt or not. This opacity creates an un/canny sense of ambiguity concerning what is ‘really’ witnessed in this chapter and by whom. In view of the already bizarre frames of reference, there was no explainable reason for the shift from "الحياة" [life] in the Arabic version (1988, 40) to “witnesses” (1994, 49), apart from a decision made by Parmenter and Al-Amir. This shift however, does create an uncanny effect - an almost imperceptible shimmer of a mirage – of co-opting ‘the reader’ as ‘another’ witness to the scene, without her/his awareness of it. The motif of ‘staging’ continues in an increasingly elliptical dialogue between the two women in this scene:

[Try to forget the acting performance and enjoy the respect.
I interrupted her, yes…yes, I’ll try before death take it unexpectedly].

Here we see the motif of “death” has a role as an actor as has “life. This role of “death” in having a potentially more active and aggressive role of “taking away” respect contrasts to the role assigned to “life” which still needs prompting to move or do something. A further twist happens in the English version, which shifts the story’s trajectory:

Try and forget that scene and savor this politeness and respect, my friend advised.
“Yes” I interrupted. “Yes, I’ll try before death takes it by surprise.”

(1994, 49)

In the Arabic version, the “it” in its masculine form (1988, 40) refers to "الاحترام" [respect], not the "التمثيلية" [the acting performance] (ibid), a feminine noun. In the English version, "الاحترام" [respect] is translated as “politeness and respect” (1994, 49), making “the scene” (ibid) the only singular noun in the conversation. “Death” is thus mediated as having
agency to take “that scene” in which the women (and the reader) seem co-opted as “witnesses.” The woman seems to prefer forgetting the scene of her own accord, rather than have “death” take it from her, a shift which makes the story’s finale in the English version as bizarre and ambiguously layered as is the finale in the Arabic version. The oddness is moreover liminally looped by Mikhail (1994, 5) by her intimating that something of Al-Amir’s alienation could be shared by “on-the-go” commuters.

As Al-Amir helped Parmenter with the translation (McGann-Baker 1994, vii), the subtle split in an already uncanny short story can be read in different ways. If we read the Arabic alongside the English version, the shifts para/translate traces of what is usually not seen when translated work is being re-staged for new readerships: editorial or stylistic shifts in translation. Reading it without the Arabic, the English version still mediates something of the sense of the Arabic in a very innovative way. By parachuting the notions of “witnesses” and shifting the terms of reference, this version communicates the uncanny sense of potentially unknowable parallel worlds between the ‘known’ real and the “mythical” real existing, as is carried in the Arabic term واض واق [Waq Waq]. This mirage-like shimmer can only emerge as (not) glimpsed by the very opacity of the flawless translation – an opacity which has also been ‘staged’ as ‘transparent’ by Mikhail (1994) earlier in the book’s introduction. In this way, it is the very liminality of the translator which makes the uncanniness of the Arabic differently ‘uncanny’ in the English version – without its English version reader being aware of this.

The seamless blurring of writer and translator agency in The Waiting List: An Iraqi Woman’s Tales of Alienation (1994) brings me back to earlier configurations of “translator-centred” feminist translation approaches. As I have stated earlier, in view of Gayatri Spivak’s (1993) critique of ‘translationese’ or ‘transparent’ translations, the premises of translator agency being overt are certainly understandable, and in many cases justifiable.
In this light, my question is not about translator agency being overt or not in the English version of Al-Amir’s work but how c/overt or ‘liminal’ forms of para/translator intervention in this work could be read as activist (para) translator practice even if permeated with silences. One step towards re/configuring notions of liminal agency in para/translation is to note that those mediating or staging this work in English translation are indeed cited in the ISBN page and in the editorial acknowledgements, even if they are not assigned copyright. McGann-Baker (vii) talks of how the face-to-face meeting between her, fellow scholar Elizabeth Fernea and Al-Amir in 1989 and of Al-Amir helping with the illustrations and translation “after her return to Lebanon” (1994, vii). As not one para/translator states the reasons for the hiatus or gap between 1989 and 1994 prefaces, the English version leaves the reader with having to read possible reasons for this gap without having directions on how to do so. Like the passengers in the story ‘Wag Wag Airport’ being directed to and from many places, a reader of the English version can try to read such gaps as communicating something is ‘off-tilt’ or as nothing at all. That some aspects of the English translation are not mediated as transparently as they first appear, thus seem very much part of its uncanny para/text.

To conclude this section, I make a final reference to the more overtly situated para/texts of the 1975-1990 Civil War in Lebanon; the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq Gulf war and the 1990/1 Gulf war in Iraq pervading both versions of the collection, framed in different terms of reference. In the Arabic version, two stories "أوراق من الأرشيف العتيق" [Papers from an Ancient Archive] and "حرائق الماضي" [Fires of the Past] make clear reference to the Civil War in Lebanon - the end of the cease-fire and how an explosion destroyed Al-Amir’s apartment in Beirut. No reference at all to the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war is made in these stories. In the 1994 English version, however, Al-Amir refer to how all three wars shaped her itinerant life as a writer. In her first 1989 preface she recalls that during the Iran-Iraq
war, she found herself “unable to involve (her) self …to write fiction about it” (1989/1994, xii). As silence on her part as an acclaimed writer would have been no easy feat in Iraq when silence was not an option for all established Iraqi writers (Wali 2007, 52), her stories of gendered alienation in the 1988 collection need to be read in these contexts. In the 1994 version, Al-Amir openly refers to how the 1990 war in Iraq obliged her to stay in the US and from there travel to Lebanon in 1994, not returning to Iraq. Al-Amir (1994, xiv) ends her preface with expressing her sense of uncertainty about the future is “terrifying my soul,” but does not give any further detail. The c/overt impact of her expression of fear becomes more apparent moreover when we consider the very few academic engagements with the novel in its English version. Nancy Gallagher (1995) views the collection as a deeply personal act of one woman’s “cathartic” writing “with politics a distant backdrop” (1995, 63). Shamanez Bano (2015) praises Al-Amir for “sensitively” describing “the impact of the rise of Saddam Hussein as an Iraqi leader” (2015, 4) although not one Iraqi state personage is mentioned in the stories at all. These brief commentaries illustrate how each critic interprets the silences of this work by drawing on their own epitexts of understanding concerning the writer and Iraq.

The necessity of the ‘reader’ having to partially mediate this work based on their own epitexts of understanding is not surprising in view of the c/overt silences on Iraq in the novel’s para/texts which seem to para/translate a respect for Al-Amir’s own reticent forms of expression. With such clear lines of collaboration shown as bringing forth the collection’s emergence in English translation, the assignment of ‘authorial’ agency to a depersonalised agency other than ‘a person’ perhaps becomes another para/textual mediation of respect. Unlike Al-Amir, (US-based) paratranslatory agencies of the work were not faced with return to Iraq or other MENA regions. While Al-Amir is clearly presented as an eminent Iraqi woman writer and ‘author’ of the stories, she herself
personally is not marked as accountable for the ‘publication’ of ‘the book’: the first literary work by one Iraqi woman writer published in the US in English translation. This and many other elements of staging at play in this work in English thus para/translates a deep respect for Al-Amir’s contexts of writing: as part of the story of her – and others’ – shifting sense of (gendered) alienation within changing ‘uncanny’ contexts of publication.

2.8: Conclusion: new paradigms of c/overt translator agency

In earlier contexts of feminist translation, Sherry Simon (1996) suggests that if translators make their activist agency clear, they have “all the rights as long as their game is played up front” (1996, 34 citing Berman 1995, 93). In this chapter, I have engaged with two literary works by two Iraqi women writers, both of which were para/translated using different strategies of activist commitment. If we read the unexplained and unexplainable ‘gaps’ in translation as “differends” (Godard 2002) contingent to their contexts of mediation, the silence on some aspects of both works’ mediations raises strategically useful questions on how liminal translator agency can be read, one question being whether the permutations of liminal agency are perhaps only readable with the benefit of additional critical insight or retrospective knowledge of past contexts of publication. As the allegorical meaning-making of many Iraqi women writers’ works (in Arabic) was written to be read as in continuous emergence, any analytical approach to both literary works in English needs to take into consideration that diffuse agencies of their para/translation are connected to each paratranslator’s epitexts of understanding the work’s contexts of writing and publication. Al-Mana’s novel evokes ‘the Uncanny’ by slowly revealing itself to be a para/translation of the words of the absent/ed in Arabic, and then retrospectively in English translation. In Arabic, Al-Amir hides the strangeness of each story by transparently making opaque the intention of creating a sense of shock to the reader. In English translation, the
stories hide any sense of anyone ‘trying’ to communicate the shocking point of each story. The opacity of such a strategy opens questions on where and how any translator agency can be discerned for the politics of such (uncanny) mediations to be appreciated. At the same time, limiting ‘activist translator agency’ to discursively or categorically overt frames of reference (Massardier-Kenney 1997) could limit the critical scope for engaging with literary works whose liminality of translation strategy functions as an (uncanny) allegory of their own contexts of activist publication. My reading of ‘the Uncanny’ in these two examples of earlier Iraqi women writers’ writing has shown how ‘uncanny’ translation praxes can be read using analytical frameworks of feminist translation which take the premises of translator activism beyond overtly articulated frames of reference.

From this point, I found using a paradigm of feminist paratranslation useful and practical as a tool of analysis in my reading of these two novels. By questioning and blurring the boundaries between text and paratext, translation and paratranslation, I have drawn attention to how each Iraqi woman writer (via c/overt and overt mediations of other para/translators) worked to navigate different hegemonic power structures at play in their literary works at different times and in different (political) circumstances. The recognition of liminal or c/overt para/translator agency helps us to critically consider how traces and absences in each novel’s mediation could be read and appreciated as shaping each novel’s contexts of production, mediation and reception. As stated by Iraqi woman activist-writer Haifa Zangana, “some books like their characters, just have a life of their own.” By this, Zangana means that the book becomes a ‘product’ co-created by the processes and agents by which it circulates and is ‘read’ in constantly evolving literary environments. By situating the reader – and their epi-texts of understanding – then, as part of any para/translated work’s meaning-making, the premise and location of the ‘activist’ translator

31 E-mail correspondence with Haifa Zangana, 15/03/2018.
is widened and opened to question. In this way, a critical acknowledgement of c/overt para/translator agency helps heighten appreciation of how the potential ‘ambivalence’ towards authority (Bhabha 1992/ 1994) could be read differently across languages. Although not explicitly stated, threading through both works by Al-Mana and Al-Amir is a refusal of co-option into any Iraqi political agency and ‘Iraq’ being appropriated by any state authority in Arabic when co-option (as for or against it) seemed the prevalent option. In English translation, gendered Iraqi experience of 1980s Iraq are clearly situated in ‘the personal’ in both instances: recovery-in-diaspora in the case of Al-Mana, itinerance-as-home with Al-Amir. As Iraq’s political history became much more overtly inter-twined with (US) English as a language of authority and discourse of occupation after the 2003 war in Iraq, the motif of refusing co-option through silence opens questions on where and by whom overtly situated Iraqi identity and experiences can be represented in Arabic-English translation. For this reason, I explore the politics of translating localised Iraqi women’s voices and their (gendered) Iraqi location (and dis-location) in post-2003 Iraq in the next chapter.
Chapter 3: The politics of translating gendered dis/location in post-2003 Iraq -
Inaam Kachachi

3.1: Overview

The theme of location and Iraq - geographical, social, political and corporeal - has inspired multiple forms of aesthetic activism by Iraqi artists and writers who work to challenge hegemonic power relations and political oppression (Al-Ali and Al-Najjar 2013). Much of this activist work concerns the impact of post-2003 US occupation of Iraq on aesthetic forms of expressing political Iraqi identity. Iraqi writer Ali Badr (2013) observes how Iraqi artist/writer identity has become binarily interlinked to “location” (Badr 2013, 115) by some Iraqi writers still living ‘inside’ Iraq as taking the following position: “the internal literature is the only true one; as those living overseas, these are the cowards, we have lived through hell for many years” (Badr 2013, 117) with those ‘outside’ Iraq responding: “you lived under a dictatorship, the authority destroyed your perspective, making you incapable of producing a true and humanistic literature, because there was no escape from censorship” (ibid). Intersecting with these inside/outside debates are concerns about the effect of US interest on Iraqi aesthetic production in the 2003 war in Iraq. Iraqi art critic Nada Shabout warns that “within today’s interest in all things Iraqi, Western media has taken the liberty to define Iraqi art and publicise the image it found fit for the world’s perception of what this art should look like. In other words, Western media is “inventing” a new historical narrative for modern Iraqi art” (Shabout 2013, 7). As perceived location of post-2003 Iraqi cultural production as well as the Iraqi artist/writer her/himself has emerged as an integral part of a work’s political agency and meaning in different ways, I explore the perceived “politics of re-location” of the الحفيدية الأمريكية [The American Granddaughter] (2009/2011) by Inaam Kachachi written in Arabic in 2009 and
translated into English in 2011. It is the first novel by an Iraqi woman writer translated into English to focus on the politics of Iraqi women translating in Iraq during the post-2003 war.

The Arabic version of the novel has been translated into English by two different translators: one official translation by Nariman Youssef published by Bloomsbury Qatar Foundation Publishing (2011) and an online version by William Hutchins (2009). It is a novel about US-Iraqi interpreter Zeina who works with the US army in Iraq to help liberate her people from Saddam Hussein (2011, 10). While this novel ostensibly focuses on the post-2003 conflict between the Iraq and US as told by Zeina, it also focuses on Zeina’s own sense of conflict towards her North American, Iraqi and exile identity. The troubling nature of Zeina, the US/Iraqi interpreter’s translating and writing in the hegemonic masculinised frames of war and oppression in Iraq is salient alongside feminist translator concerns of translating and (re)locating language within and despite their hegemonic frames of reference (De Lotbinière-Harwood 1991). The novel, moreover, engages with politics of language masculinised as a weapon of occupation and feminised as resistance to it by interweaving MSA (Modern Standard Arabic), Mosuli Iraqi spoken Arabic and US English alongside each other. To explore the gender politics of all three languages alongside feminist translation, I draw on Helen Kolias’ approach of “listening translation” (1990) and praxes of feminist translators’ versions of “mimetic translation” (Flotow 2004, 93). As both English translations ‘hear’ the novel’s Arabic gendered critique differently, I analyse the novel in translation in two sections; in the first, I read the chapters translated by Youssef (2011) and Hutchins (2009). In the second section, I focus on how Youssef’s translation re/locates the politics of conflicting gendered authorships in English translation. While I wish to highlight the significance of ‘the audible’ as part of this novel’s para/text.

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in Arabic and English translation in this chapter, my other aim is to raise appreciation of Kachachi’s purposeful use of different and gendered language registers in this novel as part of her politics of writing in Arabic: re-configuring Iraq and Iraqi identity as prevailing in different times and places despite the wars and scattered locations of its peoples.

To contextualise my analysis, I first give a synopsis of [The American Granddaughter] and the questions framing my points of analysis. I first discuss the “politics of location” (Alcoff 1991, 5) in Iraqi literary contexts, and then focus on the importance of “location” in Iraqi women’s writing. I then introduce Helen Kolias’ notion of “listening” translation (Kolias 1990) to contextualise my analytical approach of “mimetic” feminist translation (Flotow 2004) for my readings of The American Granddaughter (2011) as an English translation. In the first section, I explore how the Arabic novel’s different sites of gendered critique, become relocated, dislocated and at times trans(per)formed by the two different English translators, Hutchins and Youssef. In the second section, my analysis highlights the importance of ‘audible’ as well as ‘visible’ relocation of the Arabic novel’s audibly gendered political critique in English translation. Throughout my analysis, I assess the extent that ‘listening’ and ‘mimetic’ translation perspectives are useful to ‘hear’ covert translator interventions relocating the novel’s gendered political critiques of hegemonic masculinised oppression in English translation.


Born in the early 1950s, Kachachi grew up in Iraq when tensions between the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) and the Iraqi Ba’athist Party were at breaking point (Ismael 2007). The Iraqi Ba’athist Party established itself as the Iraqi government in 1968 until the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. Kachachi left Iraq in 1979 to study in France due to the stifling
nature of the Ba’athist rule in Iraq (AbdelRahman 2012, 1). Her Iraqi writer identity is nonetheless paramount for her, which is why it is not surprising that the outer jacket cover of [The American Granddaughter] (2009) cites Kachachi as: "صحافية وكاتبة، مصرة، رغم إقامتها الفرنسية المديدة على عراقتها" [journalist, writer and, despite her long years of residence in France, resolutely Iraqi]. For Kachachi, Iraq as its peoples and changing geographical locations defines what Iraq has become, not political military authorities defining who is or is not Iraqi. Her notion of Iraqiness as resolute self-identification and inside the Iraqi peoples themselves (Lynx-Qualey 2014a) thus works to challenge politically motivated essentialist discourses on Iraqiness. Kachachi’s belief that the location of Iraqi identity is in herself (and other Iraqis) rather than Iraq as a land configured by geo-political borders is reiterated throughout the novel.

On the shortlist of the 2009 International Prize for Arab literature (IPAF) or Arab Booker, The American Granddaughter (2011) was the first novel by Kachachi to be translated into English. It was the first novel by an Iraqi woman writer about the post-2003 war in Iraq, told from a distinctly gendered perspective. The novel centres on Zeina, an Iraqi-American woman translator working in the US army post-2003, her Mosuli Iraqi grandmother in Baghdad and the effect of their different politics on their shared past and ambivalent future. Zeina writes a diary which documents her journey from the US to Iraq and back again, and her changing relationships to her Iraqi grandmother, her fellow Iraqis and the US. While writing her memoirs, the fear of an editing, censoring Iraqi women author haunts Zeina who believes she has been unjustly cast in the role of the villain to create a patriotic Iraqi novel (2011, 26). Throughout the novel, Zeina writes: she writes e-mails to her American boyfriend Calvin, sends e-mails to her ‘milk’ brother Muhayman.

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https://arablit.org/2014/02/04/inaam-kachachi-on-tashari-and-the-iraq-that-she-caries-with-her/
As she writes, Zeina frames her troubled relationship with an ever-present and silent Iraqi woman author as a contest, a struggle for a platform to speak. Towards the end of the novel, Zeina writes that she has killed off the Iraqi woman writer “before she could kill me” (2011, 178). This leaves questions whether in fact, this event may not be a feint of the writer – ‘re-clothing’ herself yet again through the guise of Zeina which is the crux of the novel’s ongoing questioning of overtly cited political agency: who is writing for whom? For as well as a story about post-2003 Iraq, the novel is about experiences of speaking in and between shifting political (re)locations. As soon as she arrives in Iraq as part of the US army personnel Zeina, understands her different transformations as التقمّص [al-taqammus] (2009, 15) or adopting a role or personality (2011, 7). Zeina thus cites herself as “simultaneously their daughter and their enemy while they (Iraqis in Iraq) could be my kin as well as my enemy” (2011, 7). Throughout the novel, Zeina frequently refers to the power of gendered acts of reclothing: to visit her Iraqi women relatives, she wears a black abaya (2011, 72) to mark and protect herself as Iraqi and woman; to be an American in Iraq, she has to don “something like masculinity” (2011, 143), the US military helmet and sunglasses. By ‘changing (gendered) shirt’, she gets to ‘speak’ in different settings where otherwise she would be killed or could not ‘pass’.

The word التقمّص [al-taqammus] in Arabic also holds connotations of “transmutation of spirits” (Bennet 2006, 88), a form of reincarnation where someone who dies a violent or unexpected death becomes ‘reclowned’ as a child in another family and place, literally changing body or transforming corporeal clothing (ibid). Throughout the novel, we find out that التقمّص [al-taqammus] or ‘re-birth’ is indeed what happens to Zeina, with local and global political factors as well as her own sense of performance shaping and creating her transformations. The first local-global factor is how she is a US citizen: she is the daughter of an Iraqi man tortured by the pre-2003 regime who fled with his family to the US (2011,
their exile a product of political oppression in Iraq. Zeina’s decision to join the US army is also related to local and global political factors: on a local level, she believes her high army salary solves the crippling poverty of her family living in “the miserable neighbourhood of Seven Mile” in Detroit (2011, 9). Seeing the 9/11 attacks on US TV in 2001 makes her decision to join the army more overtly political. Zeina writes “What could I do to help my country in its adversity? How would a powerless immigrant like me serve the great United States of America? It was impossible to remain indifferent after witnessing that inferno” (2011, 12). In this way, by signing up as an interpreter for the US army, Zeina shows her political (self) transformation or التقمّص [al-taqammuṣ]-like passage from disempowered exile-immigrant to a (re) empowered US citizen who has skills and agency to transform her family’s exile into the American dream. In doing so, she can also repay her/their debt of gratitude to the US for hosting them in miserable exile and prove that herself (and her family) as not one of ‘them’ – terrorists attacking the US in 2001. Fadwa AbdelRahman (2012) describes Zeina’s التقمّص [al-taqammuṣ] or ‘re-birth’ as a US army interpreter as a permutation of “the simultaneity of conspicuous togetherness and conspicuous otherness in a predominantly globalized world” (2012, 2), the politics of division and solidarity in the US. In view of the politics of division surrounding the 2003 war in Iraq in the US as well as in Iraq itself, Zeina’s joining the US army could also be considered one example of what Gloria Anzaldúa (1987, 3) terms “una herida abierta (an open wound) where the third world grates against the first and bleeds.”

The novel is also about the politics of Iraqi (re)location played out in Zeina’s family: Zeina’s mother ‘relocating’ herself by marrying an Assyrian Chaldean-speaking Christian; Zeina’s father’s experience of persecution leading to the whole family going into exile and taking on American citizenship (2011, 20); the material poverty of exiles in the US. But the novel is not only about Zeina and her Iraqi family in the US. The novel is also about
Iraqi reactions to the US occupation of Iraq starting with the “blank” expressions of Iraqis watching the US convoys (2011, 6); about Iraqi women - her Iraqi grandmother, her Mosuli women relatives and Tawoos a life-long friend of the family; and about Iraqi men - her Muslim ‘milk’ brothers Haydar (who wants to leave Iraq) and Muhayman (ex-prisoner-of-war of the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war, ex-communist now part of an Islamic militia group), both sons of Tawoos. Zeina writes about her life in the US army: day to day banter with her US colleagues, US army raids on Iraqi houses, challenging her US colleagues when they mock local religious traditions (2011, 106) and expressing disgust towards the US military wo/men perpetrators of torture in Abu Ghraib prison. Her internal conflict is her wanting to be with the (US) army ridding Iraqis of Saddam Hussein’s regime which persecuted her father (2011, 168) yet standing against the US army which “replace/s torture with torture” (2011, 140) at Abu Ghraib. The story ends when Zeina leaves Iraq after her Iraqi grandmother’s death, heart-broken but resigned to life as an exile in the US swearing never to forget Baghdad (2011, 180).

3.3: Locating the politics of Iraqi women’s story-writing in English translation

Writing on transnational expressions of identity and representation, Linda Alcoff (1991) stated that no one can assume “transcendence” of their perceived location (1991, 6). We are all judged on the “location” from which we are perceived as speaking – our ‘social’ or ‘political’ location or social/political identity. Alcoff asks why “a speaker’s location…has an epistemically significant impact on a speaker's claims and why perceived “location” serves either to authorize or dis-authorize one's speech” (1991, 7), interrogating the basis of speakers’ perceived social location, language, place of birth, social background, gender identity in knowledge-production (1991, 8). Alcoff argues perceived location as a
short-hand for epistemological validation is essentialist and reductionist (Alcoff 1991, 2005). Yet, citing Gayatri Spivak, Alcoff says not speaking out of fear of critique is "to continue the imperialist project" (Alcoff 1991, 23 citing Spivak). In effect, Alcoff argues public speakers should not stop speaking, but should stop to consider and negotiate their relative privilege according them epistemologically visible and increased authority in a self-aware, self-conscious manner. The process of consideration includes the (self) interrogation of why some (women) appear in a position to ‘speak’ while others are not. It also raises the question, as pointed out by Sara Ahmad (2000) who is listening or hearing (2000, 61). Ahmad’s point about who is listening and hearing is important particularly in contexts of cultures where ‘visible’ or ‘seen’ representations of identity and location can back-fire by resulting in social groups’ decreased audibility for different audiences. Public visibility as incongruent with increased voice was reflected in the lived political reality for most (non-elite) Iraqi women living in post-2003 Iraq: seen as voting (Winegar 2015) but rarely heard talking (on US media at least) about their lived realities of poverty, dispossession, and political marginalisation (Al-Ali and Pratt 2009; Ismael 2014).

This brings me to the political location of Inaam Kachachi in specifically pre-2003 Iraqi literary contexts when death, torture, imprisonment and collective punishment were frequent outcomes of overt challenge to the Iraqi Ba’athist political state (Mashatat 1986; Simawe 2009). Pre-2003, Kachachi had only written books whose topics intimated without discursively stating her leftist positionality. Her first book (1998) was titled Lorna, Her Years with Jawad Salim. It was a biography of the wife of Jawad Salim, an Iraqi sculptor famous for the نصب الحرية [The Monument of Freedom], a huge monument in Baghdad celebrating the Iraqi people and 1958 Revolution, a revolution with strong support from the Iraqi leftist movement (Ismael 2007). Kachachi also made a documentary about Naziha Al-Dulaimi, the first woman to become a minister in an Arab country with the same 1958
Revolution government. Within the contexts of pre-2003 Iraq described earlier, the subject matter of Kachachi’s earlier works represented a clear resistance to Iraqi state directives that sought to erase traces of the political left, and the Iraqi Communist Party from the ‘corrected’ archives of Iraqi history (Ali 2008). As noted by Iraqi critic Abdullah Ibrahim (2018, 31), Kachachi’s writing is emblematic of many Iraqi writers now wishing Iraq peoples to define themselves as well as Iraq. The novel [The American Granddaughter] (2009) carries a strong critique of any reductionist ‘politics of association’ pertaining to Iraq and Iraqis by representing individuals’ ‘politics’ of location, language and cultural association as fluid, self-reflexive and transient indicators influenced by lived experience – which for Zeina is marginalisation in the US, violence in Iraq and disillusionment with both.

The use of different literary registers was another site of pre-2003 Iraqi writer political expression of political authority critique. One way was to parody Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) as a patriarchal discourse remote from Iraqis everyday speech. Earlier novels by Iraqi women writers such as Samira Al-Mana (1990), Daizy Al-Amir (1988/94) and Betool Khedairi (1999/2001) show newscasts and political speeches interrupting and punctuating the lives of Iraqis inside and outside of Iraq as an unwanted intrusion in their day to day experience. The political impact of the actual content of the newcasts precluded switching them off or tuning out altogether. As stated earlier, Iraqi writers also consciously write Iraqi dialect as a performance and speaking of lived Iraqi experience and resistance to written MSA, which Ghazoul cites as one of the “distinguishing feature/s of the Iraqi novel, whether the author is man or woman” (Ghazoul 2008, 195). Ghazoul cites Alia Mamdouh’s use of Iraqi dialect as consciously gendering the politics of her writing’s political location: “her ear for the female register of language and her rendering of dialogue…reflects various generations of women and reveals them to be politically
involved and expressing their choices in their own ways” (2008, 195). Kachachi similarly situates the language of authorities as distant from the lived realities of many Iraqi people: “…history was always written by the authorities. You don’t read much about people. And even less about women” (c.f. Snaje 2014).34 In the Arabic version of the novel, the Iraqi grandmother presents as speaking Mosuli Iraqi dialect which is transcribed by Zeina in written MSA, a language whose grammatical norms which frame all ‘spoken’ Arabic as out of place in the Arab public sphere in ways which alienate and (purposefully) exclude many MENA peoples from the very political processes which shape their lives (Safouan 2007). The collision of Iraqi dialect words with MSA in the Arabic version of the novel thus literally writes the speech of Iraqis as ‘audible’ into and against the MSA fabric of the novel as part of its political critique. In this way, women who do not read and write are given a platform to ‘speak’ to readers – translated both by the writer and the act of writing itself - MSA becomes a textual cipher for an audible para/text which is fundamental aspect of this novel’s politics of mediation.

This brings me to The American Granddaughter (2011) as an English translation, a novel which politicises the act and status of translation in post-2003 Iraq. The consequences of Arabic and English coming together in post-2003 Iraq are shown to be highly charged and often deadly. For example, Zeina hides her identity to other Iraqis (2011, 6) for her and her unit’s safety. She describes how one Iraqi woman working with the Americans is killed, her throat slit, and her eyes gouged out (2011, 86). The status of translation is shown as less deadly, but extremely discomforting for Zeina’s US army colleagues: Zeina is asked “whose side are you on?” (2011, 106). She also finds out how Iraqi understandings of obligatory military service seem to exonerate the actions of US

soldiers in the eyes of many Iraqis (despite US army service not being obligatory) while branding the agency of Iraqi interpreters as voluntary and more treacherous (2011, 144). Inaccurate cross-border discourses are shown as disastrous in consequence, where one party passes the buck to another: “We [the US] sold you a dream that was too good to be true. But we weren’t alone. You had your spin doctors and nuclear scientists and generals. They told us about weapons of mass destruction...September 11th was waiting for a scapegoat, so we bought it all. You believed us, and we believed them” (2011, 164). With the novel’s charged subject matter, however little information on the politics or premises of the English translation is available in the book. The only information given is the novel’s shortlist status on the 2009 Arabic Booker short list on the front cover, and its status as a translation in the inner page. Although the glossary of standard Arabic and Iraqi cultural words alongside the brief bio on the translator Nariman Youssef, reiterate the book’s status as a translation, the novel’s own politics of translation appear strangely absent. The online translation of three chapters of the book by William Hutchins moreover does not explain any translator agency either. The only information from the online site is: Hutchins has copyright to his Arabic-English translation via the French version of *The American Granddaughter* published by Éditions Liana Levi.35

As the novel’s different registers of Arabic are its diffuse location/s of political critique, I find Koliass’ notion of “listening” translation raises questions on how translation strategies can be ‘read-as-heard’ if they are not easily seen as ‘locatable.’ According to Koliass, “listening translation” involves a translator *listening* to the cadences s/he reads in the source text and *attesting* to her/his own experience of listening to and reading the target text. It is important to note that Koliass (1990, 214) focusses on the *practicalities* of

translating what she terms as a ‘minor’ text (nineteenth century Greek woman writing in a Greek island dialect) into a ‘major’ language (English) rather than the political premises of ‘minor’ and ‘major’ literatures, such as the neo-colonial history of “major” languages’ domination over academic discourse (Grutman 2013). But through her ‘listening’, Kolias (1990) shows how translators “attest to what they hear, and thus leave their mark as creators of a space for a "foreign" text” (1990, 219) as an attestation to their reading. She does however do what neither Hutchins (2009) nor Youssef (2011) did by overtly situating herself as known, visible, and clear in her agenda by explaining, in prefaces and footnotes where her listening occurs in the translated texts (1990, 217). Although more situated in her approach, translation processes as aural have been useful to configure how I could interrogate the audible as well as the visible re/dis/locations of translator agency of the novel.

In this way, a “listening” approach to translation could help explore the impact of a translator’s agency as ‘heard’ alongside ‘seen-as-read.’

Feminist translation approaches overlap with Kolias’ notion of listening translation, albeit underpinned by a very different politics (Kolias does not cite herself as feminist translator in any case). Listening approaches in feminist translation have taken on different forms in different times and place. In 1990s Quebec cultural scenes, a ‘mimetic’ (Flotow 2004) or ‘ventriloquist’ approach “favors the graphic and phonetic aspects of a text, by focussing on sound and on sound connections, and so mimics/renders the sound of the source text, rather than its semantic meaning,” (Flotow 2004, 93). Many ‘mimetic’ feminist translations thus audibly perform, rather than semantically explain, the meaning of the source texts. The reasons for this are multiple, one: to enhance and “enrich” the potential creative meanings of the source (and target) text (Levine 1991) and two, to communicate an experience of language (Flotow 2004, 93) rather than a surface rendering and three, to find ways of by-passing patriarchal lexical language structures which flatten or suppress
women’s voices of resistance by “rewriting the echoes” (Godard 1995, 71) of what cannot be represented in (masculinist-based) language. Such approaches interrogated the ambivalent re-location of marginalised voices in translated texts. For example, Michelle Hartman (2012) asks why the voice of ninth century Hijazi Arab woman poet Al-Khanssa does not ‘sound’ much different to the voices of other Arab women writers translated into English in the late twentieth century. In effect she is asking: why can we as readers not hear Al-Khansa differently? Is it because the translator could not hear her ninth century voice in contemporary contexts? Or is it assumed that we as twenty-first century readers could not hear its echoes anyway, given that all readerships are infused with their own diverse ‘zeitgeists’, or ideas and beliefs which are prevalent at a particular juncture in time?

From a perspective of feminist paratranslation, which blurs and interrogates borders between translation and paratranslation, Hartman’s questions could be read as intimating a conscious awareness of echoes and ambiguity which necessarily pervade notions of translation (and wo/men) operating within different parameters or para/texts of (masculinist) grammar and hegemonic discourses across temporally unbridgeable times. Elizabeth Castelli (1990) for example, works on feminist translations of the Bible (ibid), engaging with the tools of masculinist oppression as part of - and fully conscious of - her translation’s historically patriarchal epitexts and her own feminist political agenda, while (pre)configuring possible alternative understandings of the Bible. Godard conceptualised such engagements as traces of life and discourse heard and shaped by (yet resistant to) masculinist or hegemonic language - “an echo of the self and the other, a movement into alterity” (Godard 1989, 44). By this she means that ‘alterity’ to languages can only be heard as an uncanny echo as thought processes are inevitably shaped and configured by language in the first place. Working with the echo of alterity in/of language then is, according to Godard, an act of “transformance” (Godard 1989, 46) – a performance of transformation.
of an inaudible echo through creative activist translation praxis. From this approach of ‘transformance’, I set out to ‘listen to’ how the novel’s political critiques seem listened to and echoed – (or not) – in Arabic-English translation. This paradigm of analysis compels me to attest to what I myself (partially) can hear (re)written by my (somewhat privileged) access to both versions of the novel, both of which are underpinned by a politics of critique of post-2003 US occupation of Iraq.


The American Granddaughter (2011) was published by Bloomsbury-Qatar Publishing Foundation after the Arabic version had been shortlisted for the 2009 International Prize for Arabic Literature (IPAF), also known as the ‘Arabic Booker.’ Prior to the 2011 English translation, the Arabic novel (2009) had been translated into French titled Si je t’oublie, Bagdad [If I forget you, Baghdad] (2010) and published by Éditions Liana Levi. France Culture praised the novel as « le double portrait d'une femme et d'un pays déchirés » [the twin portrait of a woman and a country ripped apart]. A 2013 blog describes how « la narratrice subit un dédoublement de personnalité: d’un côté la soldate qui défend son pays; de l’autre la romancière qui capte chaque image, chaque souvenir de sa grand-mère pour un potentiel roman quand elle rentrera aux États-Unis » [The narrator undergoes a splitting doubling of personality: on one side, she is the soldier defending her country; on the other, the novelist capturing each image, each memory of her grandmother for a potential novel to be written when she returns to the US].

dédoulement» or ‘doubling’ is an insightful metaphor as it reflects something of the ambiguous sense of location and boundaries in a globalised war whose protagonists simultaneously identify with or against Iraq and the US military forces as aggressors and defenders of ‘their’ soil, inside and outside Iraq and the US. I thus explore further why ambiguity of translator location in both English versions re-locates and at times transforms the novel’s modes of gendered interrogation first published in Arabic. To do this, I read how the novels different registers of (gendered) critique are ‘re-doubled’ in Arabic and English translation, starting from the Arabic version’s title as the first page.

In the Arabic version, the title ‘الحفيدة الأميركية’ (and meaning ‘The American Granddaughter’) echoes three identities from the outset: Arab world gendered generational kinship ties, Mosuli Iraqiness and American-ness. The first point of reference is ‘granddaughter,’ of which Zeina’s American-ness is her distinguishing feature, although we learn she was born in Baghdad to two Iraqi parents, and only left Iraq “at the threshold of adolescence” (2011, 69). The Mosuli Iraqi aspect to her identity is ‘heard’ in the spelling of ‘American’ or أمريكية [āmīrkiyya]. Although the word looks like MSA (Modern Standard Arabic), if read out loud, the word also reads as أمريكية [āmīrkiyya], an Arabicised form of the word ‘American.’ Barely noticeable, Zeina’s American-ness is nonetheless mimetically presented through subtly, yet distinctly Iraqi Mosuli frames from the novel’s outset – spoken Mosuli Iraqi Arabic clothed in the garb of written MSA which, in turn, clothes the US American English word. This marks how the Mosuli Iraqi Arabic subtly intermeshes throughout the MSA language in which the novel is written, gently but visibly and audibly subverting MSA’s and US English frames of reference as the novel’s basis of critique. The title also marks Zeina named as a granddaughter from the novel’s beginning before she chooses, by online application (2011,
12), to ‘become’ or perform the role of interpreter for the US army in Iraq. The question echoing from the novel’s title is: who is the granddaughter in the novel?

Following from the Arabic title, the novel’s para/text begins with a short epigraph:

[Beware of the tender green (plants) (growing) from animal excrement] إياكم خضراء الدم
[Prophet hadith (whose authenticity) is not agreed upon] حديث نبويّ غير متفق عليه

This is an Islamic saying exhorting men to avoid marrying a woman who appears beautiful, but whose background is of ill-repute (Al Halaby 1999, 13). The metaphor illustrates fresh-looking plants growing and nourished from filth are harmful when eaten - a saying reiterating essentialist notions of a person’s origin being an indication of their worth and/or moral behaviour. Following the title الحفيدة الأميركية [The American Granddaughter], the strapline could read as referring to Zeina, ‘the American granddaughter’ herself – intimating her American-ness somehow pollutes her ‘pure’ Iraqi origins. The saying however is revealed towards the novel’s emd as a commentary on the US military invasion and occupation of Iraq – the US army presenting itself as the harbinger of democracy and liberation, the origins and reasons for its intervention mired in filth – political self-interest. And when its fallout is ‘consumed’ by the Iraqi people, the US army is thus shown as overwhelmingly harmful for the Iraq and its people. At the end of the novel, Zeina throws her army kit out with the garbage for this reason, writing “I wouldn’t be planting basil in my helmet. Sweet perfume doesn’t grow in metal. That’s what I write to Muhayman [her milk brother fighting against the US in Iraq] but he doesn’t reply” (2011, 179). In this line, Zeina addresses the US occupiers of Iraq, and all those who use military means to achieve their goals - nothing growing from violence and its tools, however appealing in appearance, will provide healthy nourishment. Her statement “I wouldn’t be planting basil in my helmet” implies that other US army soldiers perhaps did, their action of doing so, implying a belief
that the instruments of the US occupation did bring positive benefits to Iraq. The person of address – Muhayman using weapons - does not attest to listening to her, a commentary on the Iraq armed resistance/s to the US occupation: any advice to those using violence and military methods from the parties who have been part of it usually falls on deaf ears.

The choice of this hadith as an epigraph, in Arabic emerges as more ambiguous for its status in the Islamic academy as a weak or disputed hadith or Prophetic saying (Al-Halaby 1999, 13). In the Arabic version, the words غير متفق عليه literally mean “not agreed upon.” In a sense, the epigraph intimates on one level, even the very theories of origins based in one of the most sacrosanct Arab world religious traditions are themselves subject to critique and disagreement in terms of their origin. This is expression of doubt and charge of hypocrisy towards any saying which claims to be completely authoritative, no matter how sacred. Yet, if read as commentary on the reasons for the US occupation of Iraq and war, (not women and their origins) Kachachi’s literal choice of words “not agreed upon” perhaps is very apt, in view of debates on the invasion of Iraq, still ongoing and contested (Chilcot 2016). With the politics of sectarianism showing itself to be lethal for many Iraqis (Zangana 2016), Kachachi’s use of a weak Islamic hadith in a novel about conflicted and shifting loyalties in post-2003 Iraq could be read as politically ambiguous, if not blasphemous (to some Muslim readers). Or not, if read as a parable on the US occupation and war in Iraq. It is the very ambiguity of the title and epigraph in Arabic which locates, in my view, Kachachi’s politics of gendered location in Arabic. She uses the (masculinist) tools she has: MSA Arabic and the discourses on the US occupation of Iraq and resistance. In doing so, she subtly uses the novel’s title and epigraph to overlap and intermesh different metaphors to allow for their different readings, and more importantly show authority of words as (hu)man-made and changeable. These doubts towards authority echo, double-back and reverberate throughout the novel, which allow Zeina and Kachachi, according to
critic Faruq Youssef (2010) some respite from their shame in the part they play in the novel’s reiterations of US politics of war in Iraq. By becoming part of the US occupation (Zeina) and writing about it (Kachachi), both ‘writers’ critique while becoming part of and thus co-opted into the very hegemonic structures they seek to critique – what Trinh Minh-Ha (1989, 6) calls a “triple bind” when some women write - more of which I discuss shortly.

As the epitextual echoes of the novel’s beginning are reliant on a reader’s own epitexts of understanding on Iraq, this raises the question of how these multiply layered overlaps of the title and epigraph are transferred in the English translations. Hutchin’s online translation only shows chapters five, six and seven. He has not translated the epigraph but has translated his version of the book title. Nariman Youssef’s translation has translated both the title and the epigraph. As the title and epigraph reverberate throughout the Arabic novel as part of its gendered para/text, I discuss both translators’ different engagements with the title and epigraph as both para/texts raise important questions for how, and why, the Arabic novel and its other gendered critiques of masculinist authorities were ‘listened’ to and re-located in English translation by both translators so differently.

Youssef (2011) translates the Arabic title as “The American Granddaughter” and intimates nothing of the intermeshing language dynamics of the title in Arabic. The outer cover of the 2011 version, the image choice presumably of the publisher, shows the upper face and striking eyes of a young dark-haired woman merged with a sepia landscape of palm trees in the desert. The title and image situate the novel’s focus on Zeina, the young US-American woman interpreter and on a desert-like place with palm trees. The seriousness of the woman’s eye expression intimates a sense of drama and danger. Under the title is a new subtitle, “Shortlisted for the 2009 International Prize for Arabic fiction.”

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The font size of “American” in the title is significantly larger than “The” and “Granddaughter,” highlighting the American-ness as the title’s most salient feature. The only other words are “Inaam Kachachi” with no mention of Nariman Youssef. After this cover, we read the hadith epigraph, rendered as:

_Beware the beautiful woman of dubious descent - an unauthenticated Hadith_

The translation is an explanatory not literal translation of the hadith, which as explained earlier, refers to green plants growing from animal excrement. With the translated title and the overtly feminised outer cover image, the hadith appears to refer to Zeina with her mixed origins arriving in Iraq. In this way, the danger seen in the woman’s eyes could be read as the woman herself, not the US. ‘An unauthenticated Hadith’ intimates the element of truth or authenticity is in doubt rather than "غير متفق عليه" and the phrase “not agreed upon” conveys differing opinions and controversy which link the hadith to the US occupation of Iraq and any ‘just war.’ The slightly antiquated English language register used for the hadith frames the epigraph as having a more one-dimensional gendered meaning: that it is about women, its ‘unauthenticated’ status intimating superstition or unauthenticated religious discourses could be at play in Islamic discourse. As well as intimating this Hadith as antiquated and reductive, what is lost in this explanatory translation is the echo between the strapline and Zeina’s later refusal to grow basil in her helmet towards the end of the book (2011, 179). Zeina’s experience in Iraq shows her that any discourse purporting itself as authoritative is only so if people believe it – and that it can be subverted, rejected or changed. The subtle political reverberations of critique towards the war in the title and epigraph are thus muffled before the novel starts. The novel’s title thus locates America as the focus, the gendered epigraph and feminine appearance of Zeina, its point of departure.

Hutchins, as stated previously, has only released three chapters of his translation online without the strapline. Instead of translating from the Arabic title _الحفيظة الإميركية_ [The
American Granddaughter], Hutchins translates the title as *If I Forget You Baghdad*, a direct translation of the French title *Si je t’oublie Bagdad* (2010). Hutchins’ copyright clearly states his translation comes from the Arabic, not the French. His copyright frame of reference however is Liana Levi, the publisher of the French version which perhaps explains why his title follows the French, not the Arabic. The existence of Hutchin’s title, copyright and own translation legally available online may explain why Bloomsbury Qatar bought the copyright from Liana Levi – one of many multinational publishing companies buying translation rights from French publishers (Loucif 2012). Hutchins’ version (2009) although preceding the Bloomsbury Qatar version by Yousef (2011) does not have the Arab Booker status of Yousef’s translation. What Hutchins’ title does do, however, is echo and raise questions of why ‘Baghdad’ was foregrounded and ‘American’ omitted in the French version of the novel. A detailed discussion on the politics of the French version’s location is beyond the scope of this study. However, as Hutchins’ title is the final line of the novel which distils what Zeina has learnt from her time in Iraq, I briefly discuss its political ramifications before moving to the next section.

The title of the French version, *Si je t’oublie, Bagdad [If I forget you, Baghdad]* is translated from the novel’s final line in Arabic, which is "شعلت يميني اذا نسيتك يا بغداد" [May my right (hand) be paralysed, should I forget you, Baghdad] (2009, 196/ 2011, 180). Zeina’s oath attests to transformation – accepting herself as an Iraqi exile in the US, neither Iraqi nor American. Zeina concludes: “I don’t need reminders. I just repeat after my father: I’d give my right hand if I should ever forget you, Baghdad” (2009, 196/ 2011, 180). As an adaptation of Psalm 137.5 from the Old Testament used in Jewish and Christian

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40 ְתִּשְׁכַּח יְּמִּינִּי אֶשְׁכָּחֵךְ יְׁרוּשָּׁלִָּם אָי: 137: 5, תֶּהָלְיָם "If I Should Forget You Jerusalem.” Psalm 137: 5, *The Torah*. (c.f. George Phillips. 1846, 552-553)
religious traditions, this oath not only invokes her memories of Baghdad but her father’s Christian identity, which is highlighted throughout the novel as specifically Chaldean Christian. The Psalm’s symbolic importance for Jewish diaspora communities is its evocation of exile from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, the king of the Chaldeans in 597BC/586 (VanderKam 1985, 126; Gillingham 2013, 65). Zeina’s father, as Chaldean invokes and changes the place of exile from ‘Jerusalem’ to ‘Baghdad,’ the Chaldean historical oppressors now oppressed. This line (and Hutchins’ title) intimates even the most ancient, location-and identity-specific discourses are subject to change, adaptation and transformation by others; that invocations of alterity resonate with other (historically distant and even dissonant) experiences of alterities in different times; and that what remains of writing is often beyond control of its writer/s – how its echoes are re-read adapted and re-clothed in the future, and by whom. Zeina herself refers to her own (self) adaptations and transformation in different situæ as التقمّص [al-taqummus] in Arabic (2009,15), “changing shirt” (Wehr 1994, 924) as a self-conscious ‘re-clothing’ or performance which is always being done, undone and redone. Hutchins’ echoing of the French title offers a trace to how (the processes of) the novel’s translation/s have been done, redone and reclothed, any attempt at ‘definitive’ versions thus shown as inevitably compromised but also as open to ongoing transformation.

3.5: A comparative reading: the politics of gender (dis/re) location in re/translation

Read alongside each other, both translators’ engagements attest to two very different ‘hearings’ of the Arabic versions and why their c/overt translation interventions have significant impact on the readings of this novel, necessarily charged due to the political nature of the novel. From a close reading of the chapters five, six and seven, I read that Hutchins (2009) follows the Arabic language structures more closely than Youssef, yet
somehow overwrites Kachachi’s metaphors of political association with his own. One example is in the following sentence in Chapter Six:

إحتشدت الكلمات في رأسي وتسارعت وتدافعت وتداخلت مثل غيوم بيض تهرب على عجل, ثم توقفت مرة واحدة وزخّت مطرها الحاذق على اصابعي...

[The words were crowded in my head and sped and dashed off to move into one another like white clouds fleeing in haste to then stop all at once and pour down their bitter rain on my fingers.]

(Kachachi 2009, 34)

Words clump together in my head and then quickly speed off only to dash against each other before blending into one another, like white clouds that immediately flee. Then these words pause once more and pour through my fingers like a deluge.

(Hutchins 2009)

The words filling my head are white clouds taking flight. They move and merge and change shapes, then all at once they stop and pour forth their acid rain.

(Youssef 2011, 26)

In Arabic, many of the poetic aspects of the text are connected to Kachachi’s judicious use of reflexive verbs which Hutchins (2009) has clearly tried to engage with by his inclusion of words such as “each other” and “one another.” While Youssef’s sentences are half the length of Hutchins,’ they follow the more succinct style of Kachachi’s Arabic. The words "مطرها الحاذق" mean literally “sour rain” (Wehr 1994, 194). Youssef’s choice of “acid rain” (2011, 26) reconfigures Kachachi’s metaphor of ‘sour’ to resonate with Zeina’s metaphors of (self) writing to its (self) destructive and malignant effects, a theme running throughout

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the novel. Hutchins however chooses “deluge” and does not engage with its bitterness and relocates writing only as proliferating, a telling mitigation of Zeina’s presence in Iraq.

The difference between the two translators’ engagements with the gendered critique of US intervention in Iraq as a neo-colonial echo of a colonial past becomes particularly marked in Kachachi’s own engagements with gender in the fifth chapter, when Zeina, the protagonist, is describing her transformation from civilian to US military personel on her journey to Baghdad. In this chapter, the Arabic terms used highlight and parody discourses of women and war within post-2003 Iraqi/US military intervention contexts. In one instance, the protagonist Zeina refers to Nadia, the Egyptian translator as "محتالة بالفطرة" [muḥṭāla b’īl-fitra] (2009, 31) as she commands the attention of the US soldiers in their unit. In Arabic, محتالة [muḥṭāla] means “artful, cunning” (Wehr 1994, 255) and بالفطرة [b’īl-fitra] means “by nature, in disposition” (Wehr 1994, 842). The phrase "محتالة بالفطرة" [muḥṭāla b’īl-fitra] in Arabic has moral, playful but not necessarily sexual connotations. Youssef uses the North American phrase “hustler by nature” (2011:23). Hutchins translates "محتالة بالفطرة" [muḥṭāla b’īl-fitra] as “a born prostitute” (Hutchins 2009, ibid) which adds an essentialising, racist and insulting connotation to Nadia and destroys the jokiness of Zeina’s reference towards another woman interpreter with whom she feels friendship and solidarity. This change raises many questions on the thinking behind this choice of term in Hutchin’s translation, the first being what does the term ‘a born prostitute’ mean? The sex industry, a world-wide phenomenon, often intermeshes with endemic poverty, trafficking and other human rights violations, the Arab world being no exception (Mattar 2011). Hutchins’ patriarchal terminologies of sex and economy thus not only dislocate the Arabic register but disturbingly confuse and add an addition trace of gendered derogation to its meaning, not intended in the Arabic version.
Gendered mislocations in the novel’s English translation/s do not stop there. In the same chapter, Kachachi makes her first critical engagement with the US army as a masculinist military neo-colonial presence in Iraq. At her training, Zeina writes:

كل ما حولنا خشن وذكوري، ونحن غير مدربّات، بعد على الاسترجال. لا ينفع هنا، الجهاد للحفاظ على الأموثة. انت إما جنديّ أو جارية.

[Everything around us was rough and (hyper) masculine and we were not trained up (pl. fem) yet to act like men. It was of no use here to do jihad for femininity. You (s.f.) are either soldier or slave-girl].

(Kachachi 2009, 31)

This passage in Arabic engages tropes of masculinity and femininity in multiple ways. The army is shown as hyper-masculine and the interpreters as all feminine amid “not-trained-up” (ibid) to deal with military masculinity’s roughness. At the same time, “femininity” is situated with "الجهاد" [al-jihād], a word associated with (masculinised) Islamic holy war as a potential fight against the onslaught of US hyper-masculinity. Here we see any attempt to “do jihad” (ibid) for their version of femininity would locate the women interpreters in the US army within Orientalist tropes of Arab women - “slave-girls”, spoils of the war and having no personal or symbolic agency. In this sense, this passage shows Arab women interpreters unable to transcend a pre-Orientalised neo-colonial location. So here their choices offered to the women interpreters are presented as starkly binary – you either become one of us, or one of them (jihadists), an echo of post-2001 US-state political discourses which described the War on Terror as a Crusade and a test of different stakeholders’ political loyalty to the US (Bush 2001) 42 and its values as a global military power. By working with the army, Zeina shows her growing awareness of women

interpreters having to go through a process of becoming native informant-turned-military-personnel - or an Orientalised spoil of war.

Such an overtly situated articulation of neo-colonial tropes of masculinity and femininity, US men/Arab world women in such binary terms could be read as a parody of what Minh-Ha (1989, 6) termed the triple-bind: women (writers) always viewed through being women, colonised/occupied and racialized in neo-colonial contexts. Minh-Ha subsequently commented (1995) that by exposing the premises of ‘triple-bind’ trope as circular, self-authorising and thus transformable, a woman can locate and write her double/triple bind differently, in-between, within and despite racialized neo-colonial frames of patriarchy: “She knows she is being different while at the same time being Him. Not quite the Same, not quite the Other, she stands in an undetermined threshold place where she constantly drifts in and out” (1995, 218). With this formulation in mind, I read this passage similarly: Zeina is writing her apparent assimilation into the US army as a parodic choice and refusal of identity binaries, showing (self) awareness of herself as not the Same as the US army, but not Other to it either as she works within its machinations. This passage shows how Arab women interpreters are co-opted in advance within US-frames of war by choosing to be part of the army - that is, their performance of their role becomes part of the instruments in the US war on terror. The translators engaged with this passage on the charged and gendered agency of interpreters as follows:

Everything around us was rough and masculine but we hadn’t been trained yet to act like men. It was pointless here to attempt to hang onto your femininity. You were either a soldier or a call girl.

(Hutchins 2009)
Everything around us was rough and masculine and we weren’t yet trained to be macho. But it wouldn’t do to cling on to femininity. Here you were either a soldier or a concubine. (Youssef 2011, 25)

Both translators avoided the post-2001 connotations of Islamic ‘jihad’ juxtaposed with tropes of femininity. Hutchins (2009) translated the word "الجهاد" [al-jihād] as “attempt” whereas Youssef elided the term altogether. What Youssef emphasises is the slightly negative connotations of the Arabic term "الاسترجال" [istirjāl] which means “to act like a man” (Wehr 1994, 329) by translating the word as “macho,” which Hutchins does not. In Arabic, جارية [jāriyya] meaning ‘slave-girls’, starkly shows the Arab women translators forced to ally themselves to one of two patriarchal extremes: a soldier or a concubine, that is, in Arabic "انت اما جندي او جارية" [you are either a soldier or a concubine] (ibid). Youssef chooses the word “concubine” (2011, 24), so keeping Kachachi’s purposefully binary and historically-situated Islamic/Crusader patriarchal/feminised, invader/invaded connotations. Hutchins uses the more contemporary “call-girl” (Hutchins 2009), meaning, in US contexts, a sex worker who runs her own business by phone as opposed to walking the streets. Aside from differences of autonomy and temporal context, the choice of “call-girl” erases Kachachi’s juxtaposition of the Christian Crusades and the US occupation of Iraq, particularly important in the light of US President George W Bush’s use of “crusade” to describe the US ‘War on Terror’ post- 9/11 attacks.43 The word ‘call-girl’ carries mid-late twentieth century connotations and effectively domesticates the term within quasi-contemporary Anglophone contexts. I could read his relocation as a refusal to link Arab women working for the US army in 2003 to tropes of sexual slavery at times of

male-dominated Empire and war. Yet not engaging with the disturbing “Orientalist” connotations conflicts with Kachachi’s overt use of [جارية] as parody and critique, jarringly and disturbingly connecting past and ongoing colonial contexts of US/Iraq. While Youssef engages with Kachachi’s parodies of masculinities, her political engagement as a translator in this instance is not apparent. I am not suggesting Hutchins or Youssef should have cited any positionality as translators. What I do suggest is that their different ‘transformances’ of the same passage highlight the inherently ethical and politicised nature of translating women in war and Iraq as well as the gendered politicised nature of this novel.

At this point, I find perspectives of feminist translation as useful (counter) readings to consider how to listen to the echoes of two different translators’ agency. Godard (2002, 65) states the woman translator underscores the difference – the differend even – between the contexts of “the original” and the translation. Here we have two translators of the same work. Reading two translations of the same work side by side however could help us detect echoes of different differends by their very similarities and differences to each other. Such a side-by-side reading could partially expose, as termed by Kim Wallmach (2006, 4) as “what is usually suppressed, namely in the infinity of possibilities, the free play of meanings.” In view of the neo-colonial masculinist power relations the (Arabic) novel is trying to subvert, the differences in translator interventions are potentially important political ‘differends’ for the novel as an English translation.

One example of the importance of considering the differences in each translator’s politic, is the passage where Zeina describes herself getting in the military plane to leave the US for Iraq - her point of (political) no return. I start with contextualising the two English versions with the Arabic version of Zeina’s description:
[For the first time in my life, I climbed into the plane from up its ass because that’s the way the Cargo 17 aircraft opens up from the back. Its trap though, gapes widely like a saw-fish.]

(Kachachi 2009, 38)

These two sentences in Arabic read as a colliding mix of Iraqi Arabic dialect and MSA. First, the dialect term for aircraft "الطيرة" [al-tayyāra] collides with the MSA equivalent for aircraft "طائرات" [ta’irāt] (ibid). The word "بوزها" [būzhā] a dialect word for ‘mouth’ is juxtaposed with the formalised written version of the word ‘wide’ "عريضا" ['aridān] which is conjugated using the MSA object indicator (ibid). Such juxtapositions make the Arabic reader ‘hear’ the ongoing collision of dialect and MSA words in Zeina’s thought processes as well as reading it on the page – a conflict between what she says and thinks (dialect) alongside the formal words she reads (MSA) but doesn’t always write. The most transgressive metaphors in the sentence is "من طيزها" [min tīzā] (ibid). This phrase can mean from the back of something but also means ‘from its ass’ as the word طيز [tīz] is a colloquial Arabic word meaning ‘ass’ or ‘arse.’ Its MSA ‘translation’ - [al-mu’akhara] - corresponds to ‘back-side’ or ‘bottom’ which Kachachi could have but clearly chose not to use, possibly due to the dual meaning of طيز [tīz]. The written presence of طيز [tīz] in Arabic is however shocking in Arabic: first, it is extremely rare to see the word in literary print; second, it creates metaphor of entering aircraft via its ass/arse as well as its ‘back’ to mean interpreters’ point of entry and descent onto Iraqi soil - via the US military machine. With the saw-fish’s mouth evoking the image of a serrated gangway, the translators seem to willingly walk into the mouth of predatory carnivore to be devoured whole by the US military machine and then defecated out. An allusion to the moral status of the translators collaborating with the US military presence in Iraq, this is powerful
political commentary about the underbelly of the US occupation audibly and (in metaphor) evoked through the apparently unconscious thought processes of Zeina. The US army arrives in Iraq under appearances of liberation but with motives and methods mired in political expediency, a reverberation of the epigraph citing the fresh-looking plant growing from filth. Hutchins avoids the metaphorical colloquial terms:

It was the first time in my life that I had climbed into this type of plane. C-17 cargo planes load from the rear and have a broad snout like a fish’s.  

(Hutchins 2009)

The colloquial tone of Zeina’s voice with curse-words is not only dislocated but subsumed altogether into an almost manual-like description of the military aircraft. The layers of political commentary in the Arabic become a neutral description of Zeina getting into the aircraft. Moreover, by translating the Arabic word كوسج [saw-fish] simply as “fish”, Hutchins removes the predatory metaphor of the military aircraft. Perhaps Hutchins believed the mouth of a ‘saw-fish’ (fig. 2) implies a thinner razor-edged gangway which does not reflect what the wide back of a Cargo-17 looks like (fig. 1). If so, Hutchins is attesting what he sees not what Kachachi writes- Zeina thinking to herself as seeing – a predatory mouth of a carnivorous fish. What Hutchins translates in effect, is a sanitised “surface” image of translators an US army aircraft destined for Iraq.

(fig. 1): Cargo-17 aircraft loading up at the back

(fig. 2): Saw-fish


Youssef (2011), in contrast, translates the passage as:

For the first time in my life I boarded a place from its backside. For that’s how the C-17 opens, from behind. Its mouth is wide like the jaws of a shark.

(2011, 29)

Youssef (2011, 29) engages with the predatory fish metaphor but removes both the crudeness of Arabic word for ‘ass’ and its political critique by using the more genteel word “backside.” Her translation of “saw-fish” as “like jaws of a shark” (ibid) however shows a creative engagement with the appearance of the back entrance to a C-17 aircraft (fig. 1) and the disturbing audible associations of *Jaws*, a series of disaster films about sharks well-known to many US readerships. Youssef’s refusal to engage with the Arabic word for ‘ass’ does not seem to be due to her reticence with using colloquial swear words for shock value. For example, later in the novel, Zeina tells a fellow interpreter who had his photo taken with the US Minister of Defence “You can put it in your ass” (2009, 161). This sentence appears in English in the Arabic version. Youssef supplements the English sentence more forcefully in English translation as “You can stick it up your ass” (2011, 146). Youssef also engages creatively with dialect words of the army interpreters left alone in the army-base. She supplements: "هاي شلون ورطة؟...هاي وينهم؟...وين جايبنا ونسون؟" [What sort of mess is this? Where are they? Where have they brought us and forgotten us] (2009, 44) as “‘What kind of mess is this?’ ‘Where the fuck are they?’ ‘They just brought us here and forgot about us?’”(2011, 35). Youssef’s word choice concerning the C-17 thus does not seem to be an aversion to translating crude language. It could be a result of her missing the political reverberations of the epigraph about the verdant plant growing from filth, which she did not translate literally. In other words, she simply didn’t hear its politics of critique, and thus the shock it could evoke and so gently passed it over.
In view of the political connotations of this passage, I find perspectives of feminist translation on the ethics of shock are useful to discuss here. Translator choice to engage audiences with shocking language for political effect and consciousness-raising has been debated at length within Quebec scenes of feminist translation since the early 1990s (Flotow 2009, 2). In these cases, however the debates concern a translator engaging with shock in contexts of translation for her/his own feminist purposes. A frequently cited example is Linda Gaboriau’s translation of the line “Ce soir j’entre dans l’histoire sans relever ma jupe” in the feminist play Les nefs de sorcières (1975) by Nicole Brossard as “Tonight I am entering history without opening my legs” (c.f. Flotow 1991, 69). Her decision to ramp up the shock value was supported by Brossard herself but raised many questions on the ethics of translation as activist rewriting. Rosemary Arrojo (1994) asks how far can a translator re-write a text without re-enacting patriarchal writing praxes? Simon (1996) however suggests that it could be enough to be “upfront” and go ahead anyway (1996, 36). The issue of ‘rights’ is a charged one in translation and particularly salient in the case of this novel. Hutchins has copyright of his translation – which means he has rights over it and where he posts it. His version’s cost-free availability online is thus potentially more accessible to wider audiences than Youssef’s hardcopy version which entails risk. For if the online reader has no access to the Arabic version or Youssef’s version, Hutchins’ own terms “born prostitute” and “call girl” (2009, ibid) for example could be attributed to Kachachi herself, misrepresenting the novel’s political critique as well as the political paratexts of Kachachi, a writer known for her historical solidarity with women in her literary projects. As my previous example has shown, Kachachi’s forceful critique of the US instruments of war as sources of destruction is also mitigated by Hutchins’ version. In this light we see visibility of representation does not equate to equitable authority between writer and translator here – the translational representation is shown as not only as lacking, but as (silently) remiss in presenting Kachachi’s (gendered) politics of writing.
3.6: The politics of c/overt (re)location of different women’s voices

Such questions of translator (self) location in the translated text raise questions about the aim of Youssef’s translation: why does she engage with some aspects of the novel’s critique and not others? I focus the next section of this chapter solely on Youssef’s translation strategies for two reasons, one, she makes interesting linguistic engagements in chapters not translated by Hutchins and two, US critical receptions solely focus their critique on Youssef’s English translation and her engagements with the Arabic novel, reflecting their (US) critical sense of shared author and translator location in the translated text. For example, Arabic literature critic Marcia Lynx-Qualey (2010) praises “the lovely job Nariman Youssef does with Kachachi’s often-lush sentences,” particularly Youssef’s engagements with the Mosuli Iraqi accent. She balks, however, at the mix of UK and US vocabulary in Youssef’s translation. Citing the sentence “I opened [my lunch box] and found a sandwich, a bag of crisps, a Coke and a cookie” (Youssef 2011, 30), Lynx-Qualey also states: “the poor brain falters in the face of an American saying ‘crisps’ unless he or she is doing a Monty Python impression.”

By focussing on the (few) instances of dissonances between US/UK register, she seem to make light of the novel’s importance as a new addition to Iraqi women’s literature in English translation. She also does not mention Youssef’s adroit engagements with the novel’s representations of the Iraqi grandmother, one of the most important personnages of the Arabic novel. As subsequent commentary on the English version of this novel is scarce, I thus explore the relocation the novel’s polyphonic authorships in Youssef’s translation by focusing on two aspects of two gendered identities: Zeina’s relationship with her Mosuli Iraqi/US Detroit identities and

the presence of her Iraqi Mosuli grandmother alongside an omniscient Iraqi woman author when she tries to write her own diary of her experiences in Iraq.

Throughout the novel, Zeina rails against an unnamed Iraqi woman author who seems to be a figment of her imagination. Zeina expresses resentment at their relationship being “a duet forced to play on one piano. She [the author] wants us to type together – four hands and twenty fingers” (2011, 26). The following excerpt creates a cleft in any semblance of unity in authorship: first, between Zeina and the author; second between readerships thus alluding to “hidden” currents of conflict underlying what we can “hear” as the “surface” voice of the novel, the novel become a para/texts of its own para/text:

لكنه تاريخي من قبل ان اولد وانا سليلته وصاحبة الحق فيه مهما بدات غريبة وناكرة له. فهل تظن تلك الكاتبة الغشيمة انني ساتخلى لها عن ارثي حتى ولو كان وطنية مهلهلة لم تعد تنفع في شيء...

[But it [Iraq] is my history before I was born, I am its descendant and I have a right to own it, however strange (foreign) and abhorrent I may appear to it [Iraq]. Does that naive woman writer think I will give over my inheritance to her even if it is worn out nationalism no longer of use for anything].

(Kachachi 2009, 28)

It’s my history, whether I like it or not. It was mine before I was born. I am its legitimate child, no matter how foreign I may seem. How dare she, that gullible writer, think I’ll just hand over my inheritance to her, even if that inheritance is nothing but a tattered piece of nationalism?

(Youssef 2011, 28)

This excerpt situates Zeina’s position (in the US army) as a product of Iraq’s own history. Zeina’s sense of political and cultural hybridity emerges as at odds with unified notions of Iraqi identity. Youssef’s translation shows Zeina and her writing itself as inherently unstable, a work of her and others’ (repeated) self-construction. Youssef (2011, 28) translates "غريبة وناكرة" [gharībatān wa nākirtān] (Kachachi 2009, 28) as one word,
“foreign,” thus leaving out the negative sense of "ناكر" [nākira] which means “abhorrent” and “ungrateful” in Arabic (Wehr 1994, 1171). Youssef’s most radical shift is supplementing the passage with the exegesis of “whether I like it or not” (2011, 28). This reconfigures agency of Iraq’s history as a more symbiotic relationship between Zeina and those who would prefer to write (Iraq’s) history without her discomforting presence in it. This shift configures Zeina’s choice to serve in the US army as part of Iraq’s history (Iraqi Ba’athist persecution causing her family to seek exile in the US) playing out inside and outside its geographical borders alongside other political agents (i.e. the US and its post-2001 War on Terror) with unexpected, ‘abhorrent’ effects. Youssef’s translation of this passage effectively writes Zeina’s performance of agency as relocated - no longer fighting to be part of Iraq’s history but accepting – whether she likes it or not – she is a part of it. Youssef also shifts the terms of reference of Iraqi “worn out nationalism” by removing the phrase "لا تعد تنفع في شيء" (Kachachi 2009, 28) which translates as ‘no longer of use for anything.’ As Youssef effectively elides nationalism being framed as useless, it seems that three not two pairs of hands are on Zeina’s keyboard - Youssef’s along with Zeina’s and the writer she fears. For the English reader, the story reads as told by Zeina or ‘the writer’ – via Youssef. In the English version, Youssef’s supplementation would be readable as Zeina’s and/or the woman writer’s, be she the omniscient author or Kachachi herself, as Youssef ‘conceals’ or makes no overt reference to her presence. Her c/overt changes are in effect a mise-en-abime, a representation of the work within the work (Dällenbach 1989) blurring what (and who) constitutes the inside/outside of this work’s telling. Youssef’s subtle changes are only seen when read comparatively alongside the Arabic translation.

The audible presence of Zeina’s Iraqi relatives, however, makes itself heard in Arabic and English as a very audible para/text. Their Mosuli dialect reverberates through/Despite
both registers of authority, MSA and English, one example arising when Zeina’s aunt spontaneously and affectionately greets Zeina at her grandmother’s funeral:

قالت بلهجة موصولية تقلب الراء غينأ
-منو؟ زينة بنت بتول؟ أيمني جيتي من بغأ؟ تعي شمتيوكى دبسوكى....

Transliteration: [ Qālat bi lahja mūsūlīa taqlab al-rā’ ghaynan [She said in a Mosuli accent which switches the ‘r’ to ‘gh’] “Minū? Zīna, bint Betūl? Aymtā jīṭī mn baghā? t’aī shammītūkī dabūskī…” ].

(2009, 190)

The Mosuli accent is transcribed so its sounds are ‘heard’ by the Arabic reader as well as “read” and then explained in MSA, (the effect of which I have tried to render through transliteration). This means the ‘r’ or الراء sound in Arabic is switched to ‘gh’ or غ (the ghayn sound) in Arabic. The spoken feminine is also foregrounded as Mosuli second person feminine address is written as "تعي شمتيوكى دبسوكى..." [t’aī shammītūkī dabūskī] (2009, 190). This second person feminine address is written in less formal settings such as social media messages either in Arabic or a mixture of Latin letters and numerals (Abu Elhija 2014). In MSA, however, adding a ك [kī] ‘looks’ and is grammatically incorrect - a visual sense of dissonance on the printed page, mitigated by how it sounds – authentic Mosuli dialect spoken between and to women who can hear it. The overtly gendered dissonance contrasts with c/overt dissidence of the Arabic title الحفيدة الأمريكية [al- ḥafīda al-āmūrkiyya’], whose effect is subtle, almost undetectable at first reading. At the funeral, however, the Mosuli dialect overtly presents as audible comfort to Zeina who can now only ‘hear’ echoes of her grandmother’s voice when she hears the Mosuli accent spoken by other women. By making the dialect written as apparent, Zeina is transcribing two echoes: her grandmother and the moment of comfort from the aunt addressing her directly in the Mosuli Iraqi feminine. Writing these Mosuli expressions of care in MSA would only stifle the localised feminine echoes. Youssef thus renders this excerpt as:
Then in a heavy Mosul accent that rolled the “r” she said, “Who? Zeina? Batoul’s daughterrrr? When did you arrrrrive from arrorroad? Come herrrre, my dearrr, and let me kiss you!”

(2011, 174)

In the absence of feminine form of address for “you” in English, Youssef opted for a slightly generational form of feminised address: “my dearr”. The very letter the Mosuli relatives do not pronounce in Arabic ‘r’ becomes the letter foregrounded in English to make Mosuli ‘seen’ as a distinct accent yet ‘heard’ differently. This accent visibility technique has been used by Arabic translator Marilyn Booth (Booth 2007). This technique foregrounds Arabic accents as visibly and audibly distinct. Far from stereo-typing what Arabic accents sound like in English the translator carries out this foreignizing technique for distinct and at times political effects – first, to avoid flattening the dynamic effect of different Arabic registers colliding with/ alongside MSA on the printed page and two, to highlight the poly-glossia in the MENA regions where each speaker marks their location in Arabic and other MENA language/s (and is marked) by localised and socially situated modes of speech. The difference between Booth’s and Youssef’s technique is that Booth reproduces the same sounds by using English transliterations. In Rajaa Alsanea’s novel Girls of Riyadh (2005, 17) one protagonist exclaims "شيز سو كورفي!" [shīz sū kūrfī], which means what it sounds like: ‘she’s so curvy.’ Booth renders the phrase in English translation as “sheez soo kiyirvy” (Booth 2007, 204), thus highlighting the cross-border permutations of English spoken by affluent constituencies of Saudi women as a performance of their diaglossic hybridity and cosmopolitan lifestyle (ibid, 204). Booth’s strategy resonates with mimetic approaches to feminist translation which “focuses on sound and on sound connections, and mimics/renders the sound of the source text, rather than its semantic meaning,” (Flotow 2004, 93). While Booth’s technique works to audibly replicate “Arabenglish” (Booth 2007, 205) to be ‘heard’ as it is spoken in Arabic in English
translation, Youssef’s strategy differs in that she works to show Mosuli Iraqi Arabic spoken differently but without replicating the same sounds in English.

A brief return to notions of ‘mimetic’ feminist translation helps us understand Youssef’s engagement with this translation. As stated previously, ‘mimetic’ feminist translations audibly perform, rather than semantically explain, the meaning of the source texts by showing language’s performative potential which echoes within (and despite) patriarchal language structures (Godard 1995, 71). Its purpose is to communicate an experience of language (Flotow 2004, 93) rather than a surface rendering. Youssef does not use English letters to transliterate Mosuli dialect as performing the changes from “r” to “gh” (2009, 190). By exaggerating the “r” (the letter not pronounced in Mosuli Iraqi Arabic), the risk of this strategy is that Youssef could be misread as perpetrating stereotypes of how some Arabic speakers pronounce English (Booth 2007, 205), including the letter “r.

Alongside notions of mimetic feminist translation, I find Kolias’ listening-translator technique offers useful insights to Youssef’s decision-making. Kolias (1990) frames the translator as listening to the cadences of the source text then attesting to the cadences s/he hears by “re-territorialising” them (Kolias 1990, 214) into the text, as part of her attestation to her praxis of listening to the first text and how it could ‘sound’ in translation. Crucially, the translator shows her/his intervention by attesting to what s/he thinks the target reader is realistically able to hear of the sounds from the source text (1990, 217). Kolias’ distinction between source and target reader listenings crucially creates a space where the listening translator renders the source cadences as audible, but differently audible in target language translation. From this “listening” perspective, Youssef’s creative engagements with Iraqi women’s Mosuli speech thus show Mosuli dialect rendered and overt in non-Arabic translation, albeit sounding different.
The switch from ‘r’ to ‘gh’ is not surprising. If Youssef had rendered the passage as: ‘Who? Zeina? Batoul’s daughtegh? When did you aghive from aghoud? Come heghe my deagh and let me kiss you!’ its political audible effect in Arabic would still be incomprehensible. It would not show the cadences of Mosuli dialect colliding against MSA Arabic but rather would show them colliding against English which was not the political intent of the novel in Arabic. In Arabic, Mosuli dialect sounds resistant, feminine-focussed yet comprehensible. Visually, its alternative spellings look ‘wrong,’ deviate from and overwrite MSA while interweaving through it. For this point, how Mosuli accent sounds in English translation is, in my view, less significant than its overt and present re-location in the text. The translation shows Youssef attesting to her role as Mosuli-English (via MSA letters) translator, where she is trying to mirror the Mosuli-MSA translator (whoever she is) in the Arabic version. I use the word ‘mirroring’ purposefully. A comparative reading shows that Youssef clearly is the Mosuli-English translator. In Arabic, the ‘real’ Mosuli-MSA translator could be Zeina, the unknown Iraqi author or Kachachi herself. Korias (1990) states listening translation is “the possibilities that have revealed themselves to the translator in the course of working closely with it” (1990, 217). I thus read Youssef’s engagement with the novel’s politics of (Arabic) language location as mirroring the novel’s disingenuous engagements with the possibility of being mediated by multiple aut/her/ships. In this way, we could read Youssef’s intervention as a riff on the c/overt politics of multiple authorships in the Arabic – an audibly c/overt, extra pair of hands playing Zeina’s piano.

If Youssef’s foregrounding of the Mosuli dialect makes her c/overt politics of MSA engagement more audible, questions arise on how she engaged with the third register of language used in the Arabic novel - US English - as the language into which she is translating. How is the US presence seen and heard in Arabic rendered in English translation? Why, in a novel about Iraq by a writer resolute in her Iraqiness such as
Kachachi would the US register in English be important? Precisely because the novel represents any sense of (Iraqi) identity is, largely, individual to and by each person. Zeina’s presence is so disturbing (to her grandmother and other Iraqis) due to Zeina’s sense of American status developed outside of Iraqi’s geographical borders shot through with a reluctant sense of Iraqiness: “I couldn’t be anything but American. My Iraqiness had abandoned me long ago…I tried to be both but failed” (2011, 163). The Arabic version nonetheless shows the language of America, the language of the US occupiers as sounding and looking ‘alien’ and foreign to Iraq and the novel’s Arabic script. Phrases such as “Mam, they will take you” (2009, 58), “Sure go ahead” (2009, 67) and “Do you speak English” (2009, 108) show the banal and violent interactions of US army, such as raids on Iraqis’ houses (2009, 106) as tersely alike. In the Arabic version, Zeina writes herself exclaiming “Oh my God!” (2009, 67) and cruder phrases like “Fuck you” (2009, 130) and “Put it in your ass” (2009, 161), in English script, two visually different scripts bumping along next to each other, with US army-speak echoing as imperative and crude. At times, Zeina also writes herself as ventriloquizing English words through transliterated Arabic: for example, her reply to a sergeant as “Yes Sir” is written as "يس سير" [yis sīr] (2009, 59) in Arabic. She writes how her surname "بهمام" [bahnām] is mis/pronounced as "بهنام" [bahnāyyam] by North American twang (2009, 30). As the US English speech of the US army pervades the post-2003 Arabic frames of the book as unwelcome interruptions, I consider now how instances of US American intrusions pervade and bump along the English language version - the language of the new target readership.

From the outset of the novel, we do not hear a Detroit accent when we read the novel in English. We learn that Zeina left Iraq as a young adolescent and lived in Seven Mile, Detroit. Zeina spends her time with friends from Arab backgrounds (2011, 14) and speaks Arabic with her father (ibid). This explains why her spoken US English accent could be
inflected with Arabic register if heard. Zeina also expresses doubts over who is really authoring or ‘duetting’ her book (her Iraqi grandmother and the silent Iraqi author) which intimate why Zeina’s tone does not echo with an overt US register. While Zeina’s doubt suggests that her register may be a cipher of someone else’s, it does not explain the appearance of UK English words which puzzled the US reviewers in their otherwise positive reviews of Youssef’s translation (Lynx-Qualey 2010). Concerning the sentence, “I opened [my lunch box] and found a sandwich, a bag of crisps, a Coke and a cookie” (2011, 30), one reviewer on Lynx-Qualey’s blog wrote, “If she found a bag of “crisps”, I would think they’d be accompanied by ‘biscuits’ rather than ‘cookies’” (Lynx-Qualey 2010)48. Other UK English words also jar Zeina’s expected North American register: she uses “mobile” (2011, 9) instead of ‘cell-phone’; “cleaner” (2011, 23) instead of ‘janitor.’ The only attributable reason for any UK register is Youssef as the “Notes on the Translator” end-page cite that Youssef “lives and works between Egypt and the UK” (2011, 183). This note however is the only reference to UK in the whole novel.

From the novel’s paratextual information, we do not know if US/US mix was Youssef’s decision or her editor/s.’ Intentional or otherwise, the presence of overtly UK words creates a political effect: a barrier preventing (US) readers hearing Zeina as ‘fully’ American, however ‘American’ is understood to be. This barrier could be read in two (political) ways a) mixing UK with US registers makes Zeina sound ‘foreign’ and reiterates stereotypes of first generation migrants not ‘sounding’ and being fully North American or b) creating resistance to a sense of ‘transparent’ US English register, which in contexts of Arab women’s literature in translation could be read as a stand against what Booth (2010,

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terms “Orientalist ethnographicism”. By this term, Booth (2010, 210) refers to: “a way of seeing and writing the Other that grounds authority in a written narrative of personal experience, ‘capturing’ a society through the I/eye; and furthermore, claiming the authority of graphing the text in a global (and globalizing) language of reception, which is today predominantly English”. In other words, while the text is translated (i.e. US domesticated), the translatedness of the text is kept invisible to facilitate the illusion of ‘authenticity’ and ‘transparency’ in the reader’s mind. The reader then expects from the text not only a confirming tale of ‘the Arab woman’s’ personal experience but also to vicariously “experience” it themselves (ibid). This vicarious eye/I then, confers upon ‘the reader’ the authority to comment upon (and possibly appropriate) this ‘experience.’ As Zeina makes clear to the writer, Zeina resists anyone appropriating her eye/I and claiming her experience, including ‘the unknown (Iraqi woman) writer.’

Youssef like Zeina, however, appears to ‘change her coat’ or transform her (and thus Zeina’s eye/I) at different junctures in the novel. At times, she amplifies Zeina’s US political critique by compensating for her apparent deficit in US political knowledge. In one example, Zeina explains to her Iraqi family in Detroit about how the US army sees its role in Iraq: 

"بدأ يبني كل شيء من الصفر...من الصفر."

[It started to build everything from zero...from zero] (2009, 165). Youssef subtly supplements the sentence as follows: “[the US army] started building everything from zero. On ground zero.” (2011, 150). Youssef c/overtly juxtaposes the post-2001 War on Terror with the US-state public discourse of ‘saving’ Iraq by its reconstruction efforts, while eliding the US role in the war which contributed to Iraq’s destruction in the first place. By amplifying the para/text underpinning the premise of 2003 US military intervention in Iraq in this instance, Youssef thus ‘helps’ Zeina subvert the moral imperative of the US occupation of Iraq by exposing the real location of the US invasion of Iraq: the site of the 9/11 attacks on the US. Zeina does not
read as saying this in Arabic – although with her joining the US army as a knee-jerk reaction to 9/11 events in the first place, she may well have said it in Arabic if she had had to hand the political-linguistic terms of reference available to most US citizens. Youssef’s translator location infuses Zeina’s political agency with political punch which amplifies for the reader of the English version to gauge a sense of Zeina’s political location while helping Zeina over-ride the (non-US) Iraqi woman writer, invisibly with strong political effect.

Youssef also covertly sabotages Zeina’s political agency in English translation. The most striking example is when Zeina refers to the song “Tie a Yellow Ribbon ‘Round the Ole Oak Tree,” a song, as Zeina explains, which transformed the symbolism of the yellow ribbon: first as a symbol of political solidarity with the 1980 US hostage crisis with Iran and now to show solidarity with US soldiers in Iraq (2011, 159). In Arabic, Zeina writes herself as looking up different references of the song on the internet. She cites her most important reference (2009, 177) as the satirical US song “Stick Your Magnetic Ribbon on your SUV” by the Asylum Street Spankers, cited by blogger Kevin Wood as “an attempt by Austin, Texas to compensate the rest of the world for George W. Bush.”49 The song is shown as "اربط شريطاً ممغنطاً إلى سيارتك الرياضية" (2009, 177), in Zeina’s internet search in Arabic - literally “tie a magnetic ribbon to your sports car.” Youssef translates the song’s title exactly as it appears in US English - “Stick [not ‘tie’] your [not ‘a’] Magnetic Ribbon on your SUV [not ‘sports car’].” The group Asylum Street Spankers is described by Zeina, as "These are a group of Black American singers." (2009, 177) [They are a group of Black American singers]. Zeina describing the Asylum Street Spankers as ‘Black American’ in Arabic intimates Zeina’s sense that US-based opposition to the war in Iraq intersects African-American peoples’ experiences of oppression at the hands of the US white settlers invading,

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killing and exploiting different peoples to prop up a (white-led) US neo/colonial empire. The YouTube video supposedly watched by Zeina is indeed a political parody of white US state-sponsored imperialism. However, the singers in the video do not appear to be African-American.\textsuperscript{50} Growing up in multi-cultural Detroit, it is unlikely Zeina with Detroit would make such a basic culturally situated mistake. Here however she writes as precisely doing so in the Arabic version, although her ‘mistake’ interestingly locates African-American music as a site of (post-2003) cross-border, cross-constituency political solidarity as have done other Iraqi writers already, such as Saad Simawe (2004) cited earlier.

Youssef’s engagement with the English translation is striking as she could have chosen to elide the reference to African American musicians. Instead, Youssef literally renders Zeina’s train of thought as: “a satirical cover…by the African-American band Asylum Street Spankers” (2011, 160). She is, as Kachachi presumably is, illustrating cross-border solidarity between different constituencies of politically marginalised or “subalternised” groups while at the same time risking ‘Zeina’ reading as uninformed, at least for readerships with knowledge of the Asylum Street Spankers. By exposing this slippage of localised US cultural knowledge, Youssef risks exposing Zeina’s political agency as what Zeina fears all along (2011, 28): that she is a cipher, prop and a shield for an omniscient (unnamed) Iraqi woman writer’s own political critique. If Zeina presents herself as ‘American,’ the US cultural inaccuracies can only be attributed to another (Iraqi woman) writer. While this dissonance may jar the premises of (US) readers’ vicarious identification with Zeina as a ‘real’ Iraqi US citizen, this slippage conversely shows something of Kachachi’s politics of building lines of cross-constituency solidarity in Arabic to these US readers in sharper relief than it does, perhaps in the Arabic version.

Combined however, the slightly foreignizing presence of UK words, the highly foreignised Mosuli Arabic and the mis/locations of US cultural references co-create a para/textual location in English from which US readerships must read and listen to the novel. Readers have to read the novel as a translation. In other words, this novel is not a story about Iraq narrated by a US citizen in transparent (US) English. However, there is no reference to anyone “translating” apart from Zeina. While Zeina accuses the writer and her grandmother of trying to take over her novel, the unexplained UK English register and US cultural mis/representations also open questions on Youssef’s echo in this para/text. After all, Youssef is not tasked to reproduce the audio effects of another source (English) dialect or accent alongside US English. There are no UK troops, for example, fighting alongside the US troops in this novel. If we understand “mimetic” translation as communicating the echoes of a source text mise-en-abime and its multiple (off-shoots of) meaning usually shut off from conventional translation (Wallmach 2006, 4), we could read the UK register as differently and covertly mimetic. In the Arabic version, US English is rarely heard as anyone’s first frame of reference. Youssef mimetically attests to what the Arabic attests to: for the US to ‘go into’ Iraq, the US needs interpreters like Zeina. To ‘go into’ the novel, US readerships need an Arabic-English translator like Youssef. Like Zeina, Youssef translates and like Zeina, she does not give the seamless translation expected. Intentional or not, Youssef’s mixing of UK and US English is a constant jarring mimetic reminder that English is a language of translation in this work. With its jar of US cultural references, the English of novel makes ‘heard; that it was first written by as an Iraqi woman author, whose main frames of reference are Iraq, not the US.

Having discussed the audible presence/s of Zeina and Youssef, I conclude my analysis with an exploration of the audible presence of “the omniscient Iraqi woman writer” and the predicate of Zeina’s granddaughter status, her Iraqi grandmother, Rahma. For the
only time the Iraqi women writer appears to ‘speak’ in the novel is when she explains the ‘real’ author of Zeina’s story: “It’s not me who’s writing. It’s Rahma. Haven’t you figured that out yet?” (2011, 90). Rahma is ashamed that her granddaughter’s long-awaited homecoming will be clothed in the garb of US army uniform (2011, 71), particularly as her husband, Zeina’s grandfather had served in the Iraqi army in the early years of Iraqi independence. As counter-resistance to her granddaughter’s origins being tampered with in exile, she sets out to remind Zeina of her Iraqi family history to shame her into leaving the US army. Through her stories, we find out about Zeina’s family: her grandfather’s army career under successive Iraqi governments, her mother’s marriage to an Assyrian against the wishes of her family, the life-long friend Tawoos and her two ‘milk’ brothers Haydar and Muhayman, the latter with whom Zeina falls in love. After seeing her granddaughter still in ‘American clothes and riding a tank” after sharing her family history (2011, 171), Rahma drinks a full bottle of arak and dies literally of shame (ibid). After the funeral, the novel ends with Zeina leaving Iraq, making a Christian oath never to forget Baghdad (2011, 180) which in effect means that, she is fulfilling her late grandmother’s wishes.

I refer to the ambiguous relationality between the grandmother, the unknown ‘Iraqi woman writer’ and Zeina as the motif of MSA ciphering the Iraqi grandmother’s speech is what was noted and acclaimed by the Arabic language reviews. These reviews foreground the grandmother, rather than Zeina, as the ‘star’ of the novel. One (unnamed) Arabic online reviewer cites the Iraqi grandmother in categorically iconic terms:

[She will enter alongside the Iraqi literary hall of fame, alongside have the women (in the novels) of Fu’ad Al-Takarli, Gha’ib Tu’amat Farman and other Iraqi novelists who have created paradigms of unforgettable Iraqi women protagonists.]51

It is the colloquial Mosuli dialect of her generation which makes the grandmother distinctive for Iraqi Arabic readers as she speaks in localised phrases only used by Iraqi women born at the end of the Ottoman era – such as “tarbiya siz” (2009, 64) a Mosulised version of an old Turkish insult (2011, 182). Importantly although she speaks, Rahma herself does not write which explains for Zeina the relationality between her, her grandmother and the Iraqi woman writer, and the potential materiality of the novel itself as inter-semiotically shared: “my grandmother wanted me to inherit her memory. And the writer was happy with the decision because it served her novel…They merged until I couldn’t tell them apart” (2011, 91). The grandmother speaks, the writer listens and thus ciphers the personage of Zeina to write her story. The act of writing emerges as a necessary but limited tool for recording the embodied audible materiality of the grandmother’s voice: “noble work…but it also had the power to bend the truth…Even my grandmother feared what the writer was doing…Paper was incapable of conveying the hoarseness in her voice or the heat in her breath” (2011, 91). Zeina and Youssef, then, are not the only translators in this novel: the (Iraqi woman) writer is translating Rahma, and Rahma appears to be translating the moral agency of the woman writer. The chapter ends with one woman addressing another in somewhat allegorical, uncanny terms:

تعالي هنا. لا تذهبي. أعيد تشغيل الكمبيوتر. لا تقاطعني في الكلام. [Come here, don’t go. Start the computer again. Don’t interrupt my words.]

(2009, 104)

I use the word ‘uncanny’ because the ambiguity of which woman is ordering another woman in this particular sentence is emblematic of the ambiguity of authorship location underpinning this novel. As the woman writer is established as ‘ventriloquizing’ the Iraqi grandmother’s speech, all definitive sense of who is writing, transcribing and reading as writing becomes extremely blurred. Youssef reads at times as invisibly transcribing the
Zeina/writer/grandmother triangulation. Youssef also at other points subtly (re)locates or ‘reclothes’ the novel’s writer moral agency (and disrupts it) via translation:

[So, my grandmother looks for a direct channel between her memory and my conscience without the (woman) author interfering.] (2009, 103)

What my grandmother was after was a direct channel from her memory into my consciousness without the writer’s mediation. (2011, 91)

As the word "ضميري" [damīrī] literally means “my conscience” (Wehr 1994, 637) in Arabic, this sentence performs the grandmother using the writer to forge a link between her own memory, Zeina’s conscience and Zeina’s presence in the US army. In this sense, her grandmother uses her own memory is a weapon to ‘fight’ Zeina’s political affiliation to the US army without its power being diluted or distorted by the “mediation” of the woman writer. In the English version, the triangulation shifts. Youssef shifts the word “conscience” to “consciousness,” two words sonorically much closer to each other in English than the Arabic equivalents "الضمير" [al-ḍamīr] (conscience) and "الوعي" [al-waˈt] which means “consciousness”(Wehr 1994, 1268). Indeed, the shift in translation is explainable by the closeness of the two words in English while they do not mean the same thing. Considered governed by the senses, reasoning, imagination and memory (Vithulkaś and Muresanu 2014, 104), ‘consciousness’ is believed to take place in the brain (ibid, 108). ‘Conscience’ as moral reaction takes the forms of thoughts, words, acts, decisions, expressions of emotion etc (ibid, 108). Overlap of ‘conscience’ and ‘consciousness’ occurs when ‘conscience’ reacts to information received by ‘consciousness’ (ibid). In Arabic, the triangulation between Zeina’s conscience, her US army affiliation and grandmother’s memory is shown as a map to help Zeina’s moral compass find its own way. In English, wanting to channel her memory into Zeina’s “consciousness,” implies that Rahma seeks to
re-programme Zeina’s *thinking* – brain-washing Zeina to change her behaviour. This is not the same as giving Zeina a memory map which *helps* her to make her own moral decisions as implied by the Arabic version. Zeina later repeats the word “غسل دماغي” [brainwashing me] in Arabic (2009, 166) and in English (2011, 151) as she tells her family: “‘Can you believe she concocted a plan with Tawoos and her son Haydar to brainwash me?’” (2011, 151). The shift to ‘consciousness’ echoes what Zeina felt was happening in Arabic all along.

Arguably, whether the grandmother connects her memory to Zeina’s ‘conscience’ and ‘consciousness’, her intention amounts to the same thing: she wants Zeina to leave the US army, regardless of what Zeina feels or thinks herself. Connecting her memory to *conscience*, the grandmother appeals to Zeina’s own sense of right and wrong. Connecting to *consciousness*, she seeks to change Zeina’s thinking to her version of right and wrong. The change of *means* by which the grandmother seeks to effect Zeina’s moral transformation raises questions of the grandmother in English, not in Arabic. Yet we cannot know if Youssef’s re-location of ‘conscience’ as ‘consciousness’ is a purposeful political mimetic overlap or simply that both words sounded similar in meaning. If the latter, I read Youssef attesting to the sonoric overlap between “conscience” and “consciousness”, perhaps precluded by the Arabic version due to the words’ dissimilarity in Arabic. In this sense, her English language shift could attest to what Kolias terms “the possibilities that have revealed themselves to the translator in the course of working closely with it” (1990, 217) – the possibilities of the target text. After all, Youssef found new possibilities in her ‘ground zero’ supplementation. If the shift is due to a purposeful mimetic shift, Youssef has shifted the ambiguous moral agency to the grandmother as well as to Zeina and the Iraqi woman writer in English translation. Her *reasons* for translating moral ambiguity to the Iraqi grandmother (without drawing attention to her own agency) remain unknown and inaudible to the English language reader.
3.7: Conclusion: a paradigm of aural feminist translation

Kolias’ (1990) notion of listening translation situates the translation of source text not as a replica but a “careful reading” (1990, 219) attested to in another language. In configuring the different language registers in the Arabic novel – MSA, Mosuli Iraqi Arabic and US English – as ‘carefully read’ and then undercut by shifting aut-her-ships (or au-their-ships), possible readings and relocations of the Arabic version of the novel into English were shown as inevitably pluralised. This helped me read both translators’ versions of the Arabic novel as attestations of their readings of the shifting aut-her-ships’ which echo or refract an intermeshing of the Arabic and the translators’ different political engagements. Apart from the outside cover blurb asserting Kachachi’s Iraqiness, there is no preface or afterword which situates Kachachi’s position in the novel. The English version has not preface or afterword either. Yet, as this chapter has shown, Nariman Youssef c/overtly creatively attests to her political location alongside Kachachi in the translation through her c/overt re-locations of Kachachi’s Arabic political engagements with religion, gender, spoken Arabic, US English and blurring aut-her-ships. With no explanation for her interventions, however Youssef’s ‘reclthings’ of Zeina’s political engagements can only be read through carrying out a close reading of the Arabic text.

At this point, I found mimetic frameworks of feminist translation crucial to hear what Youssef listened to and reconfigured for (US) English language readers. By understanding translation as performing rather than semantically explaining meaning of a work in translation, Youssef’s translation strategies can be read as highlighting important aspects of the novel’s politics of re-location in English: one, the novel’s ‘audible’ texture is made up of the spoken languages are Mosuli Iraqi Arabic and US English; and two, the book in written English is a translation. Youssef foregrounds the Mosuli Arabic and US army-speak being foregrounded as heard-as-spoken languages and inserts unexpectedly
UK English register words which jar the flow of the novel reading as a ‘transparent’ US English translation. In this way, Youssef is clearing attesting to the possibilities of what a target language audience could hear (Kolias 1990). In this light, the ‘differend’ of the translator emerges as having important, aural and political importance – but without revealing where the translator ‘is.’ The ambivalence of Youssef’s location is not surprising as The American Granddaughter is in itself a story which troubles any expectations of locations per se. Throughout the novel juxtapositions of c/overt moral agencies emerge and abound as reactive spaces arising from the conflicting, bleeding political borders of US-state neo/colonial politics: starting with the post-2001 attacks on New York which bleeds into post-2003 war in Iraq. In his State of the Union address made shortly after the 9/11 attacks, US president George Bush set out the US-led War on Terror on starkly binary terms: “Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists” (Bush 2001). 52 Yet if Zeina stands with the US in Iraq, the country hosting her and her family in exile, she is against the Iraqi people, according to Zeina’s milk brother Muhayman. For her grandmother, Zeina returning to Iraq under the auspices of working for the US army is a betrayal to Iraq’s history. If Zeina articulates disgust towards the US army personel of Abu Ghraib to her army colleagues, her loyalty to the US army is then also put in doubt. To survive war, Zeina learns that overt political identities become c/overt and shifring according to different individuals’ localised experiences and circumstances. The act of translation is thus shown in this novel as intrusive, an act of betrayal, resistant at times to the patron, and always politically located.

As feminist translation focuses on marginalities other than gender as open to question (Flotow 2012) I have sought to listen to, read and question the c/overt

performances of the novel’s gendered political engagements by each translator of this novel. I focused my critique of Hutchins’ work in terms of what his discourses mislocate and who he overwrites. By blurring author/translator hierarchies as para/text in translation helped me highlight Youssef’s subversions and engagements with the novel’s gendered politicised critiques. Intermeshing Kolia’s “listening” and situated translator with mimetic approaches to (feminist) translation helps me question the privileging of particular discursive representations of political translation agency as ‘visible’ and therefore ‘overt.’ Reading political agencies as ‘audible’ show what can be heard (albeit not seen) in this novel as “an echo of the self and the other, a movement into alterity” (Godard 1989, 44). This means that Youssef’s overt engagement with Mosuli Iraqi Arabic and c/overt presencing of UK English echo the novel’s status as a translation of a translation: how its (re)writer/s - the translator included - transcribe and reconfigure how Iraqi Mosuli women, speak in a way to be ‘heard’ by those who cannot ‘hear’ them directly – US American readerships reading this novel post 9/11 and post-2003 war in Iraq. In this light “listening” and “mimetic” approaches help us read c/overt translation strategies as part of the novel’s ongoing التقمص [al-taqammuṣ] or ‘reclothing,’ an audible means of survival in zones of US as well as Iraqi political conflict. Such readings are important avenues of exploring expressions of political agency in political discourses saturated with how Iraqi women are seen to be heard (Winegar 2015), rather than how they are (not) heard (Zangana 2013).

Understanding the novel as comprising of and layered with diffusely located para/texts helps explain reticence of agency on the part of the translators in non-categorical terms. After all, the novel is a fiction, but the 9/11 attacks on New York and the wars in Iraq with their real and devastating material effects are not – and the names of the writer and translator/s remain after the novel ends with Zeina swearing never to forget Baghdad. In this way, audible gendered frameworks of “listening” (Kolias 1990) and “mimetic”
(Flotow 2004) translation help configure *The American Granddaughter* as ‘heard’ attestation mediated by a ‘read’ performance of the charged political locations of translation and writing in post-2003 Iraq. What an aural feminist translation approach cannot establish, however, is a *conscious* politics of audible (translation) alterity. I must ask myself then whether my readings are influenced (or distorted) by factors particular to my reading experience, such as access to both language versions of the novel. Whatever connects an English “translation” to its Arabic version in Iraqi literary contexts, then, still needs to be questioned further to explore the impact and importance of the ‘alterity’ of translation agency in more depth. Notions of ‘alterity’, in my view, raise more questions on who contributes to the multiple aspects of a translated works’ meaning-making, questions which are explored further in the following chapter.
Chapter 4: Translating solidarity among the subaltern: A Sky So Close - Betool Khedairi

4.1: Overview

Despite the heterogeneity of Iraq’s many peoples, ethnicities and religions, one of the most powerful discourses of the 1968-2003 Iraqi state apparatus was its conflation of Iraq, Iraqis and Arabness with Iraqi Ba’athism (Al-Ali and Pratt 2009, ix). Such essentialised notions of Iraqi belonging led to a state programme of Arab Iraqification which resulted in the elimination of many political Ba’athist opposition figures, often by summary executions and radical changes to the ethnic make-up of Iraq in the 1970s. Due to structural, educational and economic changes funded by a rapid rise in state oil revenues, this 1970s era is termed by some (mainly middle-class) Iraqis, as "ايام الخير [ayyām al-khīr]" or ‘The Days of Plenty.’ According to Nadje Al-Ali (c.f. Wing 2013), that middle class Iraqis at times still use ايام الخير [ayyām al-khīr] as a nostalgic frame of reference helps us understand two important aspects of 1968-2003 Iraqi Ba’athist government rule: one, its sheer longevity and two, that it did not rule by repressive force alone. As control of Iraq’s wealth in the 1970s was centred in the Iraqi government and its institutions, Iraq’s prosperity during ايام الخير [ayyām al-khīr] was nonetheless situated in the public sphere within frames of political patronage, rather than citizenship. As observed by Suad Joseph (1991) during her visits to Iraq in the 1970s, “advantages citizens received from the state were represented less as rights of citizenship, and more as the benefits of loyalty to the head of the party and state” (1991, 178). Her observation suggests that any premise of prosperity during ايام الخير [ayyām al-khīr] was, in fact, based on a politics of a citizen

53See: Niblock 1982; Davis 2005; Al-Musawi 2006; Rohde 2010; Sassoon 2012; Khoury 2013.
54See Aziz 2012 re. forced mass re-settlement of Kurdish Iraqis. For the mass deportation of Iraqis of Shia descent in the 1970s and 1980s, see Salih 2013.
conditionally belonging to, rather than having rights and responsibilities within a wealthy
Iraqi state ruled by repressive modes of governance. While Iraqi women writers’ novels
are acclaimed for portraying affiliations between diverse Iraqi identities in differing
contexts of oppression (Ghazoul 2008, 198), Betool Khedairi’s novel *A Sky So Close* (1999/2001) was the first novel by an Iraqi woman writer published in Arabic
and English translation which critically portrays *أيام الخير* as an era shaped
by diverse politics of belonging and oppression from *gendered* perspectives of class, skin
colour and ethnicity. As the first novel in Arabic which puts forward critical representations
of *أيام الخير* from a distinctly retrospective and intersectional perspective, I
explore how this novel’s representations of subaltern identities move (and shift) in English
translation, using analytical frameworks of intersectional feminist translation which
interrogate the ‘alterity’ of translation and the ‘alterity’ of engaging with the (gendered,
geo-political) politics of cross-constituency representation itself (Reimóndez 2017).

Spanning over three decades, the novel titled *A Sky So Close* (1999/2001) is told from the perspective of an unnamed Iraqi girl whose father is Iraqi and
her mother is English. Published in Arabic in 1999, this novel was translated into English
by Khedairi’s uncle, Muhayman Jamil under the title *A Sky So Close* and published by
Syracuse Press in 2001. The story is about the protagonist’s transition from young girl to
adult woman over three distinct eras, the novel beginning in the 1970s and ending after the
1990-1991 Iraq war. The first part about her childhood in the rural village of Al-Zafraniya
in the 1970s begins and ends with her friendship with a local girl Khaddouja who dies of
bilharzia, a water-borne disease caused by parasitic worms. The second part of the novel
is about her life with her family in Baghdad during the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war where she
falls in love for the first time. In the third section, she moves to London with her ailing
English mother and sees the 1990 war in Iraq from satellite screens in London cafés. The
novel ends with her reading about the impact of international sanctions in letters from her friends in Baghdad while she continues to live which Yasmine Bahrani (2002) terms as “the horror of an Iraq in tatters and a middle class in exile.”55 While this story has been read as an emblematic example of how the interlocking oppressions of state become entrenched in the Iraqi public sphere at times of war (Al-Ali 2007; Chandler 2013; Masmoudi 2010; 2015), this novel also raises questions about how social injustices towards particular people in Iraq seem normalised even before the devastating impact of war and sanctions. From the novel’s opening pages, it is clear, for example, that the protagonist’s middle-class experience of rural life in the village contrasts starkly to that of her best friend Khaddouja, a local girl who is "حافية" [barefoot] and has no hope of ever going to school (1999, 9). As an Iraqi-English girl with what she describes as a complexion which is "المبالغة بسُمرتها" (1999, 20) or in English “exaggeratedly dark” (2001, 19) skin complexion, the protagonist also connects briefly to the presence of black Iraqi ethnicity in Iraq through silent, visual and banalised everyday events of colorism and racism: a racist biscuit brand name, a colorist train of thought. The ambivalent position of the main protagonist as a middle-class dark-skinned Iraqi-English girl, at turns, questioning and not questioning such localised events suggests that these representations of marginality in Iraq were mediated to resonate with the novel’s readerships in specific ways. This, in turn, raises questions on how these events of marginality (and potential solidarity) were re-mediated in English translation to different readerships. Such questions are salient in contexts of intersectional feminist translation scholarship concerned with how asymmetrical balances of power and representations of marginalised identities are mediated in and across translation (Castro and Ergun 2018).

To contextualise my focus on how gendered rural and black Iraqi identity is mediated in and between Arabic and English translation of this novel, I first set out the critical contexts of the novel and its reception. I give, then, an overview of why a politics of "الغيرية" [al-ghayriyya] or ‘alterity’ prevalent in Iraqi women’s writing calls for an intersectional feminist translation approach which focuses on asymmetrical tensions of intelligibility within different contexts of translation (Costa 2012; Reimóndez 2017). In the first section, I read how the protagonist’s idyllic childhood in rural Iraq metamorphoses into a dystopic world for the protagonist via its very languages of mediation. In the second section, I focus on how the Arabic version’s mediations of black Iraqi identity seem to silently shift and co-emerge differently in English translation. Throughout this chapter, I consider the re/situated literary representations of Iraqi rural and ethnic ‘alterities’ in the novel from two different perspectives: one, as an importantly conscious engagement with the challenges of mediating different constituencies of Iraqi marginality in differently charged receptions, and two, as starting a conversation on why representations of some Iraqi women in translation ‘read’ as more peripheral than others.


Born in 1965, Betool Khedairi grew up at the time when the Iraqi Ba’athist Party had first come to power in 1963, thus auguring a wider political discourse of pan-Arab nationalism taking root in Iraq. After briefly being deposed in 1963, the Ba’athist party returned to power in 1968 to remain in power until the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. After graduating from the University of Mustansiriya, Baghdad with a degree in French literature in 1986, Khedairi lived between Iraq, Jordan and the UK. After A Sky So Close (2001),

she published her second Arabic novel غائب [Absent] (2004) which was translated as Absent into English in 2005. In an interview with Brigitte Voykowitsch (2003), Khedairi describes her writing as a response to the devastating effects of sanctions on Iraq and as a way of making sense of horrors she could not understand. Although both her novels situate injustice and oppression perpetrated by individuals in localised societies as framed by wider systematic discrimination, Khedairi makes a point of not taking any public position towards the Iraqi government, Ba’athist or otherwise, groups and individuals: “The Iraq in my work is the human Iraq, not only the one of the headlines...My country is bleeding. I will not make negative statements just to prove that I am a liberal intellectual. I search for fairness amidst this chaos.” (c.f. Voykowitsch 2003).57 Her sense of herself as a cultural broker also appears to be a critical political concern for Khedairi based on her own personal experience of translating and living between English and Arabic as the child of an Iraqi father and Scottish mother as well as her belief that brokerage can facilitate difficult conversations. Khedairi states that “If you speak one language and I the other, you have one mentality and I the other. We must find a way to understand…let’s meet somewhere” (ibid). To help otherwise intransigent positionalities “meet somewhere,” Khedairi articulates her belief that “art and literature can break through Iraq's isolation and bridge the distance” (ibid). ‘Bridging’ as a motif certainly threads throughout her novel A Sky So Close - a story about a girl of Iraqi and English heritage who thinks and speaks in different languages, MSA Arabic, colloquial Iraqi Arabic and English. In this novel, all three languages intersect, diversify and make connective the main protagonist’s own sense of her own lived realities and that of others, thus configuring polyphony as bridging – and calling into question – notions of difference in Iraq even before its translation into English.

As one point of departure for considering how the polyphonic relationality underpinning this novel plays out in English alongside the Arabic, the first English language reviews of the novel in English translation make interesting reading. Critical reception of the English version did indeed focus on the novel in different ways. Elizabeth Roberts-Zibbels (2001) situated the novel as an important counter-voice to the War on Terror and post 9/11 events in the US: “With Iraq being George Bush's next target in his War on Terrorism, A Sky So Close is an interesting and timely look at the life of one woman in a country oppressed by the ideologies of hegemonic nations.” While literary scholar Ikram Masmoudi (2010, 17) cites “the author” as “pointedly” condemning the political oppression of the Iraqi people, Sonya Knox (2003) – a Beirut-based reviewer with a more generic critical scope - complains that “by avoiding any mention of Iraq’s domestic politics but repeating in detail both reports from the Iran-Iraq war and the 1991 Gulf War and the effects of the sanctions on the Iraqi people, Khedairi mitigates the sense of ‘telling the truth’ that the novel’s emotional depth depends on.” Deeming the dialogue sections as “unconvincing” due to what she terms as its “heavily stilted” language,” Knox concludes her review by stating that the novel “deserved better editing (and translation) than it received.” Such differing critical engagements with the English version suggest the politics of the novel read differently in English translation according to each (US) reader’s epitextual understandings of Iraq and what Iraqi fiction in English translation should, in their view, ‘do’. In other words, each reviewer seemed to be reading the novel (knowingly

as an English translation) as if it were first written ‘to speak’ to US readerships, rather than to its first (Iraqi) Arabic-reader audiences.

These Anglo-language-centric and at times critical reviews are in many ways not surprising. As noted by Nancy Jabbra (2006), politicised post- 9/11 discourses about Iraq, often conflated with Saddam Hussein led to the “remarkable politicization of …simplified representations” (2006, 236), not only of Iraq, but the Middle East and Islam in general. Published in 2001, the English novel would have been surrounded by 9/11 contexts of Iraq as part of its ‘epitexts’ (Genette 1987) in a way that the Arabic version could not have been as it was published in 1999. As observed by Arta Khakpour, Mohammad Khorrami and Shouleh Vatanbadi in Moments of Silence (2016), a collection that focuses on how Iraqi and Iranian artists, poets and writers engage with the issue of (self) representation in contexts of the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war, “the facts of war, even when agreed upon, do not translate to simple truths” (2016, 3). As demonstrated by the (US) reviews of the English version, ‘facts’ about Iraq do not translate, in my view, to ‘simple truths’ either in the (political) contexts of representations of ايام الخير [ayyām al-khīr] in Iraq either. For this reason, my discussion of the novel does not focus on the Arabic novel as a ‘pre’ and the English version as a ‘post’ 9/11 US publication. Rather, I focus on how the novel’s representations of marginalised or ‘subaltern’ groups in Iraq during ايام الخير [ayyām al-khīr] as critique of oppression in Iraq during the 1970s were re-presented in English translation differently. To contextualise my focus on the subaltern politics of this novel in both Arabic and English translation, I explain the importance of the politics of ‘alterity’ or الغريرية [al-ghayriyya] in Iraqi women’s literature.
4.3: Iraqi women writers’ gendered subalternity as ‘conscious alterity’

According to Ferial Ghazoul (2008, 198) Iraqi women writers’ novels often “represent an unconscious affiliation between marginalised groups and non-institutionalised literature” based on “solidarity among the subaltern.” As ‘subaltern’ in (1968-2003) Iraqi political contexts often referred to any group not co-opted (but co-optable) into institutional government discourses of violence and oppression, Ghazoul’s configuration of Iraqi women writers as “among” subaltern identities (ibid) does not seem odd, even if the writers are literate and the people of whom they often write, are not. During the Iraqi Ba’athist era, Iraqi women writers ‘wrote’ the politics of their shared subaltern solidarity with subaltern experiences of Iraqi women as subalerns in various ways. One stylistic motif used, as is the case with Khedairi’s first novel, is the overtly gendered bildungsroman: a girl-to-woman story by which a little girl relates what she ‘sees’ through her child’s eye/I, usually without reference to known political personnages. Other approaches involved writing about a moment in Iraqi history from a respective eye/I. Alia Mamdouh’s novel حبات النفتالين [Mothballs] (1986/2000) set in the down-town area of Al-Adhimiyya in Baghdad represents the shifting contexts of faith, politics and wealth during Iraq in the 1940s. Haifa Zangana’s novel مفاتيح مدينة [Keys Of A City] (2000) presents how intersecting patriarchies of Arab and Kurdish Iraqi cultures in the 1950s configure cross-constituency oppressions as well as identifications (Al-Mozani 2000). In both novels, the competing currents of leftist, pan-Arab and colonial influence serve as a cursory backdrop to the lives of women and men living through gendered and class violence as well as poverty and illness, all of which were important factors contributing to Iraqi Ba’athist party coming to power in Iraq. In this respect, Khedairi’s novel focusing on Iraq in the 1970s (as

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61 The term ‘subaltern’ has been translated as التابع [al-tābi’] (Mehrez 1998) in Arabic to mean “partisan” “subject to” and “belonging to” (Wehr 1994, 109) as well as mean ‘subordinate’ as termed in the wider field of South Asian Subaltern Studies scholarship (Chakrabarty 2015; Rochona 2015).
well as Iraq’s 1980s and 1990s contexts of war) contributes to this mode of retrospective writing by offering subtle and courageous commentary on how the Iraqi Ba’athist party stayed in power, particularly during its first decade. The child’s eye/I and retrospective perspective create a strategic shared site of departure where gendered protagonist and writer consciously situate ‘otherness’ or الإغتراب[al-ghtirāb] to the environments in which they are represented in different ways. What binds writer and protagonists together is how powerless both seem when someone in the story is killed or taken from them, usually in contexts of violence. As such incidents are shown as a latent possibility but nearly always out of the hands of the (gendered) protagonists, both the child’s eye/I and the retrospective views show that all Iraqis are living a precarious marginality, or alterity, contingent upon their individual situ[es].

Before I explain how cross-constituency ‘alterity’ plays out in Khedairi’s novel, I clarify what I mean by ‘alterity’ in English as its equivalent (philosophical) term in Arabic is an important aspect of the politics of ‘subaltern’ solidarity underpinning many examples of Iraqi women’s literature. Emmanuel Levinas (1987) draws on notions of ‘alterity’ (in French, ‘l’alterité’) to conceptualise a person’s ontological sense of someone or something else in the world and thus how s/he senses her/his own sense of ‘self’ as ‘outside’ of (it)self as part of and outside of one/self (1987, 27) as a state of ‘exteriority.’ A person’s awareness of their own ‘alterity’ refers to when s/he ‘sees’ others as ‘other’ to them while knowing s/he is ‘being seen’ by ‘others’ as ‘other’ to them (1987, 50): a connective sense of ethical separation and linkage. Subjectivity as ‘alterity’ is thus an experience of connectivity through difference and differentiation. This linkage between ‘I’ and ‘other’ helps us understand why, according to Levinas (1987, ibid) our sense of personal agency and duty is necessarily connective to ‘others’ even if they are (or seem) distant or ‘other’ than us. In Arabic, the noun for alterity is "الغيرية" [al-ghayriyya] (Wehr 1994, 808) which
means selfless care for other as well as ‘alterity’ in Levinas’ sense of the word. In adjective form, the word "غيري" [ghayrī] means “hetero-” as well as “other” (ibid). Looking towards someone/thing different and not-(like) thus adds a more explicit connotation of ‘action’ as well as a sense of ‘subjective being’ to Levinas’ terms of reference. In Arabic, ‘difference’ can thus be conceptualised as ‘unconnectedness’ as well as connectiveness to an/other, neither of which preclude the duty of one person turning towards an/other as an/other. In this light, Ghazoul’s configurations of Iraqi women writing solidarity “among” subalterns (2008, 198) becomes clearer. Iraqi women writers turn to ‘other’ women to (safely) situate the politics of their literary works. In turn, writers write the ‘alterity’ of their gendered writer identity while (and by) ciphering how ‘others’ to writing in Iraq are ‘other’, but differently so, in Iraqi public political spheres.

This brings me to the politics of subaltern representation as [al-ghayriyya] in Khedairi’s novel which is situated as a bildungsroman told from a retrospective perspective by a girl of mixed cultural and ethnic heritage. Admitting she is “fascinated by the disconnection between Arab and western interpretations” of her novel, Khedairi’s position is one of distinctive refusal to comment on her novel’s meanings for different readerships: “there is nothing to misunderstand in the book. Every individual will see it from his or her own perspective; literature is, after all, as relative as life” (c.f. Voykowitsch 2003).62 Her reply initially seems somewhat disingenuous as a writer was often ‘read’ or perceived as a ‘paratext’ to their book within Iraqi Ba’athist operations of surveillance and censorship. As noted by Levi Loseff (1984) such notions of censorship were connective in their premise: a book was ‘read’ as connectively part of the writer’s politics and vice versa (1984, 4). Suad Joseph (1994) explains that ‘connectivity’ is also an important process of identity-

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formation: a lived process by which a person perceived but comes to perceive her/himself as part of another (1994, 55) by configuring her (sense of) identity as configured by ‘others’ as s/he configures their (sense of) identity. Such permutations of connectivity inscribe – and are inscribed with -intersecting dynamics of power (age, gender, class, ethnicity, location) which is why Joseph’s notion of ‘connectivity’ as lived and perceived is one useful point of reference from which to consider Iraqi women’s literature and Khedairi’s sense of relationality to her novel. Khedairi seems to recognise that individual interpretations of her literary writings are still connective to resources that she provides, even if she herself does not wish to ‘speak.’ She thus describes resources she provides in the novel as pictorial rather than discursive:

I tend to offer a collection of photos or sketches to the reader. I lay them on the table and I leave…Every reader has the opportunity to change the photos as he sees them. I don’t like to impose my thoughts on someone.

(c.f. Leinwand 2003)63

Here Khedairi seems to suggest that she is aware of herself as ‘part of’ but also ‘other’ and ‘made other’ to her own novel publication by (many and unknown) others’ roles in its meaning-making. Describing her work as pictorial, rather than discursive interaction also suggests that Khedairi feels distance and differentiation from the very means of her own expression. Her framing of her own writing (and presumably her writing in English translation) as “photos” to safeguard the reader against her “thoughts” also suggests that Khedairi is trying to communicate a sense of connective conscious ‘otherness’ or ‘alterity’ towards her own novel as well as an ambivalence towards the very premises of written representation. As she has nonetheless ‘turned to’ writing (and translation) to tell her story,

her writing seems underpinned by a politics of \[al-ghayriyya\]: a sense of duty towards helping ‘another’ (novel or reader) that she sees as ‘other’ to her via unconnective as well as connective frames. This point returns me to my earlier question how to engage with the relationality of this polyphonic novel to its English version, particularly as Khedairi seems distrusting of her own discursive frames of reference.

One way of looking at this question is to consider why the premises of written representation itself may well be infused with ambivalence in contexts of translation. Historically, many feminist translation scholars have situated women (and translators)’ alterity to language within connective frames of resistance and subversion on the basis that language – and the realities it configures – obliges women and other marginalised identities to discursively constitute themselves and be constituted by its hegemonic patriarchal premises (Godard 1989; De Lotbinière-Harwood 1991). The very alterity of women and translators in (and to) these frames of expression however strategically presents an opportunity for women – and translators - to ‘turn towards’ to expose the unseen hegemonies shaping lived realities, including the hegemonies of translation itself. Exposing the status of language/s (as well as writing) as ‘mimetic’ and derivative, women (and translators) can configure languages of hegemonic dominance as a paradigm of ‘framing.’ In this light, an intersectional praxis of feminist translation can involve what Claudia De Lima Costa (2014, 135) terms as “a counter-practice of translation...working in the gaps and silences of translation and underscoring unequal relations...(which) disrupts hegemonic narratives about gender, feminism and the subaltern.” What this “working” means, then, is to question identities of ‘alterity’ are translated by questioning the ‘alterity’ of translation itself in geo-political terms (ibid).

A ‘counter’-praxis of translation could also involve what Reimóndez (2017) terms as a “polyphonic” approach which “creates a space for multiple voices to be heard” (2017, 44)
in and through (hegemonic frames of) translation. What Reimóndez is proposing here is a paradigm of translation analysis which focuses on many, not two languages to analyse how ‘non-hegemonic’ languages in translation are often brought together by more ‘hegemonic’ languages, such as English. If linguistic and epistemological pathways of knowledge are already pre-configured by their dominant mode of mediation occurring through and via particular languages (i.e. English) but not others, the very premises of translation as a cross-border activity is clearly open to question. Reimóndez proposes that anyone involved in translation, needs to consciously consider (in order to open a conversation about) which discourses/people are reified and elided by hegemonic languages (2017, 44). Although any language has its own hegemonic, often patriarchal frames of reference, the configuring of documenting individual engagements with the ‘lived’ and multi-valent processes of translating across languages as a conversation creates space to a translation’s own contingency and connectivity as part of its ongoing meaning-making. As an example of how situes of alterity could be re/configured in contexts of a polyphonic approach to translation, Reimóndez cites a project where Tamil and Galician feminist activists co-compiled a book and a film in (and across) two non-hegemonic languages (Tamil and Galician) with the (hegemonic) medium of English between them a shared point of interrogation (2017, 52). An analytical framework of polyphonic feminist translation thus engages with alterity of languages and identities to make more evident more ways of representing the polyphonic alterity of translation itself.

While conceptualising translation as polyphonic experience of cross-constituency conversations resonates with the politics of gendered subaltern solidarity underpinning Iraqi women’s literature, the contexts of activist engagement with this approach as discussed by Reimóndez (2017) are clearly different. The activist feminist Tamil/Galician translation project was carried out on the assumption that the co-collaborators were
consciously engaging with translation as a conversation as about (and beyond) alterity as counter-hegemonic interaction. This ‘turning towards’ each other could be conceptualised then as a conversation underpinned by a politics of conscious alterity. While a politics of conscious alterity on the part of co-collaborators in a translated work helps connectively frame or ‘anchor’ the conversation about how interlocking dynamics of power could be read as part of a translated work’s meaning-making without subsuming it, such a paradigm situates this alterity as contingent to each co-collaborator’s awareness of ‘the other’ that is, their sense of mutual intelligibility. Yet to be explored in feminist translation studies is how a paradigm of translation as an act of ‘conscious alterity’ could be relevant in settings when mutual intelligibility is not shared by all agents involved in co-creating the meaning of a translated work. Not all agents are, for instance, necessarily in direct contact in some instances of translation, and not all identities of alterity will share the same politics of mediation. This raises questions on how polyphonic paradigms of feminist translation analysis ‘work’ when the premises of alterity between different agents mediating a work’s para/texts are not shared or even mutually known.

This question is a salient one in contexts of A Sky So Close. This novel is, after all, told from a perspective of a middle-class Iraqi-English girl who presents as thinking in three different languages - MSA Arabic, Iraqi colloquial and English. She thinks in a mixture of Iraqi colloquial and English at home. She is addressed in English by her mother and in colloquial Arabic by her father and the local villagers. Her voice in her story-telling mediated by MSA. As we shall see later, Khaddouja, her childhood friend and Heyla, the black Iraqi woman she meets in Baghdad do not share all three of these languages: Khaddouja speaks Iraqi colloquial but cannot read or write in any language. Heyla does not speak to the protagonist at all. My analysis thus focuses on how this novel representations of rural and black African Iraqi women as an expression of consciously
‘turning towards’ them shifts, and at times, seem problematised in English translation. In this chapter, I work to show and thus argue that reading the novel’s mediations of rural and black Iraqi ethnic identities as a mediation of the impossibilities of ‘full’ rural and black Iraqi representation is a fundamental part of the novel’s politics of “solidarity among subaltern”: a conversation about the difficulties of mediating ‘meetings’ of alterity in Iraqi literature in Arabic as well as the difficulties of their representation in English.

4.4: Interactions and reflections: rural identity in Arabic-English para/translation

While the motif of the bildungsroman seems to be driving the meaning-making of this novel, it is not by any means a happy coming of age story for the (always unnamed) protagonist: the more she understands about where she lives as she grows older, the more dystopic her world seems to become. In rural Iraq, Khaddouja dies; in Baghdad, her family survive the 1980-1988 war, but her father dies of a heart attack; in London, she watches her mother die from cancer, while seeing Baghdad burn on TV screens in London cafés. Ghazoul (2008) terms the first part of the novel as representing “the personal face of the confrontation” (2008, 198), which is situated, initially, as East/West worlds. The protagonist’s (dark-skinned) Iraqi father wants his daughter to bond with people in the rural village in which they live (2001, 10); her (pale-skinned) English mother insists her daughter has an education which takes her beyond this village (ibid). The protagonist as a little girl ends up doing both: “Your disagreement allowed me to mingle with both worlds. Just like our house, which was two worlds” (2001, 11). Yet what constitutes her ‘two worlds’ becomes more ambivalent as different axes of political power intersect their lives before and after the onset of war. The novel’s representations of rural Iraq thus interrogate the
complicity of Iraqis in ‘other’ Iraqis’ pre-war oppression, a critical aspect of this novel yet to be explored in contexts of (English) translation.

Although the first novel by an Iraqi woman writer published in the US in English translation, A Sky So Close (2001) is presented with very little para/textual introduction. Unlike Al-Amir’s publication (1994) and other novels by Iraqi women writers published in the US after 2003,64 Khedairi’s novel stands alone and un-introduced. There is no critical foreword, introduction or afterword by the writer or translator - despite this story being the first novel by an Iraqi woman writer to be published in the US. There is however one important para/textual site contextualising the English version in the form of a brief Acknowledgements page (2001, 243) in which Khedairi thanks all who helped make “the novel” in Arabic and English. She thanks the publishers of the Arabic as well as the English edition; her friends and family; her uncle Muhayman Jamil the translator; her other uncle Manar Jamil who proof-read the translation; and proof-editor Margherita Wilson for “polishing” the English version’s text. By framing her novel as co-created by co-collaborative relationships operating in and across the Arabic and English versions, Khedairi seems to suggest each version is in conversation with the other in terms of its processes of production, and co-collaboration is part of each version’s meaning-making.

From a perspective of feminist paratranslation, I begin my exploration of the relationality of the novel in Arabic and English translation by considering the title of the novel. Literally meaning ‘how close the sky seemed,’ the Arabic title - كم بدت السماء قريبة! - refers to a train of thought articulated by the protagonist as a little girl playing on an old swing with her friend Khaddouja in the rural village of Al-Zafraniya. Khaddouja plays on the swing and the protagonist does too, swinging higher and higher:

(Then) it was my turn. I kicked the air with my feet…. I went up higher… I kicked harder… I went up higher… and was swimming in space… framed by a milky blue. All the palm trees are beneath my bare feet… the sun is floating, swimming in the river. I go higher. I breathe in the horizon… At the horizon… how close the sky seemed!

In English translation, the title of the novel - *A Sky So Close* - refers to the same scene, similarly anchoring the English version’s title to the exact same scene:

I rise higher toward the heavens… I breathe in the horizon… then… A sky so close!

In many ways, this scene is emblematic of the novel’s modes of representation: imaginative, colour-based metaphors used by the protagonist to describe her own sense of herself in the world she lives in. This final sentence: "كم بدت السماء قريبة!! [A sky so close!]

communicates a spontaneous moment of wonder as the protagonist enjoys the physical power and capacity of her body, weightless, swinging free in the air. Reading as emergent in the mind’s eye/I of the girl, this phrase emerges as inspiring the title of the novel and so encapsulates the whole scene’s importance. The scene, however, does not freeze there in the story. As the protagonist swings higher and higher, the rope snaps, catapults her and literally brings her back to earth with a bump (1999, 18). Undeterred, she and her friend Khaddouja lose themselves in another game with the local village boys (1999, 19), the protagonist finally concluding the scene with a nostalgic retrospectivity which frames this story as made up of ‘snap-shots’ of Khaddouja frozen in time:

هكذا، كانت أيامي معها. سلسلة من أيام جمعة لا تتشابه

[That was how my days were with her (Khaddouja): a series of Fridays, one day never like the other].

(1999, 19)
Representing a first moment of embodied liminality for the protagonist, the novel’s title and the swing scene are connectively emblematic of how Khaddouja is presented as anchoring the novel from beginning to end: as the anchor of the protagonist’s happiness in a lost present in rural Iraq yet frozen in time retrospectively. As we shall see later, the novel’s title is a crucial site from which an important counter-conversation is opened about the importance of remembering Khaddouja, a point I explain more of shortly. Reading the novel’s title as a para/textual introduction to the ‘in-between’ spaces at play at this point however helps shed light on the multi-layered construction of this novel, in terms of language, agency and location – and contextualises why it is important to read the Arabic and English versions as connective, not separate versions of each other.

Like many bildungsromans by Iraqi women writers, this story is mediated by a combination of ‘showing’ and ‘telling.’ Scenes are ‘shown’ as happening ‘in the present’ through the eye/I of a little girl, while their significance is ‘told’ as retrospective commentary by an older version of the protagonist. The junctures where the two eye/I’s are most apparent are when the protagonist describes her deep friendship between herself and her child-hood friend, Khaddouja, which is the focus of this section. In Arabic, the story of the two girls’ friendship is told by the protagonist as a child via a series of conversations, at times peppered with such retrospective observations by the ‘adult’ protagonist. The first example of this is when Khaddouja is mediated from the beginning of the novel as the most important person in the young protagonist’s life: "كانت هي عالمي" (1999, 9) /"She was my world" (2001, 6). At this same juncture, the protagonist explains how she introduces herself to adults by mentioning both her and Khaddouja’s age:
In English, the same conversation is rendered very closely as:

- Who’s Khaddouja?
- She lives near our farmhouse. She doesn’t go to school because she has no shoes.

I believed then that children who didn’t have shoes didn’t go to school.

(2001, 6)

In both versions of this passage, the first two lines of this passage could be read as the protagonist’s ‘real’ child voice simply being mediated in written language. The third line however, "صدّقت حينها أن من لا يرتدي حِذاء لا يذهب إلى المدرسة" (1999, 9; 2001, 6) emphatically introduces the older protagonist adding an additional meaning to this scene, important for this novel’s politics of الغيرية [al-ghayriyya], or ‘among subaltern’ alterity. For as well as introducing Khaddouja and her age, this excerpt introduces the huge class differences between the girls: Khaddouja does not go to school for specific reasons – for not wearing shoes. Clearly the issues of illiteracy and endemic poverty in rural Iraq go much deeper than this term. As the protagonist recounts later in the novel (2001, 53) despite Khaddouja wanting to learn to write as she does, Khaddouja ends up working on the land as a child where her ancestors have lived in mud huts for centuries while other Iraqis new to the village - such as the family of the protagonist - prosper in newly built houses, with their children learning to read and write. The protagonist’s distinction between the two terms "حافية [barefoot] and "من لا يرتدي حِذاء" [whoever does not wear shoes] (1999, ibid) in her retrospective reflection in Arabic subtly explains why the first term alludes to the status of communities living in endemic poverty as well as the status of simply not wearing shoes. In English, Khaddouja’s situe is mediated as one of possession: she does not have shoes. In Arabic, the protagonist shows how, over time, she realises the Arabic word "حافية [barefoot] meaning “to go barefoot” (Wehr 1994, 223)’ mutates into a metonym used to frame particular communities within essentialising terms of reference.
As noted by Ghazoul (2008, 198), representations of rurality in this novel nonetheless focus on Khaddouja’s creative potential and extensive knowledge, regardless of whether she reads or writes. Despite being unschooled, it is Khaddouja who teaches the protagonist what she really needs to know as a child: the ways of the countryside. While the protagonist is termed an outsider - "بنات الأجنية" [the foreign woman’s daughter] - by people in the village (1999, 23; 2001, 23), Khaddouja teaches, brokers and translates kinetic knowledge by teaching her local words and songs. Khaddouja introduces the protagonist (and the reader) to her family’s village life: how her mother makes bread, how the elderly grandmother Bibi Hijjia tells stories and local legends to all the children as well as singing local folksongs. The reader in Arabic and English translation - as well as the protagonist - gets to learn about Iraqi dialect words used in rural spaces: "سميط" / “sameet” (1999, 24/2001, 24) or sesame-skin dough rings, "الجب" / "hib" (1999, 34; 2001, 37), a water-jug and "شكيك" /“chickeek” (1999, 33; 2001, 35) a local river cactus, to name a few. Localised Iraqi dialect words such as "السُّنْطُح" /“snails” (1999, 14; 2001, 11) and a local herb called "شيخ صملّه" /“sheikh smalleh” (1999, 19; 2001, 16) are described and so ‘explained’ in ways which allude to the (older) protagonist’s sense of liminal presence of ‘a reader.’ Less localised Arabic words such as "الفوتة السوداء" [black veil] (1999, 24) for example are not explained in Arabic but are explained in the English version of the novel: “futa – the black veil covering her hair” (2001, 25). The explanations seem to para/translate an assumption that readerships will have different limits of cultural understanding and so work through explanatory translation approaches to pre-empt them.

Notions of الغيرية [al-ghayriyya] as ‘turning-toward’ ‘others’ regardless of connection or non-connection help us understand how these frames of explanatory reference – enacted to help ‘the reader’ understand seem to reiterate Khaddouja’s attitude of ‘turning to’ the protagonist to help her understand her shared space, even if the
protagonist cannot help Khaddouja share hers. Khaddouja invites the protagonist into her family home saying "يعالي تعالي لا تستحين" [come in, come in, don’t be shy] (1999, 23). Khaddouja’s aunt Zakkiya (1999, 41) carries the protagonist back home across the farmland every night. Despite this kindness, Khaddouja is never allowed in the protagonist’s home as her English mother believes Khaddouja and her family are dirty. When the mother learns Bibi Hijjia has combed her daughter’s hair, she soaks her daughter’s hair with kerosene oil (2001, 26) for fear of lice. Her Iraqi father does not object to his daughter being friends with Khaddouja but does not change the boundaries of location set for the friendship of Khaddouja and the protagonist by her mother: “Let her bond with the land as she did. Let her see what you cannot see” (2001, 10). When he wishes to celebrate his new work project, none of his rural neighbours are invited. Such scenes para/translate why Khedairi infuses the act of ‘reading’ and ‘writing’ as imbied with potential ambivalence. For while Khaddouja teaches the ‘foreign’ protagonist (and the reader) what they need to know to understand the rural environments of this story, little seems given to her in return. In her own contexts of rural practice, Gayatri Spivak (2000) situates such ambivalence in cross-constituency exchanges within (political philosophical) frames of ‘aporia’ or a “haunting” (2004, 104): that certain representations of alterity will always mark “the impossibility of fully realising the ethical” (ibid, 105). In respect to this novel, the protagonist can ‘give space’ to Khaddouja, but only at a distance through writing. The act of ‘subaltern solidarity’ in these early scenes is shown by how Khaddouja, not the protagonist, is foregrounded as the purveyor of knowledge. Her Iraqi Arabic dialect words are ‘transliterated’ rather than overwritten as primary frames of reference, (to explained) in the Arabic and English versions of the novel. By the rural environment mediated primarily through Khaddouja’s word, her presence ‘in writing’ ensures that important details of rural cultures in Iraq are recorded for others also to read.
As the two girls grow older, the dialogues between them begin to mediate something of the tensions involved in such a co-collaborative representation of solidarity described by Spivak (2000) earlier, particularly where one collaborator’s needs may be met more than that of the other collaborator. Particularly striking about this novel’s representations of the two girl’s friendships is how the registers of MSA Arabic and colloquial Iraqi dialect are deployed to enact this tension, as shown in the following example:

لماذا تحمل بقرتكم في اسفل بطنها كيسا منفوخا تتدلى منه اصابع كثيرة؟
- حتى يكفينا الحليب ولا نجوع.
- امس رأيت الكتكايات تشرب من اصابع البقرة
اجابتني بحدة دون تردد;
- لا تكذبين! الفرخ ما ينوش ديس البقرة!
وضعت طفلة البرية حدا لخيالاتي من رسوم متحركة كنت اتبادلها مع أمي
(1999, 50) 65

“Why does your cow have a swollen bag underneath her stomach with so many fingers hanging down from it?”
“So that we have enough milk and don’t go hungry.”
“Yesterday, I saw the chicks drinking from the cow’s fingers.”
She retorted without hesitation:
“Don’t lie! Chicks can’t reach the cows’ udders!”

So my wild childhood friend put an end to my visions of moving images which I exchanged with my mother.

(2001, 55)

In both versions of the novel, Khaddouja’s voiced lived reality configures the cow as a means for survival. The protagonist is simply expressing a wish to imagine life differently as she does in the stories of her imagination. Khaddouja’s first reply is shown as matter of fact. She does not correct her friend’s choice of word "اصابع" [fingers]. Khaddouja reacts

65 Throughout this chapter, I provide no additional back translation when the English version of an example discussed literally follows the published Arabic version. This is to avoid unnecessary repetition.
less calmly to her friend’s flight of imagination about the chicks drinking milk from the “fingers” and so uses the Iraqi dialect words used by adults in the village – "بنوش" [reach up] and "ديس البقرة" [the cow’s udders] - to correct the protagonist, that is, her language of authority. In the Arabic version, Khaddouja’s sharp retort in Iraqi dialect in a rural environment has the power to relegate both the protagonist’s child-like flights of imagination and her MSA frames of speech to the realm of absurdity within her own rural mindset. In the countryside, we read that Iraqi dialect, not MSA, is the language of instruction to communicate the starkness of everyday rural life and survival. The protagonist does not reply to Khaddouja directly, but in her train of thought, she refers to her as "طفلتي البرية" [my wild girl-child] (1999, 50). As the girls are the same age, the protagonist’s use of the term alludes to how she is (unconsciously) using the hegemonic paternalistic frames of (language) power which configure some constituencies of people as ‘less knowing ‘than others. In English, this term becomes “my wild childhood friend” (2001, 55) which mitigates but cannot elide the tension, or the potential ‘aporia’ of the intersecting class dynamics arising between the two girls. As an alternative representation to the inevitability of ‘aporia’ (Spivak 2000), both versions of the novel, importantly, foreground another fundamental aspect of this conversation: both girls are still ‘turning towards’ each other alongside (and despite) the tense lived reality of each girl precluding her fully seeing the reality lived by the other girl. For Khaddouja, her reality is rural survival. For the protagonist, her ‘world’ of Khaddouja is slowly becoming supplemented by her (educated and literate) childhood imagination.

While the issue of language and knowledge hegemony is an important one for the novel in Arabic, in the English version, Khaddouja’s regional register is not differentiated from the protagonist’s (middle class) register in the English version at all. As observed by Reimóndez (2017), “language hegemony” is diverse and seemingly transparent in its
permutations and for this reason, many “colonial dynamics” underpinning transnational dialogues of interactions often go unchallenged as they are unseen (2017, 47). In wider contexts of Arabic fiction in English translation, however, the strategy of *not* translating regional accents can be a counter-hegemonic intervention on the part of the translator. As explained by Marilyn Booth (2007, 2010), making Arabic dialect ‘visible’ in English can – in the US at least - carry a risk of “buttress(ing) the Arab stereotyping so prevalent in North America” (2007, 210). Booth means by this, perpetuating notions of Arabs speaking English with heavy or distorted accents. A fear of pre-existing expectations in global publishing markets could result conversely in regionalised Arab women’s voices reading as ‘flattened’ in English (Hartman 2012) – a conversation which resonates with longstanding debates on the place of colloquial Arabic and MSA alongside each other in Arabic as a diglossic language (Hussein 1954; Idris 1974). The key difference between reading MSA and English as a ‘cipher’ for ‘another’ language or register as an ‘experience’ is that the Arabic language reader is usually aware that MSA is not a transparent mediation of everyday speech. In many contexts, reading MSA can represent for ‘the reader’ the distance and dissonance between speaking and writing or a politically situated interaction between private and public language (Saddiqi 2006; Safouan 2007).

The radical politics of ‘the protagonist’ as a child ‘turning towards’ Khaddouja as ‘her world’ of knowledge via and despite the differences of Arabic register between them in this instance seems elided in English translation. The novel however does ‘turn toward’ Khaddouja in other ways through the cipher of English, the other (hegemonic) cipher of the protagonist’s imagination in other interesting ways. As observed by the protagonist herself in both versions: “Our house…has rooms where voices intermingle” (2001, 19). As the protagonist discovers as she grows older, not all voices are mutually intelligible – not only due to language, but to difference of lived reality. The protagonist for example tries
to tell the first joke she has heard in her life to Khaddouja - an English joke about a mother tomato crossing the road with a baby tomato ending with the punchline “Come on ketchup!” (catch up). In Arabic, the protagonist changes the “ketchup” punchline to "باي باي ملعون" [Bye-Bye Paste] (2001, 50). Khaddouja (understandably) does not ‘get’ the joke as its mimetic humour is lost by the protagonist’s clunky English-Arabic translation. In the English version, the ‘real’ version “Come on, ketchup!” (2001, 56) is included. In both versions, the protagonist takes Khaddouja’s (lack of) reaction to her polyphonic joke as a sign of foreboding yet for different reasons:

لم تضحك! عندنا فقط. أدركت أن بعض الأشياء بدأت تتغير!

(1999, 50)

She didn’t laugh! It was only then that I realised that things had started to change.

(2001, 56)

In the Arabic version, the impossibilities of the joke’s representation reveal intersecting alterities affecting the protagonist more than Khaddouja in this instance. As this joke in Arabic shows, both girls think in very different languages (English and Iraqi Arabic), and the protagonist finds that her English-Iraqi Arabic skills lacking. A polyphonic perspective of feminist para translation which situates the two novels ‘in conversation’ with each other helps us understand why the fissure of alterity is in fact much deeper than language itself. In the English version, the same joke is not told in its original English ‘funny’ form. So instead of the protagonist presenting as ‘foreign’ (in Iraq and in Arabic) and thus not able to tell or ‘translate’ the joke well, it is Khaddouja who presents as just not ‘getting’ it, humour-wise. The emphasis here falls, in English, on why Khaddouja does not laugh – for here the play on words, easy to understand in English, seems lost on her. Although not stated in the novel, the reasons for Khaddouja’s reaction would have been many in 1970s rural Iraq: ‘ketchup’ as a branded (US) condiment may have been unfamiliar
to her. The joke also needs a leap of imagination on her part to conceive of tomatoes talking and crossing the road, a leap that perhaps Khaddouja has not time for, as shown in the previous example about the cow and the chicks. Importantly however, it is through the English version, not the Arabic version that the fissures between the girls’ realities in terms of their thinking, imagination and life opportunities is shown in subtly explicit terms. The Arabic version presents the protagonist’s own cultural liminality or ‘alterity’ in Iraq as ‘the foreign woman’s daughter’ as the reason for her fear of her friendship with Khaddouja changing. The English version however reveals that the “two worlds” (1999, 13; 2001, 11) dominating the world of the protagonist are not East/West or language binaries at all – but the binaries of imagination which mean that in 1970s rural Iraq, the two girls could not share this simple joke at this juncture. Reading the English version alongside the Arabic version this way helps situate the protagonist’s sense of foreboding as opening a conversation: on why during the ‘Days of Plenty’ in 1970s Iraq, one girl could ‘get’ this joke and why one girl could not, while inhabiting the same space, but very differently.

At this point, it is important to note that the Arabic version certainly does not baulk at exposing the multi-faceted nature of MSA in 1970s Iraq, namely how it is used to mediate some constituencies of Iraqi as less significant or visible than others. At the beginning of the novel, MSA seems to accommodate the voice of Khaddouja, a rural girl who literally ‘subjects’ MSA letters to phonetically mediate village Iraqi dialect words as her lived language of reference. MSA presents as a salient cipher for the protagonist’s first representations of rurality as ‘snapshots’ of idyllic childhood, such as the swing scene which makes up the title of the novel. The child-like MSA frames of the novel are also uncannily overlaid with hierarchal essentialising traces of social injustice in Iraq retrospectively from the outset, starting with the reference to Khaddouja as "حافية" [bare-foot] (1999, 9) and so not able to attend school. These traces of social injustice become
glaringly apparent when the protagonist finds out that Khaddouja has suddenly died from bilharzia. The (educated) adults around her use MSA to try to mitigate her sense of shock and disbelief by depersonalising Khaddouja in the following ways:

الموت وخدّوجة...أخفقتُ في الربط بينهما!
حاولوا إقناعي ان مرض البلهارزيا قتلها مثلما يفعل عادة بالاطفال في تلك الأحاء. شرحوا لي أنها تبولت دماً كثيرة في مياه السواقي مما أودى بحياتها. امي سارعت الى عرضي على الطبيب.

[Death and Khaddouja…I failed to make the link between the two! They tried to convince me that bilharzia had killed her, just as it usually does children in those areas. They explained she had urinated alot of blood in the irrigation waters, which is what led to her death. My mother rushed to get me checked over by the doctor].

(1999, 59-60)

Although the adults are speaking to a child, they use formalised medicalised MSA terms to present Khaddouja’s death as part of a wider picture - a reiteration of the frames underpinning ‘no shoes’ story they used to explain why Khaddouja would never go to school like she would (1999, 9; 2001, 6). The explanation of Khaddouja’s death is still shocking in Arabic to the protagonist, despite the adults’ attempts to ‘rationalise’ Khaddouja’s death as an everyday statistical banality: "مثلاً يفعل عادة بالأطفال في تلك الأحاء" [just as it usually does to children in these areas]. As explained by Hannah Arendt (1963/2005) concerning the Holocaust and Philip Zimbardo (2007) (on the torture in Abu Ghraib prison), the use of language to frames instances of like this within banal terms can and should be (counter)read as exposing the very systemic operations of power that allow dehumanising practices of power to flourish. The banality of ‘official’ wording is situated as such so it (and what it represents) is less likely to be called into question. Here we see the protagonist not questioning the banal, and non-critical terms of MSA reference used by the adults, but at the time not accepting them either. Underlying this lack of critique is something very telling about the politics of ‘banality’ worked in the 1970s. Iraqi scholar Nadje Al-Ali argues, for example, this ‘banality’ was underpinned by complicity:
“For the expanding middle class...in terms of social-economic rights...access to education, health care, having a house, a freezer, a car, people could do quite well if they didn’t open up their mouths. This was all in the 1970s.”

(c.f. Wing 2013)⁶⁶

While a salient commentary on the politics of complicity potentially at play in 1970s Iraq, her commentary also needs to be couched alongside a recognition what usually happened to members of the Iraqi middle class if they did ‘open up their mouths’ in the 1970s – as did Iraqi writer Abd’ul Sattir Nasir they tended to ‘disappear’ (Mousawi 2015). So, while Khaddouja’s death seems framed within clichés of hegemonic power, the mimetic reiteration of these clichés leave space for reflection on why her death – in the public sphere during 1968-2003 Ba’athist era in Iraq – could not be mediated otherwise, even by the novel itself. Read in this light, ‘MSA-speak’ emerges as mimetic ciphering of a c/overt liminal political critique on the systematic abuse and marginalisation of different constituencies of Iraqis through the blatancy (or b/latency) of its own depersonalising flawlessness in the face of individual tragedy. In this language of (flawlessly mediated) power, ‘unavoidable’ conditions of poverty, lack of education and poor health are shown as explained away. As the protagonist’s family (and the reader) discover after the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War in 1980, more deaths and disappearances are similarly ‘explained away’ as the ‘khir’ or ‘prosperity’ in Iraq runs out – due to war, oppression or neglect. By presenting MSA as a tool of (its own) mimetic parody, this episode emerges as a powerful c/overt counter-discourse to essentialised configurations of أَيَامُ الْخَيْرُ [a[yyām al-khīr] in Iraq as well as an emblematic example of how (gendered) solidarity and alterity ‘among’ subalterns could read in (pre-2003) contexts of Iraqi women’s writing.

The conversation however does not stop here. In the English version, the conversation that Khedairi seems to be alluding to in Arabic is made more explicit by the exegeses added to the protagonist’s expressions of grief as follows:

Death and Khaddouja…I was unable to link the two! They told me that she’d come down with bilharziasis. They explained to me that her lifeblood had drained away every time she urinated into the irrigation ditches and that the continuing blood loss had ended her life. My mother rushed me to the doctor even though you had told her in a condescending tone that it was not possible for me to acquire the disease through human contact. The only way I could catch Khaddouja’s disease was by doing what she had done – wading in stagnant water.

(2001, 66)

Here, the reasons for Khaddouja’s death shift from (rural) location to the personal actions of individuated people in those locations: here Khaddouja had carried out the action of wading in stagnant water and thus paid the price of ignorance. Furthermore, the exegesis of the father patronising the mother para/translates other levels of banalising alterity at play: he configures her mother’s visit to the doctor as a combination of prejudice towards rural people and her lack of medical knowledge. It is clearly inconceivable to him that his daughter would wade in stagnant water, but completely conceivable that Khaddouja would.

If this passage is read as a triangulated conversation across and between the languages of the protagonist’s household, the father’s condescending tone – spoken in English to the mother - brings into sharp relief how this death is conceivable as ‘normalis-able’ even in English translation. The father speaking his words to her mother in English masks his own complicit assumptions about rural Iraqis through two languages of the Iraqi educated class not used by rural Iraqis in 1970s Iraq – MSA Arabic and English. The English version thus enacts the ‘aporia’ of hearing the same words in MSA as a default register which invisibly works to elide that it is trying to hide: that Khaddouja’s death cannot be attributed as other than a statistic in the Iraqi public sphere. As the protagonist cannot grasp this rationalisation
in either version of the novel and falls into a depression, her family then moves to Baghdad to help her connect her sense of self to places and people not associated with Khaddouja (2001, 67). The story’s title however eludes this attempt at re-orientating her (and the reader’s) frames of imagination by ensuring that the snapshot picture of the happy day spent with Khaddouja (on the swing) as the novel’s first point of reference in both languages. Reading this novel as a ‘polyphonic’ para/text thus helps us read why the title of the novel represents such an important, even iconic example of الأغيرية [al-ghayriyya] in Iraqi women’s literature. Khaddouja’s resolute presence subtly subverts the MSA ‘statistic-speak’ which rationalises her death as one to be forgotten amongst many rural deaths.

The title of both versions of the novel calls its reader to consider ‘how things were’ in 1970s Iraq not with nostalgia, but how Khaddouja’s life could (and should) have been if more Iraqis – other than the protagonist as a child – had consciously ‘turned toward’ her, and other rural children like her. In this respect, this novel’s representations of rural Iraq in the 1970s seems to be starting a retrospective conversation about why some boundaries of representation could have been exceeded (but weren’t) in 1970s Iraq and why some boundaries – or ‘aporias’ - were just not possible to express. The title of the novel working to preserve the memory of Khaddouja in the swing scene initiates at least, a possible conversation, in my view, about how unequal relations of representation could be mediated with respect and in nuanced ways, as well as why Khaddouja is only allowed into the space of the ‘writing’ classes retrospectively- encapsulated in the title. In contrast, however, the representations of black Iraqi woman/s identity in this novel are much less nuanced, although no less important. To explore why this may be the case, I first contextualise the history of black Iraqis in Iraq, before exploring how the mediations of black Iraqi subalternity in the novel seem to shift across from Arabic into English para/translation.
4.5: Traces and echoes: black Iraqi identity in Arabic-English para/translation

Nearly two million Iraqis of African heritage live in Iraq, mostly in the southern town of Zubeir, near Basra (Diab 2013). Believed to be the descendants of Africans transported by slave traders across the Islamic Empire, black Iraqis have lived in Iraq for centuries. Their ethnic origins are diverse and can be traced to the regions of Yemen, East Africa, Zanzibar and the Nuba regions in North Africa (Diab 2013, 102). Despite owning land, access of black Iraqis to education has historically been poor, with illiteracy as high as 90% in some regions (Zurutuza 2011). While black Iraqis are known in Iraq for performing songs and dancing at weddings in localised cultural spheres (Labbe 2004), their presence in the Iraqi political sphere has always been erased before and after the fall of the Ba’athist government. In 1999 and 2001 (when Khedairi’s novel was published in Arabic and English), little about black Iraqis was known in the US (Labbe 2004; Zurutuza 2011). As observed by a US marine stationed in Al-Zubeir after 2003, “not even the Afro-Americans like him” (Zurutuza 2011)  knew about them. Zurutuza’s citation of the US marine is also telling of how the marine perceived localised “belonging” in Iraq as configured along visually ethnic lines: “‘If I dressed in local Arab garb, I would be able to walk across these streets and nobody would take me as a foreigner’”. He added that he’d probably feel safer that way than with the bulletproof jacket and the helmet he’s wearing. As an observational paratext of US occupation of Iraq, the marine’s reflection also intimates how black Iraqi identity is seen predominantly as an historical, visual rather than a political phenomenon of Iraqi belonging.

67 Jalal Diab was a founder of the Free Iraqis Movement (FIM) whose political agenda was to put black Iraqi rights on the public political agenda in post-2003 Iraq. He was assassinated in 2013 (Salloum 2014).
In his seminal article on black Iraqis as one of many diverse minority groups in Iraq, Jalal Diab (2013) gives a clear account of why black Iraqi identity has been politically marginalised in Iraq for centuries, taking as a point of departure how the word "عبد" [‘abd] or "عبدة" [‘abda] is commonly used in Iraq to refer to anyone identified as Iraqi of African heritage. With [‘abd] literally meaning ‘man/boy-slave,’ [‘abda] woman/girl-slave or [‘abīd] the plural form, this term conflates dark skin colour, African ethnicity, Iraqi belonging and historical-political contexts of slavery in ways which situate black Iraqis in Iraqi society “at the bottom of the social pyramid” (Diab 2013, 105). Its common usage provides the political framework to understand how and why black Iraqis still face endemic everyday political and social marginalisation in Iraq (ibid). In wider Muslim community contexts, Islamic scholar Dawud Walid (2013; 2014) also refers to the everyday use of the term ‘abeeed’, the pluralised form of the word in Muslim communities as a vital issue to be faced and addressed, particularly as Muslims in the US are already facing Islamophobia due to the events of 9/11 and post-2003 Iraq/US war. The vitriolic responses to Walid’s blog confirmed his opinion that deep structural issues of racism pervade some regions of the Arab and Islamic world, some of which have disturbing resonances with far-right discourses of racism in the US: “One tactic of shame used is calling someone ‘abeeed lover’ like how white supremacists say ‘nigger lover’” (Walid 2013). The equivalent term in Arabic thus needs to be understood – like the equivalent US English word cited by Walid – as inherently bound up with operations of historical oppression of millions through the slave trade. The systemic and individual disavowal of responsibility for the use of this Arabic term also highlighted by Walid, thus puts into perspective the lived alterity of black Iraqis. Concerning the difficulty in openly resisting racist speech directed towards him on

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a daily basis in Iraq, Zubeir resident Majid Hamid explains: “I can beat them up, but there will be trouble afterward” (c.f. Williams 2009). 71 When Jalal Diab was assassinated (after displaying a picture of then US president Barack Obama in his office), black Iraqi responses to oppression in the public sphere seem to be subsequently pervaded by even more silence (Salloum 2014), a motif which also pervades Khedairi’s novel in its fleeting references to black Iraqi identity. While the references to black Iraqi identity in A Sky So Close are indeed fleeting in occurrence, their presence seems, at the same time, purposefully situated, albeit slightly differently, in each version of the novel. Bearing the contemporary contexts of black Iraqi alterity in mind, I focus on the mediations of black Iraqi identity in this novel and specifically, on the shifts in English translation.

In this novel, the first time the protagonist encounters a black Iraqi woman is when she meets Heyla who works as a servant in a local neighbour’s house in Baghdad. Before moving to Baghdad, the protagonist has already encountered colorist discourses when living in the village. As her father is dark-skinned, she remembers “somebody once asked you if you borrowed your skin colour from the Indian market” (1999, 20; 2001, 19) – although her father’s reaction is not commented on by the protagonist. In making this observation, the protagonist adds as if talking to her father retrospectively, “I inherited from you the exaggerated darkness of my skin” (ibid) which, tells the reader that she too is dark-skinned like her father as well as of mixed Iraqi/English heritage. This is not however the only identity by which she is defined and named by others. She is called "بنية الإنجليزية" / “the foreign woman’s daughter” (1999, 23; 2001, 23) by the local villagers, a name which defines her as ‘other’ through her mother, not her father. She is also considered middle

class because she lives in a house “that’s not made of mud” (2001, 7). The first time the reader encounters racism, however, is on the bus to the urban school, where the children situates her skin complexion in highly racialized terms:

أطفال الصفوف العليا لا يكفّون عن قَر ص من تحت المقعد. يستهزئون بسُمرَتي قائلين: جَات العَبدة! أمي تحب نومتي المتأخرة. لا داعي لإيقاظها لتربط لي حذائي أو تعتبّر ياقة قميصي. الطعام جاهز منذ الليلة السابقة....

[The children in the older classes never stop pinching me from under the seat. They make fun of my dark-tan skin saying, here come the ‘abda!]²² My mother liked to sleep in late, so no need to wake her for her to tie my shoe-laces or to straighten my collar. The food was ready from the night before].

(1999, 30)

Here we read the word العبدة [al-‘abda] as part of her voice-in-thought going elsewhere. While significant enough to register as memory in her inner monologue, the full pejorative sense of the word as described by Diab (2013) seems not have been understood by the protagonist, but just one of the many things the protagonist is thinking about. While العبد [al-‘abda] reads, like dialect swear words, as a shocking site/sight in MSA, its political impact in writing is nonetheless connective to the (Arabic) readers’ reactions to seeing the word in print, framed by their own awareness of skin colour discourses in Iraq. With its racist implications apparently heard and passed over by the protagonist, the very banality of this word’s emergence and disappearance raises questions on its purpose in the novel in Arabic in terms of its ‘political’ materiality. For the word’s materiality in the protagonist’s mind is not the same ‘print’ materiality facing the reader - the thought passes in and out of the protagonist’s mind. In print, the presence of this word in Iraq is clearly not shifting anywhere for the reader: s/he has to ‘face’ to consider why such racialized configurations

²² As Walid (2013) equates the racially pejorative slur ‘abeed’ to the US English slur ‘nigger’, I use the transliterated Arabic word ‘abda to carry this same meaning in my subsequent commentary in English.
of Iraqi personhood may have been articulated by young Iraqi ‘middle class’ children – where and from whom they have heard this word and why they said it to the protagonist.

If we consider the printed presence of this insult in the novel as a para/translation of the differing material contexts of racialized language in wider post/colonial contexts, this episode featuring the sentence "جَات العَبدة"[jāt al-‘abda] - which means ‘Here comes the ‘abda!’ - resonates with the phrase “Look, A Negro!” as recalled by Franz Fanon when he was in France (1952/2008, 84). In contrast to the protagonist in Khedairi’s novel, however Fanon describes his reactions to this ‘greeting’ in expansive, politically-situated detail: nonchalance, humour, indignation bordering on the sense of (inner) fragmentation. For Fanon, such racialized ‘hailing’ reiterates histories which conflate darkness of skin, African features and slavery as a “fixed like dye” configuration of black African identity within the same audible materiality of the same “white song” (ibid). For this reason, he designates this hailing as a “corporeal malediction”, an indelible curse which props up a “historico-racial schema” (1952/2008, 84) which orientates hegemonic colonial societies as shaping notions of what makes sense in the world. In this light, the protagonist’s apparent lack of reflection suggests that hearing "جَات العَبدة"[jāt al-‘abda] (1999, 30) shapes not what makes sense in her world, but rather in the world of the children in the bus, and that of ‘the reader’. As a retrospective representation of black Iraqi subjectivity, the sight/site of the word عبدة [‘abda] is also a sudden reminder of how black Iraqi person’s lived experience is just being passed over in 1970s Iraqi societal settings, as was Khaddouja’s death as discussed earlier. In English translation, however, we find a distinct shift in the mediation of this name-call:

The older children pinch me from behind the seats. They make fun of the darkness of my skin saying, “Here comes the black girl!” My mother likes to sleep late. There’s no need for me to wake her up or to straighten my collar. My food has been prepared the night before…”

(2001, 32)
While the racialised naming-calling happens, its most shocking element: "جَات العَبدة [jāt al-‘abda] is mitigated as “black”. This word still carries some of the historical-political force of العبدة [al-‘abda] and its US-American equivalent, albeit with much less shocking effect. Considering this novel as a polyphonic translation opens space to consider how this shift para/translation something of the unconsciousness alterity of the protagonist alongside the alterity of those involved with translating the novel towards the term in Arabic. So far, the protagonist has stated she has “exaggeratedly” dark skin (1999, 20; 2001, 19) her Iraqi father wants her to bond with the land (1999, 13; 2001, 10); her white-skinned English mother is insistent she attends an urban school to broaden her experience beyond life in the village (ibid). Before attending school, the only children the protagonist knew were Khaddouja and the village children as she was never registered in nursery, as her mother recalls (ibid). The protagonist’s silent reaction suggests that she may not have understood the term (as she had never mixed with children with racist attitudes before). While this line of thinking may give a rationale for why this snapshot of bullying seems ‘re-touched’ in translation, the protagonist is still being insulted in colorised, racialized terms in both versions of the novel. In view of the meticulous snapshots of rural life so far, a sudden snapshot of racialized ontological violence towards one girl which identifies her – and other Iraqi with similar complexions - as framed within such marginalised racialised line clearly does not appear by chance. This raises questions on why Khedairi wrote: "جَات العَبدة [jāt al-‘abda] in Arabic at all.

As this charged but purposefully charged junctures in this novel seems subtly, but distinctly shifted in English translation, the notion of ‘the translator’ “working in the gaps and silences” (Costa 2014, 135) emerges as a salient point of interrogation and analysis at this juncture. One reading of this scene is that it is not seeking to mediate a full picture black Iraqi experience at all. Rather, it forces the reader to encounter how children of
primary school age learn of racism from adults and then repeat it to other people. As the name-calling of the children goes completely unchallenged by anyone in this novel, (including the protagonist), this fleeting scene shows how this word at that moment was simply ignored, by its very banality, in whatever language the novel is mediated. The banality of the phrase also seems linked to the children finding a dissonance between the protagonist’s (and so her father’s) skin colour and her presence on the school bus. As her father talks of how he wants the protagonist to bond with the land, the people and animals "[the way we were raised]" (1999, 13; 2001, 10), her father’s Iraqi identity seems to be rural, rather than urban. As it is the protagonist’s dark skin (rather than her mixed ethnicity) identifies her to the urban child as ‘not belonging’ in the bus, rural (dark-skinned) Iraqi identity thus appears to be conflated within paradigms of racialised alterity in terms of class, poverty and education. Also emerging in this scene however is how middle-class mobility seems to intersect and even by-pass such everyday commentary in Iraq in ways that rural status alone could not. For the protagonist ignores and continues going to the urban school despite the bullying. She later goes on to university when few rural and black Iraqis would have had the opportunity to do so. When the war ends, the protagonist can leave Iraq with her mother to live where her Iraqi identity, rather than skin colour, marks her as marginal. Yet while her middle-class status could be understood as mediating a gap between what she heard and what she may have understood from this insult as a middle-class Iraqi girl, the premise for re/writing the Arabic "العبدة"[al-ˈabda] in ‘less’ shocking terms in English translation nonetheless still remains unanswered.

One way of exploring this question further is to consider whether and why a para/translatory praxis of elision could be at play in this novel. As shown in the Acknowledgements page of the English version (2001, 243) and by Khedairi’s own
framing of the novel as “a collection of sketches” (c.f. Leinwand), this overtly polyphonic novel seems to be fighting the potentially binary frames of its own discursive mediation. Nonetheless, as explained by Vincent Rafael, in contexts of translating specific issues of tension, unexplained shifts or silencings can para/translate a reluctance on the part of one or more agents to new audiences “hearing (of) some things that the other him- or herself (the author) did not mean or did not intend to be heard” (Rafael 2007, 240). And this scene with the shocking term in Arabic is clearly directed as a critique towards special social groups: those who can read it in Arabic, that is, middle-class, literate people who will have some understandings of Iraq in the 1970s. A Sky So Close (2001) was the first novel by an Iraqi woman writer to be published in the US, 2001, at a time when main-stream US media images of Iraq were at best ill-informed and in many instances orientalising in the most binary neo/colonial terms (Khalid 2012). As noted by Ella Shohat (1990), even before recent wars in Iraq, the Middle East – and Arabs in general – were mediated in mostly orientalist frames in one of the most mainstream US outlets of story-telling, Hollywood cinema. As the US marine states (Zurutuza 2011), many US readers would not have known of the existence of black Iraqis in Iraq, let alone the racialised politics shaping their socio-political presence in the Iraqi public sphere. So, was this term ‘re-touched’ in translation?

Considering the novel’s representations of cross-constituency alterity as a mediation of potential solidarity “among subalterns” (Ghazoul 2008, 199) comes in useful at this point. Reimondez’s (2017) configuration of translation as a ‘conversation’ about the inequalities at play in any work mediated by hegemonic language also helps frame the wider cultural contexts of the Arabic version, as well as the English version. For while this instance of endemic racism during ‘The Days of Plenty’ reads as shocking in (MSA) Arabic, in the

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episode *following* this scene, the protagonist’s skin colour is also shown as the metaphorical signifier by which the village people welcome her, and when the protagonist feels, within rural frames of Iraq, a sense of belonging for the first time:

[Particles of dust are everywhere….Everything there was the colour of the earth even their dark-tan skin which was like the colour of clay. Everyone belongs to this brown family, this colouring inherited with unfailing and exciting vitality for generations. How pleased/surprised I am when they in turn describe my dark-tan skin as I come towards them: Welcome to the round baked bread, welcome!]

(1999, 35)

The villagers’ likening of the protagonist’s round, tanned face to baked bread shows how rural Iraqis with no schooling configure the protagonist’s dark skin colour with metaphors of belonging in ways which resonate with their own lived experience of nourishment, warmth and familiarity. Para/translated into this passage then is how the act of articulating metaphorical connections of belonging can lead to transformative effects, in terms of lived experience of belonging and does not require a formal education to be enacted and understood. The premise of ‘belonging’ as connective to embodied appearance is not called into question by the protagonist, as she also configures similar metaphors herself. She describes Bibi Hijjia the eldest person in the village for example: 

"وجهها صورة مكثفة للشقوق المتفطرة لذلك الجدار و ما ببي الحجية إلا امتداداً له" (1999, 24), that is, “the overcrowded wrinkles on her face resemble the jagged fissures in the mud wall behind her. As a condensed image of the cracks; Bibi Hijjia appears to be merely an extension of the wall” (2001, 25). As she likens the villagers to the local landscape, she also welcomes that the villagers –"بدورهم" [in turn] (ibid) – liken her to something connective to them.
Emerging in the Arabic version then is a vision of cross-constituency solidarity (rural, black, mixed-heritage Iraqiness) mediated by a child of mixed-heritage who ‘passes’ in appearance as rural and black Iraqi, hailed as not-belonging and belonging in contingent but different situes in terms of class. In the English version, however, a slightly more ambiguous frame of identity is mediated which sheds light on how the Arabic commentary shifts in English translation in somewhat mitigating terms:

The dust particles are everywhere…Even their complexions are brown, like the mud around them. They’re all part of the same brown family, a coloring they’ve inherited unfailingly for generations. How strange I feel when they welcome me as one of them: “Here comes the girl with the round face the color of baked bread!!

(2001, 38)

In this version, the phrase “how strange I feel” (2001, 38) does not mean that the protagonist is not happy to be welcomed by the rural family due to her dark skin colour - which has been insulted on the bus. What she is presented as feeling in English however, suggests that the villagers ‘turning towards’ her conversely creates a fissure in her sense of belonging, rather than a fusion. The reasons for this fissure or ‘strangeness’ are made clearer if we consider, just after this scene, the protagonist’s fleeting observation about her English mother whose pale skin complexion is different to her own in both versions of the novel, an observation which also shifts in English translation:

يقولون إنها جميلة. فهمت أن ذلك يعني شديدة البياض.

[They say she is beautiful. I understood that meant extremely white].

(1999, 36)

Although fleeting, this child-like observation para/translate first the protagonist’s acknowledgement (but not necessarily acceptance) of what Margaret Hunter (2002) terms (in US contexts) an undercurrent of “skin color stratification” (2002, 175) at play in her
localised (middle class) milieu. For Hunter, this stratification is linked to an interlocking dynamic of racism alongside colorism, by which different constituencies (of women) are privileged or marginalised according to their skin colour in the US (2002, ibid). In the Arabic version, this fleeting observation, in contrast, situates why the protagonist feels valued and welcomed within rural village society, but less so in middle-class urban settings. In other words, this comment on middle class colorism is seen by her at this time as localised, rather than all pervasive in its effects, as Hunter suggests is the case in the US. The English version of the novel, however, opens a subtly different conversation about the protagonist’s sense of belonging in terms of her sense of ‘difference’:

They say she’s beautiful. I supposed they’re dazzled by the whiteness of her skin.

(2001, 39)

Here the reason for her mother being considered “beautiful” is switched from one of b/latent colorism to a situation of bedazzled spectatorship: an inversion of what happened to her on the bus, when hailed as “black” (2001, 32). In the English version, the ongoing onslaught of essentialising colour metaphors seems to create a sense of fissure between rather than any sense of belonging for the protagonist. Reading the two versions together, we can see that perhaps two different conversations about colorist alterity seem to be taking place. The Arabic version seems to be opening a conversation on how processes of naming seem contingent upon intersecting, but not necessarily interlocking frames of reference. The English version seems to mediate the protagonist’s own sense of ‘difference’ to everything around her, her middle class and ‘mixed’ heritage status predominating (and subtly eliding) the Arabic version’s oblique critique of the racialised and colorist dynamics underpinning wider rural/urban class differences in 1970s Iraq.

The conversations – and strategies of translation - shift in more ambiguous ways when the protagonist meets Heyla, a black Iraqi woman of African heritage. Her first
encounter happens in Baghdad when the protagonist and her mother are instructed by her father to pay respects to their neighbour Um Nidhal, whose husband Abu Nidhal has just died. The protagonist gives intricate descriptions of the neighbourly visit: a “mourning ceremony” (2001, 93), known in Arabic as "تعزية" [t’aziyya] (1999, 81). Here the protagonist meets Heyla and describes her as "الخادمة السوداء" (1999, 84) or in English, “the black servant woman” (2001, 96). While Heyla makes the t’aziyya refreshments, striking to the protagonist is Heyla’s expansive corporality as well as her kindness:

بكرشها ومؤخرتها...ازدحم (المطبخ) بوجودها.

[With her belly and her bottom, the kitchen became crowded with her presence]

(1999, 84)

“…with her big belly and big hips…the kitchen has become too crowded”

(2001, 96)

Here Heyla’s corporeality is described as literally taking up the entire kitchen. The English version makes the ‘bigness’ of Heyla’s body more explicit, thus equating her presence to something overwhelming the protagonist’s own physical sense of space. The protagonist then recounts a series of micro-events and reflections at the mourning ceremony which interweave conversations and somewhat odd, but connective trains of thought, which return to Heyla and her appearance, but this time in terms of skin colour:

كنت أحب طبيعتها. نادت إحدى الجالسات, وكانت طبيبة بيطرية, تكلم عن مفاقيس الدجاج....ألتقحت هذه بالمطبخ.

[I liked her good-heartedness and kindness. She called out to one of the women sitting down, a vet who was talking about chick incubators...She then came to her in the kitchen. I would prefer to swap her ancient name “Heyla” for the chocolate biscuit ‘Um Al-Abed’].

(1999, 84)

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74 See previous footnote re. Walid (2013; 2014) and the US English equivalent of this racist terminology.
There are clearly many elements to this train of thought: Heyla’s presence is likened to comfort and kindness. Her positive thoughts then turn to her name which means ‘cardamom’ which is a bright green spice used in many culinary traditions. The bright greenness associated with the spice seems incongruent to the protagonist – so she looks for another food which she sees as more congruent to Heyla’s skin complexion. Wanting to find a metaphor for Heyla which equates to the sustenance, calm and sweetness she brings to the mourning ceremony, the first thing that comes to her mind is a chocolate biscuit – whose brand name is ‘Um Al-Abed’, literally meaning ‘Mother of the ‘abd’, a brand name which conflates Heyla and people of African Iraqi heritage to historical discourses of slavery (Diab 2013; Walid 2013). Notable in this train of thought is its innocuousness in the mind of the protagonist, as she seems to reiterate the same name directed at herself as a younger child to someone else without any reflection upon it. The crucial difference here however is that she is clearly thinking this term in her mind and not speaking it out loud as did the children on the bus. More shocking about the term “ام العباد” [um al-’abd] however is that it is a brand-name for an every-day product. In other words, the brand name situates racialised configurations of African identity as insidiously banal.

The liminal conversation about everyday insidious racism mediated as ‘passing’ in Arabic clearly does not pass unnoticed by the para/translator/s of the English version:

I like Heyla’s kindness. She calls out to one of the seated women, a veterinarian who’d been taking to her friend about chick incubators...The vet comes into the kitchen. I would like to change Heyla’s ancient name – it means cardamom – and call her Um-Al-Abid, or Mother of the Dark Servant, the trade name of a local chocolate biscuit.

(2001, 96)

Here we see a polyphonic strategy taking place which communicates something of the tension of this term’s re-representation in English translation: Heyla’s name is first
explained - “it means cardamom” (ibid). The Arabic term "أم العبد" [um al-'abd] is then transliterated as “Um Al-Abid” before being translated as “Mother of the Dark Servant.” While avoiding any mediating the literal meaning of عبد [’abd] in US English as configured by Walid (2013), the transliteration “Um Al-Abid” (ibid) c/overtly addresses readers who may understand the literal meaning of the biscuit brand in Arabic with its racialised political implications. The shift to “servant” thus appears as somewhat ambivalent in intention. For as pointed out by Walid (2013), the term ‘abd’ is never used to refer to a Muslim believer not of African heritage, which usually means that any equating of ‘abd with ‘servant’ at best naive, and in most cases, “insincere.” This last point raises questions on why the phrase "أم العبد" [um al-'abd] was both transliterated and ‘translated’ as “Mother of the Dark Servant” (2001, 96). Read alongside Walid (2013), the partial elision could be read as a c/overt ‘calling out’ of middle-class everyday configurations of black Iraqi identity. For readers unfamiliar with Arabic, the transliterated words Um-Al-Abid could also para/translate a c/overt invitation: for a reader to ask someone more familiar with Arabic about what these transliterated words mean. In other words, this transliteration calls up on the (non-Arabic) reader of the novel to open an interaction or a conversation about racialized operations of power in Iraq in the 1970s alongside her/his own cultural/political discourses of ethnicity, race and class in the US. As this invitation to this ‘conversation’ is c/overtly enacted (and not overtly), this strategy however risks as simply concealing a fear of exposing the Arabic version’s invitation initially directed towards the Arabic-language readers to consider why the (middle-class) protagonist remained as ‘belonging’ in school, while Heyla and Khaddouja did not.

The final reference to Heyla occurs when the protagonist finds out that her father has suddenly died of a heart attack. This time, she meets Heyla in her own home - where a *t‘aziya* ceremony is now being held for her own father in the wake of his sudden death.

The driver was crying, and Madame was (there) waiting for me. Abu Nidhal’s widow and her woman servant Heyla Um Al-‘Abd were preparing coffee, in a state of shock.

(1999, 115)

The driver was crying, and Madame was there, waiting for me. Abu Nidhal’s widow and their *colored* woman servant, Heyla-Um Al-Abid were there too, preparing coffee for everyone…They were all in a state of shock.

(2001, 137)

In this instance, an overtly racialized exegesis is *added* to the English translation. In her grief, the protagonist uses (in English) the more racializing word “colored” (2001 137) when previously she had referred to Heyla as “black” (2001, 96). This clear exegesis in English translation configures the protagonist as situating Heyla and her black Iraqi ethnicity now in more overtly racialized frames. Arising from her grief is a fleeting but telling moment of when the very naming practices used to insult her, have become part of her ‘unconscious vocabulary, a process which is mediated as much more explicit in the English version. In both versions of the novel, these thoughts represent how easily the protagonist is (briefly) co-opted into racialising different Iraqi constituencies in metaphorical terms as she too has been (briefly) racialized by others. The fleeting representations of Heyla and her Iraqi ethnicity, moreover, contrast all too sharply with the detailed ‘sketches’ of Khaddouja. The brevity alongside the purposefulness of these fleeting scenes however suggests that Heyla’s presence should not be read as a representation of black Iraqi identity at all, but rather as an echo of middle-class limited
encounters with black Iraqi identity, despite at times, the protagonist being configured as part of it. Heyla’s presence thus is part of a wider political (non) commentary on the systematic marginalisation of certain constituencies of Iraqis at play in the novel, rather than a representation of her agency as a black Iraqi woman living in Baghdad. With both versions of this novel para/translating Heyla in such liminal terms, read retrospectively, this novel opens a conversation about how peripheral the representations of black Iraqi identity are written in this novel, and so further conversations on how black Iraqi identity could be shown differently in contexts of Iraqi literature or cultural production. The shifts in English translation also inspire other conversations about the ‘alterity’ of this polyphonic novel’s own processes of translation as a US publication, which I discuss in the next section.

4.6: Conclusion: new conversations for polyphonic feminist translation approaches

In this chapter, I have shown that the two versions of Khedairi’s first novel can be read as connective polyphonic translations which open a conversation about Iraqi society in ways which do not create images of ‘heroes’ and ‘villains’ but rather call for (gendered) reflections on alterity in localised sites in Iraq. As the triangulated interactions of MSA Arabic, Iraqi dialect and English reverberate across both versions of the novel, the novel’s meaning-making does necessarily not stop at the first reading of either version of the novel. But as not all readers – and protagonists – are privileged with knowing all three languages, the potential ‘alterity’ of the reader (and some protagonists in relations to others) however gives rise to a tension in its politics of cross-constituency representations. The central presence of Khaddouja and the peripherality of Heyla’s representation thus emerge as key elements in both versions of this novel, alongside the second and third parts of this novel which read as dominated by war, illness and exile. A Sky So Close is importantly the first
novel by an Iraqi woman writer to draw attention to the endemic marginalisation faced by rural communities and black Iraqis during the 1970s from a retrospective perspective. In this light, the overt presence of Khaddouja’s voice and the silent visuality of Heyla’s presence clearly open a conversation on what the mediation of ‘solidarity among subalterns’ ‘reads’ and ‘translates’ as in this instance of Iraqi women’s story-writing. This polyphonic novel in effect marks one Iraqi woman writer as trying to write the politics of unrepresented alterities in Iraq while trying to mitigate the potential of its very impossibility. Bearing in mind the discriminations historically faced by black Iraqis (Diab 2013), few girls of black Iraqi ethnicity would have lived a story to that of the (middle-class) protagonist. In Khaddouja’s environment, stories and songs were preserved in oral, rather than in written cultural traditions. Understanding the novel as underpinned by a conscious perspective of alterity as the الغيرية [al-ghayriyya] thus helps us consider the faultlines of mediation of the novel’s representations of rural and black Iraqi alterity as part of its meaning-making in translation. One of these faultlines is how the novel’s representations of cross-constituency solidarities alongside cross-constituency marginalisations covertly frame – while challenging - the impossibility of some constituencies representing fully whom they see as ‘other’, as contingent upon situe.

To more fully understand what a politics of the الغيرية [al-ghayriyya] might mean in this novel, we need to consider why Khedairi may have chosen to imagine the story from the perspective of a darker-skinned, middle-class girl living alongside Iraqis who do not read and write - or in Heyla’s case, even speak to her. The protagonist is, importantly, never represented as the ‘heroine’ or moral conscience of the novel: she names as much as she names. Read within ‘polyphonic’ paradigms of feminist translation, the cursory but purposeful representations of Iraqi alterity communicating (and so enacting) the gaps and tensions of the representation of localised oppressions emerge as multi-valent parts of the
novel’s meaning-making. If, as Bahrani (2001) suggests, it is the reading-class of Iraqis who are connectively implicated in the novel’s political critique in Arabic, the representations of Iraqi alterity moving between MSA, Iraqi Arabic and English ‘show’ or ‘sketch’ Khedairi implicating herself too. The ways by which all three languages shift in English translation suggest that the para/translators were aware that some terminologies could implicate Khedairi – and themselves – rather than their (US) readerships per se. This perhaps explains why they opted to mitigate, transliterate and explain some terms.

The question of the ethics of representing such mimetic configurations of Iraqi alterities in the temporal contexts of this novel’s publication in English translation however remains. Claire Beckett’s (parodic) photo exhibition Simulating Iraq highlights the importance of re-considering how ‘the Iraqi every-day’ is perceived in the US by showing pictures of ‘Iraqi people’ whose ‘roles’ are played by US citizens, military and civilian. (Beckett/Banai 2009). One picture depicts four African-American US civilians representing four Iraqi women drinking tea. Whether an oblique reference to rural or black Iraqis or not, this picture highlights how little about specific constituencies of Iraqis can be known if Iraqis’ representation in (post Gulf wars) US is usually via the tools of power which mediate marginalised constituencies of personhood as subjects to be objectified in the first place. Although openly challenging the premises of ‘I’ and ‘other’ post-(2003) war in Iraq, Beckett’s exhibition opens questions about the extent that Khedairi’s charged contexts of representations of Iraqi alterity in 1970s Iraq could have been read as ‘intelligible’ through the lens of the equally charged contexts of post-9/11 US political involvement in Iraq. The potential opacity and porosity of borders between different readerships and different alterities post-US/Iraq Gulf wars raise questions on the role of

English translation itself as cipher of the gendered politics of conflict threading through many Iraqi women writers’ novels first published in Arabic. The politics of how the representations of gendered confrontations with conflict in Iraqi women writers’ novels are re/mediated in (post-1990 and 2003) English translation is thus the focus of the next chapter.
Chapter 5: Re/writing gendered encounters and confrontations: Alia Mamdouh and Hadiya Hussein

5.1: Overview

In Iraq’s shifting contexts of conflict and political instabilities, Iraqi women have been framed as having distinctive characteristics of power and resilience: ‘mother-like’ strength (Abudi 2010; Kashou 2013); mainstays of their families’ survival (cooke 2007); and keepers of community remembrance, particularly in Shi’a Muslim communities (Deeb 2005; Pederson 2014; Shabbar 2014). During the recent wars in Iraq, images of Iraqi women also seem to have functioned in many US and other Global North media outlets as ciphers or symbols of the hopelessness and misery of the oppressed. As noted by Marta Zarzycka (2016), it is women (often with children) who are shown as embodying the effects of violence and war as a geo-political entity and nation, with (military or militarised) men configured as perpetrators. Alongside such gendered frames of reference, Iraqi women’s literature has emerged as a contra-punctual literary activism which refuses co-option into any ideology that situates war, oppression and victimhood as inherent or inevitable to Iraq and its peoples along lines of gender, constituency or language. According to Ghazoul (2008, 201), Iraqi women’s literature is thus distinguished by a politics of "تكاملم" [takāmul] or a holistic “complementarity” which situates social, political and gendered difference in Iraqi society as integral to its creative, psychological and social development while “not necessarily entail/ing polarisation” or enmity (2008, 201). Yet while cultural-political heterogeneity in Iraqi society has been integral in Iraq’s literary scenes for decades (Al-Musawi 2006), this motif has risked becoming overlooked not only during the years of Ba’athist censorship but in the wake of the post-2003 war in Iraq (Al-Ali and Al-Najjar 2013, xvii). As the fall-out of identity-based conflict in Iraq has resulted in little restorative justice for its victims so far (Al-Marashi and Keskin 2008), the premises and implications

Mamdouh’s novel about Baghdad of the 1940s and 1950s has been published in English translation twice. The first English version Mothballs (1995) – whose English title was a literal translation of the Arabic title - was translated by Peter Theroux as part of the Arab Women Writer’s Series edited by Arab literature critic and writer Fadia Faqir, published in the UK. The second version was published in the US under the new title Nephtalene: A Novel of Baghdad (2005) by New York Feminist Press. Although Theroux’ 1995 English translation was used in the 2005 version, the edits and para/texts used to ‘repackage’ the 2005 US version novel make the novel ‘look’ very different to its 1995 predecessor. In contrast, Hadiya Hussein’s novel ما بعد الحب [Beyond Love] (2004) has been published once, in the US by Syracuse Press, a publishing house with longstanding commitment to publishing material on the Arab world in general. The English version Beyond Love (2012), like Nephtalene: A Novel of Baghdad (2005) has additional para/textual chapters written by academics known in the US academy for their expertise in Arabic or women’s literature. Both novels in English seem to para/translate a resistance to Iraq, Iraqi women and Iraqi identity being couched in unnuanced and orientalising terms, as has been in the case in the US (cultural and political) media since the 1990s (Jabbra 2006; Shohat 1992). In this chapter, then, I explore how the para translation strategies re/co-create the English versions in ways that mediate the politics of publishing each novel’s gendered writing in Arabic as intelligible in English to new audiences by presenting gendered representations of localised conflict in different ways.
To contextualise my readings of both novels’ journeys in Arabic-English para/translation, I give a brief overview of how some Iraqi women writers have engaged with the politics of conflict in Iraq and why it would be useful to read Mamdouh’s novel حبات النفتالين [Mothballs] and Hussein’s [Beyond Love] in English para/translation using analytical frameworks of metramorphic feminist translation approaches, inspired by frameworks of matrixial feminist psychoanalysis (Ettinger 1992). I then explore the ‘re/re-packaging’ of حبات النفتالين [Mothballs] in English (1995/2005) by considering how the connective gendered formats of this novel’s mediation in Arabic challenge while at the same co-create opportunities for each English translation to be read differently. For Hadiya Hussein’s ما بعد الحب [Beyond Love], I discuss how novel’s politics of Iraqi exiles’ storytelling of the horror of militarised conflict is repackaged in English in ways which disturb or blur the borders between ‘the readers’ in the novel and ‘the reader’ of the novel in politically generative ways. Drawing on theoretical frameworks of metramorphic feminist translation (Flotow and Shread 2014) which question either/or premises of translation, I explore in this chapter the extent that we can re/read each novel’s meaning-making in Arabic-English translation as para/translating the tensions of the (re) telling of its respective stories of gendered confrontation, in languages and political fields of conflict which are connected and at times, irreconcilably different.

5.2 Beyond binaries: Iraqi women re/writing gendered geopolitical difference

Iraqi women writers have often written of conflict and confrontation in Iraq to critique and comment on the either/or premises of identity and oppression, usually from the perspective of a woman protagonist. In her novel ممرات السكون [The Corridors of Silence], Iqbal Al-Qazwini (2006)77 writes of an Iraqi woman in Berlin vicariously living

77 Published in English translation as Zubaida’s Window (2014), full detailed listed in Thesis Appendix.
scenes of the 1990-91 Iraq war via the European TV screens and in her dreams. While Jean Baudrillard (1991) famously declared “the Gulf War will not and did not take place” in the minds of many people living in Global North due to the ‘clean’ way it was mediated by US and other state media, it is precisely the ‘clean’ communication of the war in Al-Qazwini’s novel which has the most shocking, traumatic impact on the main protagonist, Zubaida. As she watches the war in Iraq via her TV screen, Zubaida finds any categorical premise of herself – and other Iraqis in exile - ‘not being there’ thrown increasingly into question.

Lutfiya Al-Dulaimi’s novel حديقة حياة [Hayat’s Garden] (2003) focuses on one woman, Hayat living the 1990 war in Iraq, while waiting for her husband to return from the 1980-1988 war. Hayat’s wait both ends and tragically perpetuated when her husband is found to be alive – homeless in the streets of Baghdad, having lost his mind years ago when an ex-prisoner of war. While she remembers him, he does not remember her. In Bouthayna Al-Nasiri’s short story "عودة الأسير [The Return of the Prisoner] (1998), the fallout of the 1980-1988 war emerges in cross-generational frames. When a man – presumed martyrred in the 1980-1988 war – returns to his wife and children, he does not receive a welcome as an ex-prisoner-of-war. He leaves the family for an unknown destination when he discovers his ‘death’ as a martyr is much more palatable to his youngest son than his survival. Showing post-war conflict for Iraqi veterans as no longer the battlefield or the prison camp but the society into which they return, this story attests to the tragedy of ideology permeating all levels of Iraqi society as an aftermath of the devastation resulting from the Iran-Iraq war.

At a time when Iraqi literary and aesthetic production was dominated by propagating the notion of Qadisyat Saddam78 during the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war, Alia Mamdouh’s story حبات النفتالين [Mothballs] (1986) literally defied inclusion, association with and co-

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78 A political motif used by the Iraqi Ba’athist state apparatus to co-opt all elements of Iraqi society into the 1980-1988 war as a re-enactment of the Battle of Al-Qadasiya, an historic battle between the Islamic Abbasid and Sassanid Empires, year 636. (Davis 2005; Rohde 2010; Khoury 2013; Lewenthal 2014).
option into any Iraqi war literature produced in Iraq at that time. The novel is about the life of one little girl Huda living in Al-A’dhamiyya, a downtown neighbourhood in Baghdad in the 1940s and 1950s, a time of competing nationalist, leftist and colonial ideologies in Iraq’s political history. Huda uses second, first and third person perspectives mostly in the present tense, to tell her story of her life in ways which configure the people and neighbourhood around her as co-protagonists sharing and thus co-creating this multi-focalised story alongside her. As well as evoking traditions of Iraq oral story-telling (Ghazoul 2008), Huda’s overtly gendered and multi-focalised mode of mediation situated this novel as distinctly ‘other’ to the overwhelmingly hypermasculine discourses of binary conflict prevalent in Iraq in the 1980s. As the uniqueness of Mamdouh’s novel in Arabic is connective to the gendered registers she uses, which include the second person feminine, this novel presents a challenge to English translation as there is no gendered second person address (i.e. you), in English, the potential effect of which is re-personalising the ‘second’ person address in less ‘overtly’ gendered frames. Despite the challenges of translating this innovative literary work, the story was published in English translation twice (Mamdouh 1995; 2005) – as well as in, as French (1996) Spanish (2000) and other languages.

Hadiya Hussein’s story [Beyond Love] centres on one Iraqi woman (also called Huda) who flees to Amman as a political refugee in the 1990s, after voting ‘no’ to Saddam Hussein remaining president in the Iraqi general elections. As she remembers her experiences of life in Iraq under international sanctions, she encounters other Iraqis telling her their stories of exile which are mediated to the reader by Huda’s act of listening to them. As this story presents how specific Iraqis listen to specific others talking of their localised tragedies, this is a story which sets out how cross-constituency solidarities can begin to happen in the face of hegemonic ideologies of identity-based conflict – simply by the act of listening to others’ stories. Particularly haunting is how the markings of Iraqi personhood
are mediated in this novel as connected to gendered Shi’a traditions of mourning which draw on past events of tragedy as one way of making sense of tragedies in the present (Shabbar 2014). With a multitude of stories diversifying and overlaying Huda’s own story in different ways, this novel also calls its own authorship into question in ways which blur, fracture and diversify notions of time but its location and agency of story-telling. The first of Hussein’s novels to be published in English translation, this novel was published in the US in 2012, at a time when the ongoing violence in Iraq after the 2003 war was often ‘explained’ by the US state government as occurring on sectarian grounds (Al Marashi and Keskin 2008; Al-Ali and Pratt 2009). As the novel shows the US military forces (through the protagonists’ stories) as perpetrators of mass violence during the 1991 Gulf War, the politics of presenting this novel in (US) English translation was potentially charged, particularly as the role of US military had historically been ‘glossed over’ in US media coverage (DeGhett 2015; Cheric 2016).

Although very different in terms of style and content, both novels represent the articulation of the gendered nature of conflict and confrontation as opening up space for cross-constituency solidarities to emerge in specific, situated ways. In Mamdouh’s novel, gendered confrontation is presented thematically, through the events in the story. This novel also shows alternative configurations to ‘conflict’ through presenting MSA Arabic and Iraqi colloquial dialect in specifically gendered formats operating alongside each other in the text. In Hussein’s novel, the telling of stories articulates the need to situate the articulation of confrontation in Iraq carried out by particular perpetrators against particular constituencies of Iraqi as an event with universal importance that calls to be read about and listened to. In this respect, one of the most important aspects of this novel is that there is always more than one story. For this reason, the multiplicity of different au/their/ships mediating the stories abounding in the novel emerge as inherently part of each novel’s
mediations of the entanglements of (gendered) confrontation. Despite the clearly transformative politics of each novel and its critical acclaim in its respective publication contexts (Al-Zayyat 1996; Lynx-Qualey 2014c), there has been little critical engagement with how each work moved across its charged political contexts in English translation despite – and due to – the entangled relationalities of both languages in Iraq’s recent histories of conflict. To contextualise how I read each novel’s move in Arabic-English translation, I first explain analytical frameworks of metramorphic feminist translation approaches (Flotow and Shread 2014), underpinned by the premise of non-binary subjectivities in translation, and their salience vis-à-vis Iraqi women’s literature.

5.3: Metramorphic feminist translation approaches – beyond language binaries

Theoretically, metramorphic feminist translation approaches are inspired by Bracha Ettinger’s psychoanalytical model of the matrixial substratum (1992) or metramorphics. This model sets out to explore notions of independence, dependence and inter-dependence in the human psyche by drawing on paradigms of child/child-bearer relationality to diversify and problematize categorical notions of unitary human subjectivity. As Bracha Ettinger (1992) explains, she first drew on a paradigm of feminine sexual difference based on pre-natal child/child-bearer relation as one way of “relativizing the prevailing status of the Phallus in Lacan’s (and Freud’s) psychoanalytical theories” (1992, 176) in Western culture which, in her view, had idealised the Phallus (and its connotations of being the masculine sex organ) as “the only representative of sexual difference” (1992, 185), thus foreclosing anything ‘other’ to it as anything but ‘a lack’. Within a field of knowledge
where notions of human subjectivity seemed premised on paradigms of separation\textsuperscript{79} predicated on metaphors of the (male) body never to be shared by all, Ettinger’s approach worked to radically re-configure subjectivity-formation as a connective, emergent process shared by everybody not subsuming, separating or rejecting anyone. From this perspective, Ettinger drew on a matrixial paradigm not to reify the status of pregnancy or the biological act of ‘child-bearing’ but to foreground the subjectivity-formation of the pre-natal person connective to her/his bearer as a space or threshold where “elements or the subjects meet…recognise one another without knowing one another” (1992, 199) not as “I’s” but as “I/non-I’s” co-emerging as continual processes of “border-linking.” By proposing that pre-natal/child-bearer relation emerges alongside and shifts in ongoing co-relationality, human subjectivity can, then, be configured as (emergently) predicated on ‘less than’ \textit{while} ‘more than’ One state of subjectivity (Ettinger 1992, 200). A matrixial approach thus firstly calls into question relationalities based on definitive notions of ‘difference’ and ‘sameness’ and secondly, configures an alternative axis of ‘Other’ sexual difference which, according to Ettinger, “produces for men and women a different, non-Oedipal sublimation where, in the search for non-I(s), the \textit{jouissance} is of the borderlinking itself” (Ettinger, 2001, 110). The notion of ‘border-linking’ configures human engagement as conceivable alongside and beyond phallic notions of exclusion or sublimation.

Seeking to transform hegemonic configurations of (masculinist) realities which configure translation within metonymic or metaphorical frames of misrepresentation, compensation or loss, Luise von Flotow and Carolyn Shread (2014, 593) have drawn on Ettinger’s notion of pre-natal subjectivities to consider how (feminist) translation praxis and theory could move beyond unitary or binary notions of privileged subjectivity in

\textsuperscript{79} In contexts of psychoanalysis, separation refers to that from the mother post-birth (Kristeva 1982) and/or through a person’s sense of consciousness “connected with word-presentation” emerging from a pre-conscious state. (Freud 1923, 19-23 c.f. Ettinger 1992, 185).
relation to translation. One approach is blurring definitive ‘I/you’ relationalities between translator and the text, inspired by Gayatri Spivak’s notion of “intimate” translation where the translator engages with the text in order not to subsume it (1993, 177- 178). In this way, metramorphic feminist translation approaches have sought not only to problematize the border between writing and translation, but to problematize the notion of borders in the first place as one way of fostering a deeper focus on “the dynamics of intimacy [involved in translation] and hence the nature of translation itself” (Flotow and Shread 2014, 592). Another way of moving (translation) beyond either/or paradigms involves considering that all texts are in co-emergence in different ways, before, during and after their processes of re/writing or translation. Metramorphic feminist translation approaches thus configure the material and psychic contexts of translation decisions as “ethical encounters through exchanges in which difference is maintained within an intimate space” (Shread 2007, 213). In this respect, a paradigm of metramorphic feminist translation analysis seeks to go beyond framing translated works within binary configurations of ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ translation decisions. Instead, a metramorphic translation approach would consider how these translated texts move across (and in) ambiguous or charged publication contexts as part of its meaning-meaning, a particularly relevant point in contexts of Iraqi women writers. As this meaning-making includes recognising how the role of the translator bears upon these contexts, Flotow and Shread (2014) draw on Ettinger (1992)’s notion of tsimsoum – where the child-bearer’s body and pre-natal child are in constantly emerging, and often discomforting states of contraction and expansion – as another way of situating the dynamic of translation as movement and co-emergent agencies operating in shared often confined, dangerous, sensitive and intimate spaces (2014, 595). Translation can thus be configured as a process of ‘borderlinking’ between differences and tensions which cannot always be easily accommodated, particularly salient in contexts of Iraqi women’s literature in translation.
In contexts of this chapter, a paradigm of metramorphic feminist translation configures moreover that translation is a multi-faceted and multi-valent process through which there is are never ‘one’ completed work, but rather work always in process or mediating meanings which can be diversified and interrogated. As pointed out by Rosi Huhn (1993, 8), “in contrast to metamorphosis, each of the new forms and shapes of the metamorphosis does not send the nature of each of the preceding ones into oblivion or even eliminate it, but lets it shine through the transparency, disarranges and leads to an existence of multitude rather than unity.” Huhn’s notions of ‘shining through’ inspired feminist translators Carolyn Shread (2007) and Luise von Flotow (2012) to consider the co-emergence of meaning between texts (and the languages of mediation) to be acknowledged and explored in ways “which do not efface its origins” (Shread 2007, 224). In this way, metramorphic feminist translation approaches have been used to conceptualise – and to make manifest - the layering of languages and discourses at play in and between the translation/s of different works as part of a translated work’s meaning-making. Shread (2007, 227) highlights for example how non-binary configurations of translation helped her engage with Fatima Galleh’s play Les Co-épouses (1990) which subverted and confronted French as its ‘primary’ language of mediation with its echoes of Arabic and Berber in ways which marked rather than elided the gaps and confrontations between these echoes in English translation (2007, 228). How a text moves - and doesn’t move - across languages and readerships, in themes and analytical frameworks, is thus (part of) a translated text’s (gendered) meaning-making. Going beyond either/or frames of ‘credit’ and reparative assimilation (i.e. replacement), Ettinger’s notion of ‘I’ and ‘not-I (s)’ as co-emergent has helped feminist translators, such as Shread (2007) to help frame and understand gaps and partial renderings in the translation of various works as generative processes which let “shine through” the complexity of (translating) a work, rather than as mitigations or losses attesting to its ‘lacking’ or derivative status.
This last point brings me to how I draw on this approach on contexts of Alia Mamdouh’s [Mothballs] and Hadiya Hussein’s [Beyond Love]. While metramorphic feminist translation analysis is certainly not about finding ‘solutions’ for what cannot be easily negotiated or even mediated in translation, such terms of feminist translation raise questions on the ethical implications of reading confrontation and at times irresolvable conflict as generative layers at play in translation. Politically, for example, how can the ideologies of conflict at play in Iraqi women’s novels be read as co-emergent when the politics of US/Iraq conflicts, such as the 1991 Gulf war and the 2003 War, clearly intersect and shape how their US English translations are mediated? The fundamental differences between Arabic and English in terms of their script (writing and grammar) also raise questions of how notions of border-linking can be relevant when the space or ‘lines’ by which the border-linking could happen (that is, between Arabic and English as language) may not ever be mutually recognisable in the first place. In this respect, paradigms of metramorphic feminist translation approaches invite more engagement in contexts of Iraqi women’s literature, particularly as the frayedness of the (political) contexts generating attention to Iraqi women’s literature in English translation could impact on how ‘generative’ their literary works can be read to be, and for whom.

5.4: حبات النفتالين [Mothballs] by Alia Mamdouh: critical contexts

Born in 1944, Alia Mamdouh grew up in Baghdad and worked as a journalist before leaving Iraq in 1982. She has written seven novels and two collections of short stories. Her novel المحبوبات [The Loved Ones] (2004) was awarded the 2004 Naguib Mahfouz Medal for Literature, a prestigious award for the best contemporary novel published in Arabic yet to be translated. Although published three decades ago, Mamdouh’s novel حبات النفتالين

80 See Thesis Appendix for a full list of Mamdouh’s publication in Arabic and English translation.
"Mothballs" (1986/2001) is still remembered and eulogised by Iraqi critics, with Najam Kadhim stating that "تبقى برأينا واحدة من أجمل وأفضى الروايات النسوية والعراقية عمومًا لحد الآن" [it remains, in our opinion, one of the most beautiful and mature Iraqi and Iraqi nisūwī novels until this day]. Part of its appeal in Arabic is how this novel situates its main protagonist Huda as evoking the sights, sounds and smells of Iraq in the 1940 and 1950s by her distinctly Iraqi register and localised cultural terms of reference. Huda’s switching modes of focalisation at turns disorient and immerse the reader into her world of down-town Al-A‘dhamiyya neighbourhood in Baghdad: a life of poverty, childhood games, defiance of her father, fear for her mother dying of tuberculosis and love for her grandmother who is the mainstay of the family. No less significant in Huda’s everyday life are her younger brother Adel and Mahmoud, her first love, with whom Huda plays and argues in the local neighbourhood whose residents she exasperates and makes laugh in turn by her witty retorts and exuberant joie-de-vivre as she runs through the streets. Another significant person in Huda’s life is her aunt Farida who takes Huda on trips to the public baths and shopping in the market. Outside of her family, Huda’s best friend is Fardous, and like Huda’s grandmother, a great source of comfort and wisdom. The family house, its courtyard, the narrow streets, the local mosque and neighbourhood shops also figure prominently in Huda’s telling of her and her family’s life. Alongside bringing to life the dramatic events which shape the family and the entire neighbourhood, Huda’s distinct way of telling her story makes every scene, train of thought and interaction in this novel evocative of Iraq and its peoples in bygone times. At the end of the novel, however, the neighbourhood’s community is scattered due to slum clearances enacted by the 1958 government as a move to move the country forward into its new post/colonial era. In this way, the novel from Huda’s eye/I begins and ends with her family moving forward together,

81 Hosted by the Arab Cultural Association, Cardiff, 17/03/2018 (Al-Saffar 2018).
albeit uncomfortably, in a truck. As the novel’s title [Mothballs] suggests, although the neighbourhood disappeared, each person from there, still connectively carries and encapsulates something it within them. In this way, this novel has been read as a metaphorical ‘capsule of memory’ evoking Iraq and its peoples from times past (Faqir 1995, v) which works (with its readers) to keep its memory alive today.

As an Arabic publication, Alia Mamdouh has described [Mothballs] as a novel about confronting fear. Her understandings of her novel however, seem to change over time. In her article “Creatures of Arab Fear” (1998), Mamdouh first situates fear as a “multi-headed monster” which permeates any articulation or manifestations of writing in the Arab world (1998, 69). In a later interview – in the wake of her novel being re-printed in Arabic in 2000 – she then situates this fear in her own personal contexts: vis-à-vis her own father, the Iraqi government and perhaps the Iraqi president himself:

[Fear of the other is what we carry inside of us...I had to search for the citizen of fear inside of me to understand all this fear, to then cut it off from its roots...My father was the first policeman I had to confront who represented the authoritative governance of the (Iraqi) regime.]

(c.f. Nini 2000, 16)

Here Mamdouh now configures her confrontation of fear as an emergent process connected to her act of writing but differently: through writing her fear, she articulates a better understanding of it, to so be able to cut it off “at the roots” (ibid). Mamdouh in another later interview situates the scenes of (gendered) localised patriarchal violence in her writing as articulating overcoming fear from a retrospective perspective, and why she writes from overtly gendered perspectives: not to privilege feminine over masculine, but seeking to show how interlocking alliances, confrontations and fears can change and happen between Iraqis (c.f. Chollet 2002). In her 2004 article, “Baghdad: These Cities Are Dying In Our
Arms,’” however, Mamdouh re-configures her act of writing as an embodied political act of reconstruction through outrage, rather than retrospective articulation of fear, seemingly as a response to the 2003 war in Iraq: “With a close-up shot, I am rebuilding my country before you. It is a construction of anger, vast beauty and identity which I submit to the act of writing. That will give it a finality” (2004, 48). Here she re-situates her act of writing as both site and tool taking a picture or filming a scene: her act of writing giving Iraq ‘presence.’ While Iraq itself may be in a state of destruction, her sense of Iraqi anger, beauty and identity ‘directs’ how she uses this site and tool. Mamdouh does not specify however what “a finality” of her writing means when it is translated. This brings me to the English re/translations of حبات النفتال [Mothballs] (Mamdouh 1995/2005).

As stated earlier, the Arabic novel was first translated into English by Peter Theroux as Mothballs in 1995, as part of the Garnet Arab Women Writers’ Series, edited by literary critic Fadia Faqir. The series was marketed and received as a collective Arab world women-focused project led by Faqir facilitated with established literary translators, borne out in many (at times combative) reviews on the quality of Arabic-English translations. 82 In the 1995 version, Faqir situates Mamdouh’s novel as part of a transnational literary project which aimed to challenge “homegrown” and Western orientalist ideologies projected onto Arab women/writers before and after the 1990 war in Iraq (Faqir 1995, viii). The novel – a re-edited version of Theroux’ 1995 English translation - was republished in the US as Nephtalene: A Novel of Baghdad by New York Feminist Press in 2005 as “the first novel by an Iraqi woman writer to be published in the United States” narrowing its geo-political scope to Iraq and the US. While the 2005 Afterword by Iraqi critic Farida Abu-Haidar (2005, 192) pays tribute to Faqir for “saving” the novel from

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obscurity by the 1995 English translation, a dynamic of the ‘second’ version replacing the 1995 version emerges: the 1995 version is absent/ed in the 2005 ISBN page and Theroux’s 1996 translation copyright date is amended to 1986, the same year that Mamdouh is attributed copyright for the first Arabic publication. As Abu-Haidar (1998, 308) had stated in a previous article on Mamdouh’s work that the 1995 version misses many nuances of the Arabic version, her involvement in the 2005 version suggests that this ‘new’ translation would be different to the 1995 version. Both versions however have a shared politics of activism, albeit situated differently: to present the novel (and Huda) as countering stereotypes about Arab (and Iraqi) women. As each version’s para/texts are so striking on a visual and discursive level, I first carry out a detailed analysis of the non-discursive mediations of the novel in both English versions. I then discuss how the para/translators of each English version novel work with the challenges of mediating Mamdouh’s distinctive use of gendered and colloquial Iraqi Arabic registers. In this section, I argue that while each version clearly works to foreground the personage of Huda as instrumental to the novel as an English publication, each version also works to enact Mamdouh’s politics of using language to fight and build for Iraq, albeit differently.

5.5: Mothballs and Naphtalene: confronting gendered un/translatability

From the outer covers of the 1995 UK version (an image of a public bath), the emphasis is on women; on the 2005 outer cover, we see one little girl, presumably evoking Huda, which situates the story as told from ‘one’ person. Commenting on the Arabic version, Iraqi critic Mohammed Aref (2014) praises the chapter about the public baths: بسحره لوحة الفنان الفرنسي «إنغرز» المشهورة «الحمام التركي» “Hamam al-Naswas” يضاهي [images of public bath for women comparable in magicality to the painting «Turkish Bath» by celebrated
French artist Ingres.\textsuperscript{83} As Ingres’ painting has been much critiqued and pastiched for its orientalising, patriarchal and voyeuristic overtones (Kleinfeld 2000), Aref’s commentary raises questions on why the 1995 book - setting out to combat Orientalism (Faqir 1995, viii) - depicts an image of a women’s public bath which could connect so readily to prevalent epitexts of orientalist exoticism and violation of women-only spaces, invoked and revoked in many Arab world literary critical scenes (Boer 2004). To respond to this question, I read this cover as au/their/ed modes of para/translation, using analytical frames of metramorphic feminist translation analysis.

Upon first reading of the cover, the perspective appears situated from below at a (not above as is the case in Ingres’ painting). The brush stroke images show uncovered heads and faces turning away from any outside gaze – including Huda’s - pre-occupied with and turning to each other, talking or bathing. Bodies below the shoulders are submerged in water, wrapped in towels or hidden behind the public bath wall and the title frontispiece - part of the cover image while being separate/d from it by its signage as a title. The bucket’s prominence foregrounds Huda, as a nine-year-old girl, playing with buckets, pumice stones and soaps around the older women who relax and talk amongst each other which we read about later in the novel. If the notion of public baths calls to mind Ingres’ Turkish Bath, the child height eye/I view, the bright colours and image of a bucket close-up thus offer an alternative perspective. The inner outer cover then introduces this novel as “seen through the eyes of a nine-year-old Huda” and lists the places she lives her life – public steam baths (an allusion to the outer front cover), roadside vendors and playing in the streets where political demonstrations are taking place. From a metramorphic perspective, this outer cover could be read as a process of co-emergence by situated association: after reading the

\textsuperscript{83} Mohammed Aref. 2014. “Yawm nisīl al-‘arab al-ajnabiyyāt” In Al-Ittihad, 06/03/2014  
chapter about the public baths, the bath scene presented from *Huda’s* child eye/I-view, is framed in turn by the cover para/translators’ strategic positioning and size of the title frontispiece, beyond the ken of Huda and the women she sees. Both evoking and uncannily disturbing Ingres-like epitexts of women-only spaces in MENA, the 1995 cover image\(^{54}\) ‘faces’ Orientalist notions of Arab women’s spaces head on, engaging with such tropes from the novel’s first page (the outer cover). In this way, we can see this outer cover blends the politics of Mamdouh’s writing with that of the literary project – rebuilding understandings of Iraq literally before the readers’ eye/I’s, so involving them in the process.

In the 2005 version, we see an image of a little girl wearing an *abaya*, superimposed over a traditional Arab world market scene. The new title *Naphtalene: A Novel of Baghdad* evokes a more poetic notion of the flammable elements of ‘mothballs’ alongside new associations with Baghdad, a city synonymous in the US media with war and burning in post-2003 Iraq (cooke 2007). The outer blurb flap in contrast to the 1995 version describes Huda as strident in her politics: “looking to establish her female identity amidst an oppressive patriarchal society and an impending revolution.” The book is presented on this outer blurb flap as also able to “change the way readers perceive gender politics in the Middle East.” The book further foregrounds gendered politics as underpinning the novel via a Foreword by Hélène Cixous, a philosopher known for her seminal essay “La Rire de la Méduse” [The Laugh of Medusa] (1975) in which she introduces the concept of *l’écriture féminine*. In her Foreword, Cixous (2005) describes the fieriness of Huda as diffuse, partialised and gendered: “In appearance, a girl. In action, a boy. In poetic truth, a fiery daughter” (2005, vi), her last point foregrounding family - rather than Baghdad - as point of reference for Huda’s gendered “fiery” (ibid) resistance. Cixous also mediates Huda as unbounded: her fire literally lights up everything around her, including the writing in the

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novel itself (2005, vi). Reviewers of the US version nonetheless seemed to read Huda within gendered contexts of post-2003 Iraq. Book reviewer Caroline Wilkinson praises Huda (not Mamdouh) as a “fierce” and “resilient” voice which “destroys the patronizing concepts of Iraqi women that widely circulate in this country” (Wilkinson 2012). In her review situated on the outer back cover jacket, acclaimed writer Luisa Valenzuela also praises the novel’s importance within distinctly post-2003 political frames: “Nephtalene is a beautiful novel that will help preserve in our hearts the memory of a city systematically being destroyed under our very eyes.” From a metramorphic perspective, these commentaries resonate with Mamdouh’s post-2003 politics of writing as described in her 2004 article: she (through Huda) defies Baghdad’s destruction by writing conflict as writing to rebuild it (Mamdouh 2004, 48). While presented on the blurb as able to “change” (NYFP) reader perceptions of “gender politics in the Middle East,” no detail on what perceptions would be, are articulated either.

In the discursive elements of each version of the novel, each para/translator mediates Huda – and the novel – as an iconic feminine voice in English in ways which give strong visual and politically discursive clues to how Huda’s voice should be ‘read’ by its new readerships. In the 1995 version, the outer blurb cover informs the reader of something what the novel is about: a woman-focussed take on Iraqi society through the eye/I of a young girl. In her detailed critical introduction, Fadia Faqir (1995) explains why Mamdouh’s novel was chosen as the fifth novel in the Arab Women’s Series: as a response to the “television pictures recording day after day, the bombs falling on Baghdad” (1995, v). In other words, Faqir wanted to help preserve something of Baghdad which is already “partially destroyed” (1995, v) by publishing this novel. As well as explaining the wider

contexts of Arab women writer’ politics of writing, Faqir’s introduction also summarises
the following: the story, patriarchal relations in a conservative 1940s Iraqi society; the
politics of fear and resistant desires pervading the lives of many of the protagonists; the
political background of pan-Arabism, Leftist politics and anti-colonialism. She also heaps
copious praise on Peter Theroux, the translator (1995, ix), and the challenges he faced in
translating this “song” about Baghdad into English. Although an expansive remit for an
introduction, Faqir seems thus to be para/translated a hope that the novel will be read in
nuanced ways in English translation.

In contrast, the 2005 New York Feminist Press (NYFP) version does not show
explicit reference to any war, although the para/textual frames are extensive. Cixous’
foreword (2005) situates the novel’s politics about gendered confrontation and reading the
novel as going beyond it. Abu-Haidar’s afterword (2005) is made up of twenty-two pages
which summarise the whole story, its critical themes and the literary contexts of Iraqi
women’s literature. By commending the novel and Mamdouh as having “a universal appeal”
(2005, 212), Abu-Haidar seems to present similarity not difference, as what connects the
(NYFP) reader to the 2005 novel. While the re-packaged para/translator strategy in each
version reflects that Iraqi literature was considered (by the paratranslators) as unfamiliar to
the readerships of their respective publication, the sheer volume of each version’s
explanatory note suggests something of Mamdouh’s Arabic novel in English translation
cannot ‘speak alone” to English language readerships. Abu-Haidar (2005, 212) - citing
Richard Woffenden (2002) – states that Mamdouh’s “Arabic language often leaves the
reader in confusion and this of course is part of the appeal for many who love the
ambiguities.” The reader however is not left to discover such ambiguities of Mamdouh’s
writing without ‘expert’ guidance to direct him/her. This makes me consider why
Mamdouh’s language in Arabic could be difficult to negotiate in English translation.
My own point of departure is my recognition that the novel is an extremely innovative example of Arab literary writing which evokes many literary Arabic traditions – poetry, song, fable, magic realism, streams of consciousness and (gendered) political satire. As pointed out by Al-Zayyat (1995, 2) the “poetry” of the language used by Mamdouh is fundamental to how the “song” of the novel reads in Arabic:

يأتي الوضع باللغة العربية الفصحى وان امتزجت بالعامية العراقية. ...بمدى ما يستثير هذا الوصف أجواء بغداد ولون ورائحة ونبض بغداد بمدى ما يبلغ استخدام الكاتبة للعامية العراقية مرتبة الشعر.

[This effect happens by Modern Standard Arabic and how it is inter-mixed with Iraqi colloquial… by the extent to which this type of description evokes the atmosphere of Baghdad, its colours, its smells and its pulse, by how the writer’s use of colloquial Iraqi elevates and brings it to the level of poetry].

(Al-Zayyat 1995, 2)

To evoke what eminent Egyptian literary critic, Latifa Al-Zayyat calls “a sweet song for the folk of Baghdad” (c.f. Faqir 1995, vi), Mamdouh frequently uses rhymes evocative of colloquial poetry in Huda’s everyday spaces. As noted by translator studies scholar James Holmes (1994), translating layers of signification with visual and audible resonance in poetry is no easy feat – and any attempts to do so - has “generated so much heat with so little light among the normative critics” (1994, 25). So rhyming trains of thought such as "ولكني أحب العصيان وصداقة الصبيان" [But I love rebellion (‘ašiyān) and the friendship of boys (ṣabyān)] (1986/2000, 70), are often translated in the English versions without the rhyme, which in this example results in “But I love rebellion and the friendship of boys” (1995, 52; 2005, 60). Al-Zayyat’s commentary on MSA and Iraqi colloquial dialect mixing to co-create ‘poetry’ is particularly salient in contexts of Huda’s grandmother’s cultural and religious references, which evoke a bygone generation of Iraqis connected to their localised situies by the cadenza, sound and choice of words, as in the following example:
I draw attention to this sentence as one example of how Mamdouh (2004) enacts her politics of building an Iraq in evocative and meaningful ways by making oral expressions of the past ‘present’ on paper. From a metramorphic perspective of feminist translation, Huda’s grandmother’s speech border-links diverse registers of Arabic in ways which undercut unitary divides between colloquial and MSA with the result of both registers beautifying the other without ‘one’ register privileging, denying or conforming to ‘the other’ either. In the first sentence, the verb "عملتو" [‘amaltū] a clearly colloquial format of plural verb connects to a mutually colloquial and MSA word "الخير" [al-khīr] to then move the focus on to the plural verb imperative "لا تتحدثوا به" [lā tataḥaddathū bihi]. This verb is presented as MSA by its vowel marking but destabilised as MSA by the less formal conjunction به [bihi]. Evoked here is a representation of a wise woman sharing her philosophy of life with her grandchildren in language that she thinks that they will understand it in ways that Arabic-language readers can also understand. By ‘border-linking’ colloquial register to MSA Arabic this way, Mamdouh situates the grandmother’s voice as speaking to the eye/I of the (Arabic) reader alongside Huda and Adil. Her voice as ‘written’ Arabic expression is thus situated to be ‘read’ as ‘heard’.

As my back-translation attests, however, any attempt to render this register in English translation does not ‘borderlink’ the audible materiality of her seniority in age, experience of life in the neighbourhood and her Muslim tenets of faith in the same way. In both English versions of the novel, it is unsurprising that her voice here is rendered as:
“If you do a good deed for someone, don’t talk about it. No matter what happens here at home, tell people ‘We don’t know.’ If someone tells you his secret, don’t ever repeat it. A secret is like a treasure and has to be hidden in a well.”

(1995, 33; 2005, 40)

Some of the creative audibility of the Arabic is heard in English, albeit as an echo (Godard 1989) – a rhythm of speech reiterated three times, not three rhythms combining two registers. Although Mamdouh’s nuanced layers of inter-mixing Arabic are ‘smoothed’ into ‘one’ layer in both versions of the novel in English, this passage’s overall meaning does not present as difficult for the English-language reader to grasp. So far, then, it is not clear why Mamdouh’s multi-layered Arabic has so much paratextual packaging.

I consider then the scenes in which Mamdouh seeks to write ‘her fear’ (Mamdouh 1998; Nini 2000; Chollet 2002) by situating everyday violence in the novel as part of Huda’s everyday life. The first scene is when Huda’s father finds Huda playing in the street. When he drags her home, he shouts: "بنت الكلب ترقص وتغنّي بالشارع والولد يحضنونه" [The daughter of a dog dances and sings in the street and the boy[s] are hugging her] (1986/2000, 40). I draw attention to this line as it is an important juncture from which the combative but symbiotic relationalities between Huda and her father seem to emerge. In the 1995 English version, the source of his anger towards Huda is situated as relating to her actual physical movements in the street: “The little bitch dances and sings in the street and the children hug her!” (1995, 27). As Farida Abu-Haidar (1998, 308) specifically referred to this line in the 1995 translation as reading “rather lamely”, the 2005 version (with Abu-Haidar as Afterword author), unsurprisingly, reads as “The little bitch dances and sings in the street and the boys hug her!” (2005, 33). In the 2005 version, the father’s anger shifts towards gendered agency: it is boys who hug Huda, not children. In the Arabic and both English versions, nonetheless, Huda represents someone onto whom the father can project his anger and acquire a sense of his own power and place.
when someone was in front of him” (1995, 28; 2005, 34). As the weakness of patriarchal power is exposed by its dependence on ‘see-able’ (gendered) presence of an/Other, this juncture evokes a very powerful allegory in view of Mamdouh’s likening of her own father to Iraq state authorities, even before the demise of the then Iraqi president (c.f. Nini 2000).

The political implications (and weaknesses) of the patriarchal dynamic are further highlighted in the 2005 version by Hélène Cixous in her Foreword: “If the women are slaves and prisoners, the men are the paramount prisoners of the prisons they run” (2005, vii). Any analogy between gendered and neo-colonial oppression in Iraq is left open to interpretation as Cixous couches this novel as “a vision of the world and an art form” (2005, vi). What Cixous does clarify is how the gendered power dynamics in Huda’s story are a manifestation of how self-contorting system of oppressed-oppressor dynamics trap and weaken the oppressor the more s/he uses tools of oppression available to her/him.

In both English translations, all episodes of its gendered confrontations are thus laid out as clearly as they are in Arabic with no elision or mitigation. The father’s fractured family life and his growing distaste for his job as a prison warden attest to the failure of the patriarchal system of society which allows him to carry out unilateral actions of oppressive authority. Huda’s father for example evicts Huda’s mother from the family house not due to her illness (she has been ill for years) but because he has got another woman pregnant in the city of Karbala (where he works as a prison warden) and wishes to bring his new ‘family’ to the house. As the matriarch of the family, the grandmother however confronts and resists the prospect of further damage to her grandchildren Huda and Adil by refusing to allow the ‘new family’ into the family home – an attestation to the father’s (patriarchal) action not having its intended result due to its connectivity with other (matriarchal) structures of power at play in the family. As the story goes on, the father crisis of patriarchy
deepens until he loses touch with reality, resulting in his setting himself on fire at the end of the novel. Representations of patriarchy as a blunt, and faulty tool of force are not limited to the agency of individual men in this novel. Huda’s paternal aunt Aunt Farida uses binary premises of gendered power to resolve her husband’s absence by viciously attacking him physically, sexually and verbally when he does eventually return to the family house. Like Huda’s father, Aunt Farida finds no solace in her life by using the patriarchal tools of violence, usually associated with men. Outside of the family home, Huda also notices that local Iraqi men ‘disappear’ from the local are and return with marks of torture on their bodies, her observations alluding to another permutation of patriarchal oppression in 1940s and 1940s Iraq present alongside that of long-standing societal mores: British colonial interference. Although not mentioned in either introduction in the 1995 and 2005 version of the novel, the historical frames of this novel are a sobering reminder of the presence of English (British) as a silent language of neo/colonial oppression in Iraq decades before the more recent wars in Iraq.

Alongside these scenes of (gendered) confrontations with patriarchal power, the novel also shows tender, meaningful relationalities between siblings, family members, Huda’s friendships with local children, girls and boys which also configure everyday Iraqi life beyond and within the bounds of patriarchy. Women who love women are for example represented in this novel as making use of the many women-only spaces available due to patriarchal demarcations of space which isolate women and men (Ahmad 2017, 90). Mamdouh’s politics of writing to expose life in this Iraqi neighbourhood as a plethora of cross-constituency confrontations and solidarities inter-mixing then returns me to the question of each English version’s considerable ‘re-packaging.’ What was it, that the ‘paratranslators’ of each English version believed that their target readerships ‘needed’ to...
know in advance of reading this polyphonic novel? To put it differently, to which aspects of the novel is ‘the reader’ guided to via the English versions’ para/texts?

This question brings me to the first sentences and the last paragraph of the novel. Both represent junctures in the novel which reflect a fundamental component of Mamdouh’s innovative and co-creative politics of meaning-making, whose political point, perhaps literally defies English translation. In the first sentence in the Arabic version, the main protagonists of the novel are ‘seen’ through the eye/I of Huda, before she quickly moves on to talk about her family, her house, people who come to the house, the street:

السحب فوق رأسك, والامتحان دائما  بانتظارك. انظري إلى أبيك فقط, تراءى لي أنه يقود شاحنة كبيرة. تجلس في الخلف أمك محتكرة الصمت والممرض. وباقي القطيع كان يلعب داخل المعتقل, يدمدم قليلاً ويسكت. جدتك…..

[The clouds are over your head, and the test is always awaiting you. Look at your father. He looked to you that he is pretending/ making himself look like that he is driving a big truck. Your mother is sitting in the back monopolising the silence and illness. The rest of the herd play in the detention camp, growling a little then falling silent. Your grandmother….

(1986/2000, 7)

The first reference to the father - [He makes himself look to me that he is driving a big truck] is layered with ambiguity. The Arabic verb "تراهى" [tarāʾā] (Wehr 1994, 368) – categorised in grammatical terms as a Form Six verb86- communicates a reflexive action which is feigned as well as an action carried out between people. The reflexivity of the verb تراهى [tarāʾā] (Wehr 1994, ibid) thus situates that Huda’s father is aware of his own ridiculousness and fakery. With Mamdouh’s commentary on the father standing in for figures of authority in Iraq in mind (Nini 2000), the feminised imperative verb "انظرى" [anzarī ] (1986/2000, 7) for “look at, see” (Wehr 1994, 1144) presents Huda as addressing herself as able to look at this father’s (self) reflexive action

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86 See Ryding (2005) and LeTourneau (1998) for grammatical discussions of Form Six reciprocity.
from an overtly gendered perspective of difference from, but nearness to him. In contrast, Huda’s mother is mediated as sitting in the back of the truck, not looking at the father in the same way. Huda’s thoughts moving on to her grandmother then lead to a train of thought about her over-bearing Cousin Munir, her aunt Farida and the family house – where Huda’s story of her life in the neighbourhood seems to begin. The verb تراءى [tاراءى] is important here for two reasons: firstly, this multi-layered verb is distinctive, due to its relative rareness as an Arabic term and subtlety of meaning. Importantly, it only appears once again at the end of the novel, so signifying – and revealing – the end of the story:

نركب الشاحنة التي تراءى لي أن أبي يقودها. عمتي في الدار الجديدة, جدتي تجلس بجوار السائق. ونحن نتمايل في الخلف.

[We are riding in the back of the truck which my father looked to me as if he were pretending/feigning to drive. My aunt is in the new house. My grandmother sits next to the driver and we sway in the back.]

(1986/2000, 212)

Here the truck is no longer a metaphor - it really is a means of vehicle transport by which the family leave their neighbourhood due to the 1958 government slum clearances in Baghdad. Its very (uncommon) distinctiveness in Arabic evokes and so joins the first line of the novel - with its mockery of a patriarch ‘feigning to drive’ the way forward - to its end paragraph. This word has important effects: it creates a surprise time-loop where the story’s end has returned to (and is revealed as) its very beginning. Its beginning revealed as its end shows that the story is a simulcrum of Huda’s stream-of-memory, with Huda’s past and present eye/I telling the story being suddenly juxtaposed to the reader’s eye/I. In this way, the linkage between the first and last paragraph re/configures the story as potentially never ending at all, but simply becoming scattered into an eye/I other to that of Huda’s - the changing ‘present’ of the reader’s eye/I who according to her/his interpretations, diversifies its meaning-making. The reflexive genre of this novel’s agency of telling then
helps to shed light on why this novel in so many ways also enacts Huda’s politics of confrontation with power: instead of the reader deciding to engage with the novel, it is the novel which configures anyone reading the novel as part of its meaning-making (Al-Zayyat 1995, 2), each reading changing as the reader’s understanding of each re-reading changes. In effect, the verb ترآءی [tarāʾ ā] functions as a ‘moth-ball’ in Arabic, expanding and contracting where the memory of 1940s Baghdad can be read to be preserved. In view of the specificity of this word in Arabic, the reasons for which the (Iraqi) contexts of this story are explicitly ‘spelt out’ as an English para/translation become clearer. For in these two crucial scenes, the grammatical tools of English cannot match the reflexive tools proffered by Arabic, as shown in the first line:

The clouds are over your head, and the test is always waiting for you. Just look at your father. It seems to you that he is driving a truck. Your mother is in the back monopolising the silence and illness.

(1995, 1)

The clouds are over your head, and the trials of life are always ahead of you. Just look at your father. It seems to you that he is driving a truck. Your mother is in the back monopolising the silence and illness.

(2005, 1)

The 1995 version follows the Arabic version of Huda’s train of thought closely to the point of literalness: “the test is always waiting for you” (1995, 1). The 2005 version more idiomatically offers “the trials of life are always ahead of you (2005, 1). The more idiomatic phrase “it seemed to me” is used in both versions to re-create the effect of reflexive echo of "ترآءی لك"[tarāʾ ā laki] in the first and final page of the Arabic version.

As we rode in the truck it seemed to me my father was driving. My aunt was in the new house. My grandmother sat beside the driver and we swayed in the back.

(1995, 162; 2005, 190)
The flawlessly idiomatic English phrase “it seemed to me” is however a much less arresting turn of phrase, particularly as the word "تراءى" [тарā’ā] in Arabic version (1986/2000, 1) combines reflexivity, a gendered child-like observation with a covert mockery of patriarchy. The phrase invokes the time-loop on which the novel’s innovative gendered meaning-making hinges in less forceful terms, dimming slightly the vibrant force of the novel as a literary ‘mothball’ of Iraqi memory, so overtly evoked in Arabic. From a metamorphic perspective which looks at the tensions, as well as the potential of mediation however, the presence of the de-gendered ‘you’ in the English language potentially creates an unexpected space for a more disorientated journey into the novel for the English language reader as there is no feminine second person address to guide a reader to Huda’s presence in the story. Following the first paragraph of the novel, the net train of thought introduces the grandmother and Cousin Munir, an aunt who shouts “Huda” to “wipe the platter” (1995, 3; 2005, 4). It is only through Adil, Huda’s younger brother, that ‘you’ presents as gendered: “He loved you as if you were the last sister in the world” (1995,4-5; 2005, 5). The link between the “Huda” shouted at by Aunt Najia and the “you”, the sister of Adil is only made apparent once Huda’s mother is introduced: “She gave them Adil and Huda – what more do they want from her”? (1995, 5; 2005, 5). The lack of gendered ‘you’ in the English version, could potentially immerse a reader into a different dis/orientation in Huda’s world for five pages simply due to there being less (gendered) direction to guide her - an initially unbounded adventure via the unknown.

Such an unbound experience is however overtly precluded in the 2005 English version. Along with the image of the little girl on the cover, the “Editor’s Note” (2005, viii) is placed directly facing the first page of the novel so that it cannot be missed. This Note briefly informs the reader that s/he will “experience the various incidents and see the different characters through Huda’s eyes” (ibid) in the second, first and third person, often
from different perspectives. The brief glossary of cultural terms (from the 1995 version) is on the same page which briefly explains that Huda’s ‘experience’ is predominantly Muslim and family-focussed in perspective. In the 1995 version, the reader has a slightly less ‘guided’ option of reading: the page facing the first line of the novel is blank, although this page is preceded by this glossary and a detailed (six page) introduction by Fadia Faqir (1995). The overwhelming politics underpinning the ‘re-packaging’ of each English version then seems to be, in metramorphic terms, one of ‘border-linking’ alongside assumed boundaries of understanding: the para/translators seem to be building a platform – or a border-link - from where the subtleties of an iconic political Iraqi novel could be made accessible for readers with different levels of awareness concerning Arab, Middle Eastern and Iraqi women’s literature. That ‘a reader’ could confront this text alone without any prior guidance seems never to be entertained.

I conclude this section by noting that the literary political effect of each version of Mamdouh’s novel in English translation in its different ‘re-packaging’ seems to have had generative effects in terms of Iraqi women’s literature in transnational publication. The 1995 version inspired Mamdouh’s novel to be translated into other languages and reprinted in Arabic by a Beirut-based publisher with wide-reaching distribution in 2000. The 2005 version also inspired New York Feminist Press to publish more literary works by Iraqi women writers, putting Iraqi women’s literature on the US literary map with wider global reach. In this way, while not all aspects of Mamdouh’s political, uniquely time-looped Iraqi novel of confrontation are ‘readable’ in either English version, each version has enacted Mamdouh’s politics of building Iraq by ‘making’ this novel more read as well as readable through its (re-packaged) para/translation. While the US/Iraq wars may have increased (US reader) interest in this novel, its different para/translators have thus, in my view, helped the novel (and Mamdouh) ‘rebuild’ Iraq, albeit differently.
 liczne: [Beyond Love] (2003) and Hadiya Hussein: critical contexts

A prolific literary writer, Hadiya Hussein has published ten novels since 2001 – six in Amman, Jordan and four in Canada as well as many short story collections. Her novel [Riyam and Kafa] (2015) made the longlist in the 2015 International Prize for Arabic Fiction (IPAF), the only Iraqi novel included that year. After joining the Baghdad Broadcasting service and the cultural section of the Iraqi national newspaper [Al-Jumhūrīyya] in 1973, she was fired in 1995 for publishing the short story “A City of Silence” by Iraqi Surrealist writer Adil Kamal (Šešić, Leštarić and Alexander 2014, 103). Although Hussein is listed in the recent anthology 12 Impossibles: Rebellious Arab Writers (2014), her writing does not seek to trouble the the premise of writing in Arabic itself. Most of her stories are written in MSA, with interspersions of Iraqi dialect. Her reputation for transgression comes from the subject matter of her novels – wars in Iraq; exile; violence; poverty and corruption; the sheer hypocrisy of public political discourses alongside the lived realities of many Iraqis. Her novel [Beyond Love] (2004) was one of the first novels by an Iraqi woman writer to openly articulate the presence of Saddam Hussein (الرئيس ['al-ra‘īs']. Although never claiming that her writing is autobiographical, Hussein has situated her writing as one way of confronting [difficult circumstances] that all Iraqis have experienced. Hussein has also stated that she writes to "address the fears of the Iraqi citizen who has become even more fearful of a slip of the tongue than an actual, physical slip" in the face of surveillance and oppression in Iraq. So, while Hussein writes to address pervasive permutations of fear, the confrontation of this fear, in her view, does not take place othrough the act of writing this fear – but also

87 A full list of Hussein’s novels and short stories in Arabic publication are listed in the Thesis Appendix.
by the act of *reading* it. In Hussein’s stories, we indeed find characters living through
difficult circumstances: localised situations of torture, mass deportation, endemic poverty
and ongoing exile as well as war. In relation to such experiences, as a 2012 (US) English
translation, this novel is distinguished by its very striking additional para/texts in the form
of additional chapters and review commentary on the outer cover. These para/texts focus
on two historical junctures of the 1990 Gulf war and the 1991 uprising in southern Iraq: a
Foreword by Arab literature scholar mariam cooke; an Introduction by translator Ikram
Masmoudi; incisive reviews by eminent Middle East scholars, Muhsin Al-Musawi and
Roger Allen. The outer jacket cover of the English version (2012) depicts an image of Old
Damascus by Syrian artist Emad Jano who describes this image as representing “peaceful
religious tolerance sadly lacking in present times”90 which is still somehow preserved in
the historical architectures of *many* MENA cities, despite the vicissitudes of different
political eras. In view of how the two episodes of political confrontation taking centre stage
in this novel in Arabic move into English as gendered para/texts of solidarity: first, the fall
out of the 1991 Shi’a uprisings and second, a story of “The Highway of Death.”

5.7: *Beyond Love (2004/2012): confronting cross-constituency solidarity*

In her interview with Izzadin Al-Shabib (2014), Hussein describes ما بعد الحب
*[Beyond Love]* as the first novel where she felt able to switch between two places – Amman
and Iraq – to consider the many permutations of presence, absence and transit in exile lived
by many Iraqis in the 1990s. ما بعد الحب *[Beyond Love]* is a story about Huda, a woman in
Amman who spends most of her time listening and reading of other Iraqis telling their
stories of international sanctions, poverty, war, rebellion and subsequent exile as they (and

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90 Personal e-mail correspondence with Emad Jano and the thesis author, 19th May 2017.
she) try to move on from the past but seem to talk about it endlessly. Cooke (2012) describes this novel as “a pastiche of memories strung together … between Nadia’s notebook and the narrator’s deadly days in Amman” (2012, x). This novel does indeed traverse many stories situated in many times and places by different people: the Iraqi countryside before Iran-Iraq war, the 1991 Gulf war, the 1991 uprising in the south of Iraq, international sanctions in Baghdad and the importance of Amman as a welcome place of safety for Iraqi exiles.

While scenes of ‘present’ action in this novel occur Amman, Iraq and the US intertwine its protagonists’ past and future. Huda has left Iraq for Amman after voting ‘no’ to the Iraqi president in the general elections in Iraq. While in Amman, Huda meets with her friend Nadia to discover soon afterwards that she has died in a car crash. As the only person who knew her in Amman, Huda is given her dead friend Nadia’s diary and letters to her lost lover Emir that were never delivered to him as they were separated after the 1991 uprising in Iraq. While reading Nadia’s diary inside her room, outside in the street, Huda finds herself outside of her room listening to other Iraqi exile stories either in passing conversations on the street or at the UN office in Amman. She overhears countless “flight from hell” stories at the UN Refugee Bureau (2012, 43). When hearing a parent call to her child "اسم الله يمّه[ism allah yamma] in a park, (2003, 133), Huda describes hearing this notably Iraqi expression as feeling like “thorns” in her heart (ibid) as it reminds her that so many Iraqis carry with them, children as well as ‘stories’ into exile. Huda thus feels that she absorbs the many stories of Iraqi exile through unconscious osmosis in ways which highlight the sheer numbers of Iraqi exiles living in Amman at that time as well as the connectivity of Iraqi experience.

While a ‘pastiche’ of memories held together by Huda’s experience of listening and reading, this novel could also be read as a ‘pastiche’ of aut/their/ships – Huda’s story is her own, but it is shaped by other Iraqi stories. As the volume and plurality of Iraqi exile
experience in Amman is so overwhelming, we read that Huda makes choices on what stories she can hear and read in the limited spaces and psychic capacities she has: it is she who decides to take Nadia’s diary and letters (2003, 7). She chooses with whom to speak at the UN office. It is she who calls Moosa, an Iraqi man at the UN Refugee Office in Amman, not vice versa. When she meets Um Khadija in Amman, a woman of senior age alongside whom Huda had worked in an underwear factory in Baghdad, it is Huda who seeks her out again to hear stories of what happened to the other women in the factory. While her employee and landlord Sameh, a lute-player, provides Huda with much needed practical help, Huda seems oblivious to his own stories. Dominating Huda’s time and thoughts is only one particular story: the story of her friend Nadia that Huda reads from her diary, while at the same time remembering the times in Baghdad and Amman she and Nadia had spent together. This point brings me to why I focus the analysis of this chapter on the interactions between Huda and Nadia face-to-face and later beyond the grave. One reason is because the ‘paratext’ of the tragedies detailed in Nadia’s diary and Huda’s reaction to these tragedies are the crux of this story as a tale of Iraqi exile in Amman. The second reason relates to the role of Nadia’s diary in Arabic and how its role seems to shift and co-emerge in English translation.

To clarify this last point, I draw attention to how and why the diary compels Huda to realise that the experience of exile is connective, thus situating her subjectivity (and the focalisation of the novel) as co-mergent with those of others, including those absent:

ماذا أفعل بالوقت المطوط؟ الساعات طويلة...لا شيء عندي أفعله. أيامي في عمّان ساكنة مثل بركة لا تفضي إلى أي مجرى...ها هي نادية بعد موتها تحركها تمسك بي لأنصفر أمام ذكرياتها...ترى ماذا بعد هذه الولادة المتعسرة؟

[What could I do in the hours stretching ahead. The hours are long…I have nothing to do. My days in Amman are quiet like a lake which never flows into any tributary. Here Nadia is stirring it and nailing me down in front of her memories...Does she see what is coming after this difficult birth?]  

(2003, 36)
This reflection on Huda’s part is the first of many instances where we read how Huda feels that Nadia’s stories constrains yet gives purpose to her sense of space and time as empty and still. Huda situates the diary as breaking her sense of isolation which she describes as a lack of connection with other “tributaries” (2003, 36).\(^9\) Importantly for the politics of this novel as an Arabic publication, Huda attributes to Nadia an agency which has an vital co-emergent effect on her, as if Nadia is able tell Huda what happens next, as life beyond the grave. The boundary between Nadia’s life and death thus seems to Huda as blurred - a تقمص [transmutation of souls]-like loop between lost past and impossible present. In the English version however, the agency slightly shifts:

WHAT COULD I DO with the lengthening hours? Time had slowed down. I had nothing to do. My days in Amman were quiet, like still water. But Nadia stirred it after her death, nailing me down in front of her memories. I wonder what came after this difficult birth …

(2012, 28)\(^9\)

While the Arabic version configures each person’s ‘water of life’ as connective, by how it flows in movement into others’ ‘waters’, the translator Masmoudi (2012) connects Huda’s train of thought into a new tributary: that of the Aesopian expression “Still Waters Run Deep”, a familiar adage in Anglophone literary contexts. Aesop’s fable “Still Waters Run Deep” warns of places or people with characteristics of calm as hiding tumultuous intentions,\(^9\) oddly disturbing in the volatile contexts of 2012 contemporary Iraq, still experiencing US military occupation. In English, the timeloop between Nadia’s past and (impossible) present is cut: Huda simply asks the question of herself, so she can read on and find out more of Nadia’s story which includes letters to her beloved Emir who went


\(^9\) The capital letters in this excerpt are as presented in the font layout of the 2012 English version.

\(^9\) Fable 822, Abstemis 5. The farmer finds the deep still water more challenging to navigate than the tumultuous shallow waters when crossing a stream. (Gibb 2010, 260).
missing in the 1991 uprising. While Masmoudi’s intervention could be read as smoothing over the nuances of the Arabic passage for clarity, the metaphor of “still water” creates a new echo of meaning co-emergent within Anglophone cultural contexts.

Shared in both versions, then, is the motif of the diary which acts as the catalyst of events in this story. Nadia’s is the only story ‘forcing’ itself to be ‘read’ by Huda (and the reader of the novel) in all of its (at times) gruesome detail. Nadia appears to Huda in dreams when she tries to flee from reading it. Huda is thus compelled to ‘read’ what has ‘already’ been ‘written’ as Nadia’s death has precluded the possibility of Huda being able ‘change’ (to relay) what she wishes of it. The leitmotif of a ‘full’ reading of this diary being a duty, rather than a choice for Huda is an important aspect of this novel, as a similar leitmotif seems to frame ‘the reader’ of the novel in both Arabic and English translation. For it is in this diary that Nadia relates and mourns her family’s experience of torture, war and persecution during and after the 1991 uprising in the south of Iraq. As Nadia is writing about actual events documented to have happened in Iraq in 1991, ‘the reader’ as well as ‘the novel’ seems, like Huda, to be ‘nailed down’ by the very para/texts of what events in Iraq cannot be changed. The porosity of the novel’s para/texts foregrounds in my view, why reading the two versions of the novel using a metramorphic perspective of expanding aut/their/ships may be useful. On one hand, we have two versions of a story which present as two differently dated and ‘printed’ texts. Joining them together however is the novel’s para/text of Shi’a collective tragedy,

The first passages of Nader’s diary mediating Nadia’s birth nonetheless suggest that the ‘paratext’ of historical Shi’a tragedy could (and should) have been open to change in both versions. When Huda first reads Nadia’s diary, we/she learn that Nadia is from a rural Shi’a family whose poverty seemed to destine a life of hardship in advance. Nadia notes as she and her twin brother were being born, the midwife exhorted her mother:
Don’t be worried. Seek the help of Al-Zahra, the mother of the Hassanayn. Don’t clench.

(2012, 27)

In the impossibility of Nadia remembering, let alone writing down the midwife’s exhortation at her own birth, Nadia is documenting what she was told about her own birth retrospectively. Moreover, the name of Al-Zahra, a revered iconic figure in Shi’a Muslim history, sets a highly politicised dynamic of survival for her and her twin brother predicated on historicised discourses of gender: men’s fate as martyrdom and women’s roles to commemorate past injustices as part of, not separate from those of the present (Shabbar 2014, 212). As the mother of Imam Hussein killed in battle with his twin brother Hassan at the Battle of Karbala, Al-Zahra is invoked in Shi’a commemoration for two reasons: one, as a mother who has lost her sons to the armies of Yazid, the Sunna Muslim Caliph and two, as a mother to a daughter Zainab, a figurehead revered for keeping men safe from the armies of Yazid (Shabbar 2014, ibid). As a mother who has a history of miscarrying baby boys, but bearing healthy girls (2003, 34), the midwife’s invocation of Al-Zahra is to prepare for the survival of yet another girl, and the death of yet another boy. To the midwife’s surprise, twin babies are born: not two boys, but a girl followed by a boy (ibid), a gendered transformation of the Hassanayn (the twin boys Hussein and Hassan) narrative, boy and girl horizontally side by side in timeline, not vertically separated by generation. This event shows that death happening in the past, cannot, does and should not foreshadow death in the future, which is what Nadia’s diary – read in Arabic or English by Huda or whoever is reading the novel – seems to be about.
The somewhat ambiguousness of both Huda and the reader – in both Arabic and English - reading Nadia’s diary as a document of actual lived experience makes the borders between Huda’s reading and Nadia’s writing potentially porous in both versions of the novel. Huda remembers for example how Nadia was reluctant to talk about her past partly as her experiences were painful to recount, and partly because she felt her own story was not worth repeating as so similar stories had happened to so many other Iraqis:

المصيبة اننا نحكي الحكايات ذاتها مع علمنا ان كل عراقي عاشها واكتوى بنارها.

[The catastrophe (of it all) is that we tell exactly the same stories despite all of us knowing that every Iraqi person has lived them and been charred by their fire.]

(2003, 25)

“The irony is that we all recount the same stories even though we know that every Iraqi has been burned by this fire.”

(2012, 18)

After hearing Nadia’s refusal to speak, Huda explains why Nadia needs to tell her how her twin brother Nader was executed by the Iraqi authorities, not only for herself, but for her and the sake of other Iraqis in general:

ليس لنا الا هذه الحكايات, علينا أن نكررها لتبقى شاهداً على عصر المجازر… تكلمي يا نادية… أخبريني لماذا أعدموا نادر؟

[We have nothing else but these stories, so we must repeat them so that they (the stories) are a witness to the era of butcheries…Nadia, tell me…why did they put Nader to death?]

(2003, 25)

In Arabic, Huda is urging Nadia to tell her as a trusted friend who knew Nadia’s brother, Nader, so she can mourn him with her. Here Huda configures the stories as "شاهدًا" [a witness] (2003, 25) not only to the absence of those who experienced massacres, but of the horror that the people ‘experiencing’ a massacre, being marked by at least someone. As ‘massacred’ people do not live to tell their own stories, stories about these people thus are the only remains left of them, carried by others who were not there – those still alive. As
this particular story carried by Nadia is all that can be left of Nader, he is attributed as having an uncanny ‘double-presence’ as Huda remembers this past shared moment with Nadia while at the same time, recalling when Nadia told her of Nader’s story in the present. In this way, the novel gives Nader (and those suffering a similar fate) an expanded presence on the page in Arabic as an identity - inevitably partialised but nonetheless preserved in presence on paper. In the English version, the moral duty to build a more public politics of empathy and solidarity-building is more explicitly articulated, thus expanding and diversifying, the political para/text of this sentence:

These stories are all that we have. We ought to bear witness to the age of butcheries. You have to speak, Nadia. Tell me why they put Nadir to death.”

(2012, 18-19)

Here the action shifts to frame this memory (of Huda calling Nadia to evoke her memory of her brother) as to be shared, as well as marked by others, and not a generalised event to looked at by individuals and then to be archived and forgotten. In English, Huda orders Nadia to speak - not specifically to her (as the Arabic version) but so “we” can bear witness to Nader’s death and feel empathy with her and his individual tragedy, however similar or different it is to other peoples’ tragedies. This shift seems to intimate the liminal presence of ‘a reader’ as a protagonist in the story itself, and the act of reading as an active and generative, rather than only a receptive, action. In this respect, this scene para/translation of the novel is an ‘inverted’ para/text – it is the pre-occurring history of Iraq which shapes the story and how it is read, not vice versa. To borrow Al-Musawi’s words on the outer cover jacket, this story of Nader’s (and Nadia) amongst other stories is “another testimonial in an inventory that should keep knocking at the human conscience.”

This last point brings me to briefly return to the para/textual mediations of the English version. Striking about the 2012 version, is how each para/translator seems to blur the
genres of fiction and memoir by conflating the subjectivities of the novel’s different mediators. The two chapters by cooke and Masmoudi explain how the novel represents the devastating impact of the 1990-1 Iraq war, the 1991 Shi’a uprisings and international sanctions. cooke describes Huda and Nadia as “creators whose survival challenges the destructiveness of war” (cooke 2012, x). Masmoudi (2012, xvi) conflates Hussein and Huda by referring to Hussein’s exile status in Amman as mirroring Huda’s own. On the outer cover jacket, Iraqi academic scholar Muhsin Al-Musawi credits both Hussein and Masmoudi as translator for “unequivocally expos/ing the atrocity of American-led war and Saddam’s revenge on the Iraqis. It is another testimonial in an inventory that should keep knocking at the human conscience.” In other words, this novel is not only about documenting what tragedies happened to Iraqis but calling out the political agencies enacting their perpetration. On the outer back cover jacket, Roger Allen also praises the novel for offering “like many works of fiction….an understanding…that no news broadcast or journalistic report can replicate.” The outer jacket cover thus presents the novel as history and testimony to Iraq’s troubled times of conflict – and its horrors - while situating the individual subjectivity of ‘the reader’ as part of this novel’s meaning-making.

The full horror of what happened to Nadia’s brother Nader, however, is only discovered when Huda (with the reader) reads Nadia’s diary. What makes Huda reel in horror is the cruelty of what happened to Nader, second, the personal depth of Nadia’s pain and third, how her specificity of pain is likely to be shared by many other Iraqis completely unknown to her (Nadia) and Huda – and by proxy, who is reading the novel. The full horror of Nader’s execution however only emerges when Huda later reads about Nadia and her mother collecting the coffin of her brother in silence from the Iraqi prison authorities after he was imprisoned after the 1991 uprising in the south of Iraq. Nadia notes hundreds of other Shi’a families are doing the same thing (2003, 57): collecting coffins of their loved
ones to then go to Najaf cemetery, a burial ground for Shi’a Muslims in Iraq. The collective but individual specificity of the horror arises when Nadia and her mother find that the coffin named as her brother Nader’s, does not contain her brother’s body but that of an older man, his eyes gouged out. Their tragic discovery leads to other mourners at the cemetery finding that the mutilated bodies of their loved ones – at times just in body parts – are also in the wrong coffin. Nadia then asks a series of rhetorical questions which ask (and list) the ways Nader may have been tortured, a scene where personal psychic pain of one woman, would be shared by many others:

كيف خرجت روحك يا توأم روحي؟ كم لحظة دامت نفسك الأخير؟...اخسي ان يكونوا قد قطعوا جسدي وانت حي...وين سؤال وسؤال تصرخ أعماق أعماقى: أين اختفت جثة نادر؟

(2003, 66)

In English, the same moment is recorded, with some slight alterations of font format:

How did your soul depart, my twin? How many moments did your last breath linger? I’m afraid they dismembered your body while you were still alive.

Between one question and another, my soul was screaming: “Where is Nadir’s body?”

(2012, 60)

A metramorphic feminist translation approach could help us consider how and why the political dynamics of this horror described in this diary entry emerge in Arabic and English similarly, and slightly differently. In Arabic, each thought runs into the other communicating that Nadia has written her own thoughts on one page. In English, the change of paragraph indenture and font means that Nadia’s questioning reads as ‘split’ to the extent that the final question screaming out could be just as much part of Huda’s train

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94 The font setting of this and the previous examples are as they appear in the English version of the novel.
of thought as Nadia’s. I draw attention to the change of font setting and indenture, as this para/textual motif is only used once again in the English version of the novel when Huda is quoting words articulated in the public (publishing) sphere, such as Dunya Mikhael’s iconic poem "الحرب تعمل بجد" (2003, 104) translated in English under the title “The War Works Hard” (2012, 96). Reflecting the subtle intervention of an (unnamed) paratranslatory agency, such subtle shifts work to enact on the page how Nadia’s line of questioning fractures her sense of self and show how she is ‘split’ between articulating what she can think but what she cannot say in ways different (but similar) to the Arabic.

From a metramorphic perspective, the politics of reading this whole scene about Nadia and her mother taking her brother’s coffin to Najaf cemetery seems connected to fact that this scene is being documented and diffused into the two very languages with which Shi’a Islamic collective memory has had a traumatic history: MSA Arabic and English. MSA is the language by which the (Iraqi Ba’athist) authority banned the public remembrance of many Shi’a cultural religious practices (Deeb 2005, 15) and public expression of Shi’a identity in general (Ali 2008; Shabbar 2014). English is also the language by which the (US military) authorities were commanded to stand by as the Iraqi Republican Guard massacred thousands of Shi’a Iraqis – children, mothers and elderly – in southern Iraq during the 1991 Basra uprising (2003, 81; 2012, 76). According to Nadia’s diary and in her letters to her lost lover Emir, the US American helicopters remained hovering in the skies, silently watching (ibid). In these contexts, the representations of Nadia’s soul literally screaming serve a very definite political purpose in both versions of the novel: the minutaie of Nadia’s telling show the horror she experienced is part of a collective experience, this tragedy overwhelmingly about specific (but many) individuals.

It is here at this point that notions of metramorphic subjectivity as ‘less than one’ yet ‘more than one’ can help us to understand the politics of solidarity that Hussein is working
to co-create in the Arabic version and at a later date, the para/translators of the English version work to do. The para/text of Nadia’s diary for Huda, is that it is not a fictional tale: it is a documentation of what happened to her and others in these political contexts. While this tragedy is specific to a particular Iraqis during the 1991 uprising, the acts of torture and desecration of dead bodies are certainly not exclusive to particular constituencies of Iraqi which contravenes Iraqi government directives in the 1990s (Cockburn 1995). This borderlinking of truth and story, between diary and novel, allows the Shi’a specificity of this tragedy to thus expand and potentially include all Iraqis, who are then invited to read (and so mark) the tragedy of one persecuted group as resonant with their own specific contexts of difference, however articulated and remembered. The meaning of this scene is not only in that events specific to Shi’a Iraqis are rendered through a diary, but that they are read – and reflected upon - in the first place.

This brings me to the legal para/text framing this novel as a US publication. The ISBN page – a routine list of publication information and copyright details – states: “This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, dialogues and incidents are either the product of the author’s imaginations or are used fictiously. Any resemblance…is entirely coincidental.” As many of the events about the 1991 uprising in Nadia’s diary are considered in Shi’a Iraqi communities to have really happened (Shabbar 2014, 212), the political import of Nadia’s diary coming ‘uninvited’ into Huda’s “still” life to “nail down” (2012, 28) Huda (and reader) shows the critical impact of novel’s diverse modes of aut/her/ship expanding in English translation. Even if ‘a reader’ chooses not to interpret any events in the novel as ‘real’, the events nonetheless present something that many Shi’a Iraqis understood to have happened. In this way, the novel’s politics of solidarity-building is enacted through a mediation of confrontation between ‘the world’ represented in the novel and ‘the world’ in which the novel circulates as a (US) publication. Guided to the
spaces of Shi’a mourning as Huda would have read them - as if they were written by someone else – in Nadia’s diary, whoever is reading this novel finds her/himself in an ambivalent space for critical encounter: between the (US) ISBN ‘world’ which presents the whole novel as fiction and the ‘world’ presented as fact in Nadia’s diary in the novel. Whoever reads the ISBN page is confronted with the uncomfortable possibility that one of the two ‘worlds’ may be seeking to elide the political aim of the other. The political intent of all the para/translators foregrounding this novel as a ‘testimony’ – cooke, Masmoudi, Al-Musawi and Allen - thus emerges much more clearly.

The importance of the role of ‘a reader’ as part of this story’s meaning-making emerges in this respect situates why this novel could be read as generative, despite many aspects of its events are marked by tragedy whose historical events cannot be changed. As a novel mediated through Huda’s conscious sense of her own subjectivity, it becomes clear that some stories of Iraqi tragedy occupy more space than others in this novel. Nadia’s ongoing presence in Huda’s dreams ensures that her (and others’) story (of others) does not go unread or ‘missing.’ While one of the most important aspects of Nadia’s diary is that she was writing it not to be ‘read’ or ‘audience’ by others, the presence of Nadia’s diary as documentation of her life and other tragic deaths creates an uncanny fissure which alludes to the tension of the situe by which particular stories of tragedy co-emerge. If Nadia had not died, Huda (and ‘the reader’) would not be reading her diary, the mitigation of which is that Huda is reading her story under tragic duress.

The specificity of Nadia’s circumstance however, does not preclude other Iraqis’ stories from occupying Huda’s head/page-space and lived life at different times, which brings me to another important motif threading through this novel: cross-constituency solidarity. Huda recalls how she managed to leave Iraq to travel to Amman, through the help of others: her fiancé Youssef and her beloved grandmother, to whom she did even
have the time to bid goodbye. In Amman, Huda finds individual Jordanians offer her shelter, work and empathetic company. And while the US officials at the UNHCR\(^95\) seem present as cold and reluctant hosts, the UNHCR is the only route to long-term safety for Huda as well as many other Iraqis. Aware that individual tragedy is shared by all Iraqis, an Iraqi man Moosa at the UNHCR office offers to register Huda on his UN family card to Australia – as an act of solidarity from one Iraqi exile to another, with no expectations of her in return. He gives Huda a letter in which he has written about his past in Iraq before she makes her decision, as another act of solidarity: to know the man she would be travelling with. After Huda has read the latter, a footnote emerges in both versions which states that the letter is not part of Hussein’s novel at all but an excerpt “from a diary of an Iraqi soldier, poet Ali Abd El-Amir, dated March 2\(^{nd}\), 1991 (2003, 148; 2012, 140), after Qadsiyat Saddam literature had reached its peak. From a metramorphic perspective of feminist translation, the presence of Moosa’s account in the Arabic and English version of the novel is a significant juncture for two reasons: firstly, for its politics of cross-constituency solidarity and secondly in terms of how its presence works to confront the politics of the (gendered) mediation of military confrontation in both Arabic and English.

More than eight pages long, this letter is about Moosa’s life as a soldier in the Iraqi army during the 1990-91 Gulf War.\(^96\) In his letter, Moosa writes of his experience on “The Highway of Death,” a route from Kuwait to Basra where US military air power wiped out thousands of Iraqi troops returning defeated after the war had ended. The implied veracity of the ‘letter’ itself is amplified firstly by being presented as memoir written at the time of an actual events in Iraqi history and secondly, by being an excerpt written by a ‘real’ Iraqi man author Abd El-Emir (1992) at a time when few accounts of the 1991 war in Iraq were


published before 2003 (Masmoudi 2015, 89). Striking about this letter is how it contrasts with the 1980s *Qadisiyat* war stories which tell of Iraqi valour and victory. Instead, it details how unprepared the ground-troops returning from Kuwait were for the high-tech brutal tactics of the US military airforces which literally tore bodies apart by bombs from above. Whether Abd El-Amir’s memoir is a ‘real’ or re-constructed memoir of events taking place on ‘the Highway of Death’, its detailed account of how and when the US attacks happened in 1991 gives important retrospective context to why the US military forces in Iraq in 2003 were met by many Iraqis with ambivalence, despite the pre-2003 Iraqi government’s long history of atrocities (Grossman 2008). Intertwining this novel’s politics of mediation in both languages is the para/text of time in localised and global contexts. In 2003, 9/11 events were still being placed at Iraq’s door. In 2012, US troops were in the process of withdrawing from Iraq.

In view of the charged politics of translating this account in both its Arabic and (US) English translation, metamorphic notions of *tisimsoum* help us understand and analyse the radical politics of this novel in both contexts of publication: confronting a reader with uncomfortable questions, not as cross-constituency condemnation but building a politics of solidarity. In terms of translation, what *tisimsoum* means is how translation can result in ‘contractions’ of space which can “make space” for other subjectivites or experiences (Flotow and Shread 2014, 594), even if partialized and limited in agency. The soldier for example recounts in graphic detail the brutal destruction and injury of his compatriots in ways which give them presence (on paper at least) in both languages, despite their clear absence through death. His biggest shock comes to him when he learns about the timing of the official ceasefire for the first time:
[As I reached those (military) units, I learned that at 8.00am – that is, in two minutes’ time – would be the ceasefire!! …how did they allow themselves to kill us five minutes ago…five minutes had separated so many young men from life?]

(2003, 148)

Whether a ‘real’ memoir or not, this is clearly a rhetorical question: how could the US pilots bring or ‘allow’ themselves to slaughter so many at this time? He does not respond to his own question as the reason is obvious: the US forces were following orders given by their chain of command just as they as Iraqi (conscripted) soldiers, were ordered to occupy Kuwait in 1990-1 by theirs. The English version of this passage reads similarly to the Arabic, nonetheless slightly mitigating the rhetoricity of the soldier’s question:

How could they have been killing us only five minutes earlier?

(2012, 139)

This simple re-focalising translation strategy asks: how could ‘they’ have been doing it, rather than how they ‘allowed themselves’ to do it. The shift in English translation with/holds the soldier’s rhetoricity (as expressed in 1992) away from its - unforeseen-encounter with post-2012 readers to carefully re-situate the Arabic versions’s critiques of violence in more direct terms – terms which Al-Musawi also sets out very clearly on the first page of the novel, its outer cover jacket: “the atrocity of American-led war and Saddam’s revenge on Iraqis.” The translator’s strategy contracts the rhetoricity to co-create a new space in which the soldier is presented as asking the same discomforting questions about perpetrators of violence but differently: how could ‘they’ the US military forces be part of mass killing in this way? In view of the novel’s politics of confronting difference, in English translation an unexpected twist of space thus occurs: the Iraqi and US military co-emerge as uncannily similar in both brutal practice and public sphere justifications for
killing. The novel in English overtly exposes any ideology based on binary configurations of similarity and difference as going far beyond language and geo-political location. As US war photographer Harold Evans states, a picture of death and destruction in war reminds us that: "We have willed it by sending the soldier there to do that dirty work for us" (c.f. Carr 2003).  

This letter presents a more detailed discursive picture of “the Highway of Death” in ways which ensure that ‘the dead ‘are not passed over, and ‘the living’, that is ‘the readers’ of the English version are called to reflect on it.

This last point brings me to why, in both versions of the novel, the presence of this memoir in Hussein’s could be conceptualised as a tsimoum of au/their/ship enacted by the gendered contexts of the story’s mediation, not vice versa. Like Moosa (in the novel), Hussein expands (by contracting) her own field of agency to help someone else ‘pass’ via leverages of power and reception whose asymmetries are not of her personal making. Akin to Moosa’s offer to help Huda ‘pass’ through daunting UNHCR immigration procedures in the novel, Hussein as an Iraqi woman writer similarly shows a gendered solidarity with fellow literary writer, Ali Abd El-Amir in retrospective and contemporary contexts. By giving his 1992 work space to ‘pass’ into new critical readerships via Iraqi women’s literature in Arabic and English translation, Hussein shows that war memoirs of the 1991 war could exist, even if few in number or unpublished. Importantly, the two Iraqi writers (Hussein and El-Amir) – ciphered by Huda and Moosa - co-create a space where something of what happened to Iraqi soldiers on the Highway of Death can be ‘seen’ as written and ‘read’ by many different new audiences for the first time. This relation of solidarity is reiterated again by the Arabic-English translator Ikram Masmoudi co-collaborating with all four au/their to help them (and about whom they write) also ‘pass’ via English

translation. As no stone monument was ever erected to these soldiers’ memory in Iraq – particularly as many survivors joined the 1991 uprising - the letter enacts a new ‘monument’ to deaths, injuries and survivals known and unknown on the Highway of Death. Notions of *tsimsoum* (Ettinger 1992) help us to read this novel as expanding far beyond working to engage with and represent conflicting subjectivities in translation. This novel enacts by its own (self) reflexive modes of mediation, how words, and the act of writing and reading of them can, in fact, function – in Arabic and English translation - as retrospective edifices of the absent/ed while at the same time, building cross-constituency solidarity between people present/ed, be they known, absent/ed or unknown to each other.

5.8: Conclusion: re-scripting metramorphic feminist translations approaches

In this chapter, I have explored the extent that analytical frames of metramorphic feminist translation (Flotow and Shread 2014) can help us re/read each novel’s meaning-making as articulating and negotiating tensions of meaning-making emerging in and through its English para/translation processes – connected, at times irreconcilably different to its Arabic version. Never a utopic eulogy to Iraq of the 1940s and 1950s, the representations of localised gendered confrontations and conflicts in حبيات الفنتالين [Mothballs/Nephtalene] (Mamdouh 1986/2000; 1995; 2005) are shown to be contingent on any number of connective relationalities, including that of different readerships. In Hussein’s ما بعد الحب [Beyond Love] (2004/2012), the act of showing people telling of and listening to unchangeable stories of different individual and collective tragedies suggests that present and future understandings of the past are never pre-destined to be binary or polarised in focus. As both novels work to engage the (unknown) reader as part of their stories’ meaning-making, metramorphic notions of ‘border-linking’ help us configure how
sites of refusal or resistance to discourses of oppression and solidarity link while clearly delineating the presence of differing gendered grammar systems as well as the realities of war. By understanding the re/writing of tensions, connections and separations at play in a translated work’s mediation as part of its para/text, metramorphic modes of feminist translation analysis help us configure each novel’s processes of para/translation as working beyond frameworks of equivalence, but conscious of potentially dissonant expressions of differently situated ethical contingencies.

This brings me to how such premises of metramorphic feminist translation approaches could be further interrogated. As I have shown earlier, underpinning the mediations of each English version of each novel is the presence of conflict and war. War is overtly present/ed by its (academic) para/translators as underpinning the para/textual mediations of Beyond Love (2012) and Mothballs (1995). In Nephtalene: A Novel of Baghdad (2005), its discursive para/texts seem to work towards co-creating a ‘picture’ in the reader’s eye/I to help the novel ‘become’ a text to be read/able, despite the clear (post-2003) para/texts surrounding Iraq. In this respect, the strategies used by each novel’s para/translators to change or guide their respective readers’ understanding of the novel in advance of their reading emerge as powerful aspects of each novel’s mediation. At the same time, each novel faced its own ‘spaces’ of limitation and tension. The possibility of ‘fully’ involving ‘a reader’ in Mamdouh’s Arabic (1986/2000) novel becomes elided in English translation due to differing gendered and scripted grammar systems. It could be argued that the changing politics of US military presence in Iraq rather than the novel itself which in part, helped mediate the 2012 English version of Hussein’s novel as a work of cross-constituency solidarity through (and despite) the overt vocalisation of anti-US military condemnation. Alia Mamdouh and Hadiya Hussein are, after all, working to re/present their writing about the gendered confrontations with fear and conflict in Iraq to
build solidarity in ways which are readable in Arabic to Arabic readers. This point raises questions on how subjectivities (in translation) could be configured as ‘border-linking’ when some site/sights of (gendered) meaning-making result in ‘categorical’ separations. In this light, the notion of I/not-I subjectivities as a paradigm for building solidarity through translation by cutting across different languages thus needs more consideration.

In these two novels, Mamdouh and Hussein make clear that some conflicts of ideology, conflict and creativity will never sit easily with the politics of (gendered) literary expression. This insight calls to mind how other Iraqi women writers and artists, such as Haifa Zangana (2014) and Nuha Al-Radi (2003) have questioned the premises of Iraqi women’s aesthetic and literary public self-expression within (and between) language and discourses of violent fragmentation dominating post-2003 Iraq which does not open itself to the risk of appropriation in some way. Other Iraqi women writers have historically opted to write to confront a greater risk – their and others’ stories not being read at all. While a metamorphic perspective of translation cannot configure all strategies of re/writing as generative beyond all binaries, it can thus offer us a point of departure from which to read each novel’s journey of gendered confrontation in and between Arabic and English within its multiple formats and languages of mediation.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1: Overview: research aims and project outcomes

From its early beginnings, Iraqi women’s literature has emerged as a powerful mode of literary activism as well as an evocative expression of creativity which has enriched the breadth and depth of Iraqi literature as well as other genres of Arab, diaspora and women’s literature. As this thesis has shown through the nexus of translation, the critical scope of this genre of innovative literature goes far beyond Iraq as a geographical entity and Arabic as its mode of expression, while at the same time enhancing and engaging more nuanced understandings of both. For the diverse peoples of Iraq, Iraqi society has undoubtedly changed and shifted since its independence in 1932. Many Iraqis have stayed in Iraq for generations. Other Iraqis have had to move to other locations inside Iraq itself or outside of its geographical borders altogether. In this light, literary representations of Iraq through diverse modes of story-telling have crucial emotional as well as political resonance not only for Iraqis, but for readers and audiences who feel affinity, alliance or connection with Iraq’s diverse cultures. Iraq as a country however is often mediated as a fragmented geopolitical entity dominated by ideologies of conflict, dictatorship and blood-shed. Iraqi women’s literature thus seems distinguished by a distinctive motif of connecting each writer’s literary work to diverse readerships while negotiating the many intersecting epitexts of awareness vis-à-vis Iraq and its peoples, cultures and histories. The dual motif of connectivity and negotiation of (internal and external) exile thus impelled me to research how this innovative genre of literature in Arabic has moved across many interlocking intersecting discourses in English translation to expand its own gendered and geographically situated meaning-making.

Striking about Iraqi women’s literature is how it resonates with, enriches and diversifies Arab women’s literature, while being read as recognisable and distinctive in its
‘Iraqi’ and gendered modes of story-telling. In this respect underpinning the meaning-making of Iraqi women writers’ novels is how the connective appeal of each novel’s story and diverse protagonists seems intertwined with the novel’s specificity of theme and expression in Arabic. Despite the impact of English translation in putting the distinctive creativity of Iraqi women writers’ novels “on the international literary map” (Abu Haidar 2005, 192), this thesis is the first study which focuses on Iraqi women writers’ novels in Arabic-English translation, although scholarship on Arab women’s literature has always engaged with and interrogated how diverse genres of Arab women’s writings have been mediated in English translation, with gender as key point of analysis. I thus explored the novels in this study using analytical frameworks of feminist translation (which configure all writing as re-writing) as a way of shedding light on and enhancing appreciation of the potentially multiple gendered as well as geopolitical issues at play adding to each novel’s “Iraqi” meaning-making, and often different ‘re-packaging’ in Arabic-English translation.

Taking this approach, this study has always gone beyond viewing each novel in English translation as a derivative of its Arabic version, and in this respect, has set out an alternative pathway to reading Iraqi women’s literature within original/translation (and East/West) dichotomies. As the scholarship on Iraqi women’s literature so far has drawn (salient) insights from engaging with one version of each novel, yet without making connection to the innovative ways that the novel could be ‘working’ between languages and shifting contexts of mediation, I have contributed to the study of Iraqi women’s literature and Arab women’s literature by focusing on pathways of translation as part of Iraqi women writers’ novels meaning-making. One aim of this approach is enacting a commitment to widen critical appreciation of Iraqi women’s literature as a genre of Iraqi and women’s writing which has always had to diversify and re-configure its own meaning-making to write (in the face of) adversity and potential obscurity. In other words, publishing
in English translation was a path that Iraqi women writers chose as one way of preserving their creative modes of expression for their contemporary (and future) audiences, particularly in the earlier decades of censorship in Iraq when in their respective countries of publication in the words of Haifa Zangana (2009, 169), “not many people knew where Iraq was.” That said, alongside the shifting and often catastrophic events shaping the political epitexts of Iraq within international media outlets, Iraqi women writers themselves have clearly had an important role in re-shaping the spaces in which these epitexts are configured, while showing a highly critical awareness of the potential risks of being read as co-opted into ideologies of either/or representations. Another aim of this thesis then is to raise awareness of how Iraqi women writers – and their allies-in-translation – negotiated the risks of co-option in each novel’s individual path while resolutely refusing the prospect of silence or compliance within diverse permutations of oppression in Iraq. In this respect, it is through focusing on how each writer’s gendered politics in her respective novel through the nexus of translation that this thesis has diversified the critical premises on how their novels can be read as literary expressions of writer creativity. At the same time, the thesis also opens critical questions about translation as process of re-writing texts and paratexts.

One objective of this thesis, then, was to deepen critical understandings of the politics of Iraqi women writers’ novels in Arabic-English translation by using intersectional feminist translation approaches as an analytical framework. The aim of doing so was to formulate modes of engagement with these literary works which would be used productively by others. The innovative modes of each novel’s activist meaning-making, however, took the thesis far beyond this aim, and so raised awareness about new configurations of feminist translation praxis, a testament to the complexity of each novel’s mediation in Arabic-English translation as well as the transformative politics of co-creative
critical re/flexibility underpinning feminist translation. In this way, by engaging analytical frameworks of feminist translation – some of which have not received due critical scholarship attention in recent years – alongside Iraqi women’s literature, this study reveals (and in my view enacts) the complex, co-creative and trans(per)formative potential of (border) linking two gendered re/writing traditions in ways which interrogate and innovate the premises and critical understandings of both, without overwriting either.

To continue with my concluding analysis, I now dedicate the rest of the conclusion to highlight and comment on the two main aims set out in the first section of this thesis: one, to expand the emerging field of critical scholarship on Iraqi women’s literature as a transformative genre of Arabic, Iraqi and women’s literature in English translation; and two to interrogate the relevance of engaging intersectional feminist translation approaches as analytical frameworks of women-focussed and geopolitical inquiry alongside Iraqi and Arab women writers’ literary contexts. In this way, I clarify the implications that this study brings to three dynamic academic disciplines – contemporary Iraqi women’s literature, Arab women’s literature in English translation and feminist translation studies as well as potentially wider academic contexts.

6.2: Critical insights: Iraqi women’s novels and paradigms of feminist translation

Throughout Iraq’s turbulent history, Iraqi women writers have been acclaimed for writing multi-faceted visions of the world from distinctly localised gendered and Iraqi perspectives. As this thesis has revealed, Iraqi women writers’ novels are diverse in style, content and publication context in Arabic, as are the ways in which their novels were mediated in English translation. This thesis is thus the first study which works to address a salient research gap in scholarship on Iraqi literature and Arab women’s literature: how the
thematic interpretation of individual novels by Iraqi women writers was interlaced with their respective paths of translation. One outcome of this research is showing how the exploration of each novel on a thematic and stylistic basis through the nexus of Arabic-English translation sheds light on how the meaning-making of each novel (and writer) often goes beyond critical or thematic frames of gender and Iraq, including the analytical frameworks used to read its moves in and across Arabic and English translation. By this I mean that as the import and acclaim for each novel often changes according to its diverse contexts and language of publication as each novel, in effect, holds more than one story within it. This finding creates or recovers space for each novel to be read alongside its changing contexts of interpretation in Arabic and English while inviting re-reading from different shifting critical literary perspectives.

That said, although shaping its contexts of mediation in Arabic and English translation, the (reflexive) writing of individual writers was also shaped by changing times and locations of Iraqi literary production. When Iraqi women writers’ stories were first published in English translation during the 1980s and 1990s, Iraqi state censorship directives had overtly created a literary-political dynamic of الإغتراب [al-IGHTIRĀB] or (self) alienation for all Iraqi writers – whether inside or outside of Iraq – based on the power to make novels (as well as their writers) ‘disappear’ by blocking circulation in the wider Arab world. By highlighting the specificity of their charged literary political contexts of translation, this thesis has contextualised the critical importance of Iraqi women writers such as Lutfiya Al-Dulaimi, Maysalun Hadi and Aliya Talib as well as Daizy Al-Amir and Samira Al-Mana engaging with allegorical motifs in their story-making while situating why their literary writing initially did not receive due critical attention in Iraq. While Iraqi women writers’ use of ‘uncanny’ or allegorical motifs of gendered الإغتراب [al-IGHTIRĀB] to negotiate (fear of reprisals from) censorship has never precluded interpretation or
translation, this thesis shows reasons for its potential obscurity – that is, how the aesthetic political import of this motif is connective to the reader’s epitextual awareness of the multiple ambivalences of Iraqi women writers’ diverse ‘houses of fiction.’ Reading the works of Samira Al-Mana and Daizy Al-Amir in Arabic-English translation alongside analytical frameworks of feminist translation premised by explicit declaration of (gendered) translator agency, this thesis has demonstrated the need to recognise non-discursive and liminal expressions of agency as part of the meaning and import of each work’s politics of translation. By reflecting on the implications of reconfiguring the premise of translator agency this way, this study sheds light on the subtleties as well as courageous politics of Iraqi women writers who made strategic use of their gendered ‘location’ of الإغتراب [al-ightirāb] to write and thus configure an Iraqi every-wo/man who could ‘safely’ but ‘c/overtly’ interact and comply with - while defying and refusing - co-option into any hegemonic authority ideology.

Bearing this in mind, the specific literary political contexts of earlier Iraqi women writers called upon me to critically reflect, in practical terms, on firstly, how committed translator agency could be read as such if only the most liminal traces of it are discernible and secondly, on the relevance of using perspectives of feminist translation premised on overtly declarative (feminist) activist agency. One of the methods of engagement used in this study was to critically engage notions of ‘the uncanny’ in postcolonial literature in general and in pre-2003 Iraqi literature, in particular (Bhabha 1994; Ghazoul 2004) with feminist translation scholarship to ask fundamental questions on where the location and agency of a translator could be purported to be in contexts of (self) censorship. By reading where and how liminal traces of translator agency could be read to emerge in earlier and more recent Iraqi women’s literature, this thesis puts forward a new way of doing so. By blurring and questioning boundaries between text and paratext, translation and
paratranslation, translator and paratranslator, this study showed how using a paradigm of ‘feminist paratranslation’ alongside Barbara Godard’s (2002) conceptualisation of the translator as the “differend” helps to sharpen the focus on the impact of transnational and localized (gendered) power relations on how a translated work is mediated for new audiences, as well as diversifying locations of ‘traces’ of translator agency. By blurring and questioning boundaries between text and paratext, translator and para/translator as well as between writing, translation and re/writing, this study thus puts forward the term “feminist paratranslation” (Abou Rached 2017; 2018) as a paradigm of analysis to diversify and interrogate overt, c/overt and liminal configurations of location and mode of (para) translator agency at play in translated works. This thesis showed how diversifying configurations of location and expression of agency is salient for earlier examples of Iraqi women writers whose initial publications arose largely through translators and academic editors as well as the writers themselves.

In view of many Iraqi women writers’ publishing their novels in Arabic, as well as in English translation outside of Iraq, the politics of each novel’s location in Arabic as well as English have emerged as charged and fruitful points of debate in contemporary Iraqi activist-artist/writer scholarship (Al-Ali and Al-Najjar 2013; Bader 2013). Saadi Simawé’s claim (2004) that Iraq’s (pre-and post-2003 war) calamities have, conversely, led to an explosion of Iraqi literary output alongside the refusal of Iraqi women writers such as Inaam Kachachi and Haifa Zangana to accept Iraq’s disasters as source of creative inspiration contextualise the diverse dynamics of Iraqi aesthetic and literary production. One of the purposes of this study was to consider how perceived politics of (gendered) re-location has emerged as an integral part of Iraqi women writers’ novels political agency and meaning in Arabic-English translation. This thesis has thus shed light on how Iraqi women writers have worked to co-create a new politics of location for their novels.
(published outside of Iraq) by writing Iraq as a place and identity as its peoples themselves thus going beyond its geographical borders. Through analysis of the aural politics of representation in the novel *The American Granddaughter* (2009/2011), this thesis has situated the political impact of gendered, generational and regionalised register of Arabic used in many Iraqi women’s novels within more powerful and apparent frames of reference by recognising that these registers ascribe an important *audible* materiality to the novel in Arabic. Considering the implications of a ‘mimetic’ feminist translation approach discussed in contexts of theatre and poetry (Flotow 2004) alongside Kolias’ (1990) ‘listening’ translation as attestation to what the translator believes a target audience can hear, this study demonstrates how translating - or literally ‘re-scripting’ - Iraqi women’s colloquial spoken Arabic and MSA into English calls for a translator who ‘listens’ to the novel’s voices as well as ‘reading’ them. The risk of the translator having to listen to the requirements of the publisher, rather than those of the novel clearly resonates with critical debates in wider contexts of Arab women’s literature about the asymmetrical power relations surrounding and shaping literary and political receptions of translated literary works. In this respect, this thesis re-situates the political salience of ‘mimetic’ feminist translation as an analytical framework for re/reading the audible trans(per)formance of texts, so far overlooked in recent contexts of translation studies.

Iraqi women’s literature has inspired a diverse and burgeoning range of scholarship which has drawn attention to individual novels by Iraqi women writers as a genre of Iraqi literature and Arab wo/men’s activist writing. While the three devastating wars in Iraq since 1980 have undoubtedly influenced the increased critical interest in Iraq women writers’ novels over this past decade, much of the acclaim for Iraqi women writers’ novels and stories is also inspired by their diverse representations of cross-boundary solidarity “between marginalised groups,” (Ghazoul 2008, 198) – the experience of Iraqis who do
not or cannot write. Iraqi women writers’ ‘turning to’ the most marginalised socio-cultural groups in Iraqi society could be read as one mode of critical engagement with the impossibility of writing during the time of the 1968-2003 Iraqi Ba’athist government. In my view however the politics of this writing goes deeper than expressing oblique critique of political oppression. For what is striking about the novels and short stories discussed in this study and shared by all novels by Iraqi women writers published to date is the motif of connectivity (Joseph 1994) with others or an/other, even when the main (woman) protagonist is ostensibly alone. Through the gendered ‘teller’ or catalyst of the story, this study has shown how each novel becomes, through trains of thought, memories, letters, dream sequences as well as through actual conversations with other people (alive, dead, in dreams) a collection of many stories. The reflective trains of thought which blur boundaries between the protagonist’s inner self and the reader as point of address co-opt the reader into the novel’s making-meaning and thus suggests that the novel’s political and emotional impact is could be configured as happening inside and outside of the text. This study has sought to show how this multi-faceted mode of story-telling often disturbs and possibly transforms notions of text, paratext and epitext, which helps to shed light on why Iraqi women writers’ stories have garnered critical acclaim in Arabic and English through their engagement with ostensibly everyday events, through a writing of ‘conscious alterity’ which intersects and cuts across their (transnational) readerships’ politics of identity.

Alongside their aesthetic merit, Iraqi women’s stories of the (Iraqi) ‘everyday’ in localised gendered settings have been shown in this study as carrying great emotional impact, which opened space to critically further consider and question how, where and via whom the mean-making of Iraqi women’s novels happens in English (para) translation of their works. Haifa Zangana (2004, ix) for example recalls how an Iraqi woman thanked her for telling the story of a friend of hers through one of the protagonists (who is a survivor
of torture) in her novel *Women on a Journey* (2001). Clearly a sense of shared experience is why this (Iraqi) reader identified so strongly with Zangana’s novel. In this thesis, I have shown how the process of reader identification is not necessarily exclusive to lived sense of experience, but actively identifiable as consciously constructed in English translation processes which actively co-opt the reader or call into question the premise of reader lack of involvement. To contribute to previous critical analyses of Iraqi women’s literature and Iraqi women in Iraq, this study has interrogated how the motif of ‘conscious alterity’ used by Iraqi women writers to construct visions of gendered and cross-constituency solidarity (with gender as a point of departure) for (Iraqi) readers of Arabic is thus re/constructed in English, a language also used to hegemonically de/re/construct Iraqi women within monolithic frames of victimhood or “grateful” political participation as a result of US-led liberation of Iraq (Denike 2008). By drawing attention to the connective ‘liminal’ strategies used to mediate *A Sky So Close* (2001) by Betool Khedairi, for example, this study highlights how c/overt translation risks precluding or muting the (English language) reader’s ability to engage with the important politics of a novel first published in Arabic which was opening a conversation about why some Iraqis counted ‘less’ than others at times of Iraq’s decades of prosperity. By recognising that translation is always a “polyphonic” conversation about the politics of intelligibility in shifting contexts of hegemony (Reimóndez 2017), this thesis opens a wider conversation about this novel as a polyphonic story in Arabic and English whose author took the risk of exposing the fundamentally problematic premises of writers ‘writing’ solidarity *among* subalternities by ‘turning towards’ non-writing constituencies of Iraqi ethnicity (‘barefoot’ rural and black Iraqi) as a way of ‘presenting a discursive picture of their presence, as a critique towards the very Iraqis who ‘write’ and ‘read’ them. In this way, this study adds to longstanding scholarly debates on the politics of representing “subalternities” in other post/colonial literatures (Spivak 1988) through the nexus of (Arabic-English) translation.
While the 2003 war is in no way a watershed for Iraqi women’s writing *per se* and their early allies-in-solidarity, (academic editors, translators and activist publishers) this juncture seems to represent, as shown in this thesis, a critical point for commercial US publishers with US target audiences in mind. Distinguished by a plethora of additional chapter and blurb images which overtly re-package ‘conflict’ in Iraq thorough the lens of gender, this study has consciously sought to engage with post-2003 US-style mediations of Iraqi women’s literature using non-binary analytical frameworks of feminist translation to understand how the politics of conflict and identity in Iraqi women writers’ novels in Arabic moved across the charged political contexts in English translation. In this respect, my thesis highlights the importance of considering the stylistically innovative ways by which many Iraqi women writers – and the translators and publishers of their works - have re-presented their politics of re/writing as part of each novel’s meaning-making. By ‘showing’ as well as ‘telling’ how this meaning-making could be analysed, this thesis presents a new way to engage with critical interpretations of individual novels by Iraqi women writers as well as Iraqi women’s literature and Arab women’s literature in general. At the same time, this thesis has drawn attention to the limitations of doing away with recognising the presence of ‘borders’ completely. Using analytical frameworks of metamorphic feminist translation (Flotow and Shread 2014), this study has shown how tensions underlying the mediations of Alia Mamdouh’s *حبات النفتالين* [Mothballs] (1986/2000) and Hadiya Hussein’s *ما بعد الحب* [Beyond Love] (2004) in English para/ translation can be read in generative ways. This study has thus aimed to raise critical appreciation of both Arabic and English versions in the face of and despite potentially irresolvable differences in terms of language, script and readership positionalities vis-à-vis conflicts in Iraq.

Inspired by each writer’s innovative use of gendered agencies in Arabic to confront categorical notions of cross-constituency difference concerning conflict, this thesis puts
forward a new approach of interrogating how Iraqi women writers’ novels move across languages in shifting and charged frames of gendered geopolitical contexts. This approach consists of considering the tensions, challenges and ‘missing links’ of re/writing novels in translation as part of both versions’ meaning-making. In this way, while highlighting that some gendered configurations of agency in Arabic challenge or deny equivalent mediation in English, this approach sheds light on how both versions of each novel do work to challenge their audiences but in different ways; namely, the use of Arabic dialect alongside formal written Arabic in MENA public discourse (Safouan 2007); the politics of representing the experiences of specific (political, cultural and religious) communities in Iraq; the politics of building solidarity in post-2003 US. The mediations of both novels in US English para/translation thus seems to pre-configure contrapunctual findings at the end of this thesis: that while Iraqi women’s literature foregrounds gendered, regionalised perspectives of cross-constituency solidarity to challenge dichotomous political dynamics inside and outside of Iraq, it is the overtly gendered internationally-situated frames of their novel’s para/texts which have helped bring about more international critical recognition for Iraqi women’s literature, including in the Arabic-reading world. This study thus calls for a re-consideration of the premise of critical engagement with novels (in Arabic or other languages) by interrogating in more consciously explicit detail how scholarly interpretations of them are influenced by their repackaging in (and via) translation. In this way, this study highlights how translation itself creates pathways of critical debates and thus highlights the Arabic-English translation of Iraqi women writers’ novels as a field of inquiry into complex power relationalities about how ‘Iraq’ and ‘Iraqi people’ are mediated in the international sphere. They shape and are shaped however by the aesthetics of Iraqi women writers and their allies-in-solidarity ‘re-writing’ localised, gendered voices inside Iraq and beyond to be (retrospectively) re/read or re/heard differently.
6.3: Reflections and projections - scoping future research

One of the main aims of this study was to explore how representations of Iraqi women writers’ gendered relationalities to location, ethnicity, class and language in Arabic-English translation invite engagement with (intersectional) analytical frameworks of feminist translation studies to yield new useful insights on two gendered literary traditions – Iraqi women’s literature in Arabic publication and English translation - interacting with each other for the first time. Despite distrust of hierarchies and refusal of asymmetrical power relations underpinning feminist translation being highly relevant and salient to the scholarship on Arab women’s literature in Arabic-English translation, this thesis is the first study which brings together analytical paradigms of feminist translation first developed within the feminist literary traditions and languages of Quebec, Canada alongside gendered and geopolitical dynamics of Arabic-English translation of Iraqi women’s literature. From the outset, the scope of this research project could not be defined as the gendered and geopolitics of one literary tradition being read through the analytical frameworks of another, as to do so would re-enact the very binary hegemonic politics of (patriarchal) language and power with/in which each literary tradition was working to challenge, question and transform. The methodological framework of this study emerged through the transformative political premises of writing in Iraqi women writers’ novels in Arabic and English (para) translation as well as the reflexive trans(per)formative praxis of diverse feminist translation approaches. Clearly there were (gendered and geopolitical) limitations to the scope of this project. This study only focuses on Iraqi women’s novels moving between two written languages (Arabic and English). Iraqi women writers’ novels have been translated into many languages other than English – French, German, Italian, Serbian, Spanish and Portuguese as just a few (European language) examples. As each language has its own gender markers and geopolitical contexts of translation, this limitation
could be addressed by taking this project as a point of departure to widen and deepen further understandings (and gendered politics) of Iraqi women’s literature as an innovative genre of Iraqi literature and Arab women’s literature, the latter having a long tradition of moving across and between many languages, literary traditions and publication contexts. The critically reflexive and trans(per)formative methodological framework thus invites further research on how such performative literary traditions of Iraq and other regions move (and at times do not move) across borders and language. The potential critical scope of this research project thus invites, in my view, wider engagement with other Middle Eastern and North African literatures, particularly in contemporary diaspora contexts. In view of the ongoing relevance (and presence) of eminent wo/men writers in these cultures, this project sets out a new analytical framework to interrogate how these writings have been moved and re/moved through diverse (interpretations of their) trajectories in (para)translation.

In terms of theoretical scope in translation studies, this project has shown that paradigms of feminist translation are certainly not bound to their first locations of development (Quebec and European languages) but are relevant and useful paradigms by which to critically engage with translation as a praxis which ‘falls within’, intersects and crosses many other academic disciplines. This thesis contributes and adds to current scholarship in translation studies which shows increasing pre-occupation with notions of ‘how’ and ‘by whom’ inter-lingual multi-modal communication takes and has taken place, with thematic focus on conflict, censorship, activism, affect, memory, materiality, non-human agencies to name a few. This thesis has demonstrated that gendered geopolitical concerns of (intersectional) feminist translation approaches can be configured beyond the socio-linguistic and geopolitical de/re/constructions of different constituencies of women in Iraqi and Arab women’s literature in ways which consider the many permutations of agency, location and re/writing. By interrogating and foregrounding the political potential
acknowledging in absent/ed (sexual) presence as well c/overt presence as a force for agency in translation, this thesis shows the practical ways by which the critical premises of feminist translation approaches are useful theoretical paradigms by which to re/read, recover as well as interrogate how representations of gendered geopolitical identities and constituencies are often co-emergent in diverse temporal as well as language contexts.

Inspired by the innovative ways by which Iraqi women writers’ novels were mediated in Arabic-English translation, this thesis puts forward a new theoretical term - feminist paratranslation - which has already contributed to scholarship in feminist translation studies (Abou Rached 2017) and contemporary Iraqi studies (Abou Rached 2018). The specific contexts of Iraqi women’s literature in translation make the blurring and questioning borders between text and para/text necessary (rather than ‘transgressive’), thus inviting further interrogaations of boundaries of re/writing, translation and paratranslation in diverse fields of scholarship. The notion of feminist paratranslation also reconfigures dualistic notions of ‘author’ and ‘translator’ in ways which can critically question, re/read, locate or recover (traces of) au/their/ships mediating or resonating through a work’s pathways of meaning-making in more pluralistic ways. The contribution of this thesis is to show ‘the possible hows and whys’ by which we can analyse translation processes as an integral part of the innovative scope of Iraqi women’s literature, and Arab women’s literature, linking to other fields, such as post/colonial and literary gender studies. This thesis contributes in practical and productive ways to the diverse fields of post/colonial literary studies by proposing analytical tools by which scholars can strategically focus on how permutations of ambivalence in “the house of fiction” (Bhabha 1994, 18) manifest by and through the processes of para/translation, particularly when censorship or (authorial or para/translator) transit is part of a work’s critical significance. While this thesis has shown that while lines of transformative interpretation at play in feminist translation are led, structured and
focused on (and in) specific geopolitical contexts of the traditions engaged with, the theoretical tools used in this thesis can be engaged with to operate within and beyond the languages in question. In this way, this thesis as a contribution to knowledge opens a point of critical departure for further critical engagements with other literary and communication traditions’ pathways of translation, with Iraqi women’s literature central to this work.
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Chapter 2


Chapter 3


Chapter 4


Chapter 5


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Fig.2: image of a saw-fish.  [https://www.newscientist.com/article/2126267-sawfishs-fearsome-snout-evolved-to-be-undetectable-to-prey/](https://www.newscientist.com/article/2126267-sawfishs-fearsome-snout-evolved-to-be-undetectable-to-prey/)


Appendix: Reference List of Iraqi women writers’ stories in Arabic and English translation

This is a list of novels, excerpts/chapters of novels, short story collections and individual short stories by Iraqi women writers published in Arabic-English translation. I have listed available titles on novels and short story collections published in Arabic in Arabic script. I hope that this Appendix adds to and complements Salih Altoma’s seminal work *Iraq’s Modern Arabic Literature: A Guide to English Translations Since 1950* (2010), which lists literary works by Iraqi writers published in English translation up until 2010.

Ibtisam Abdullah


Daizy Al-Amir


**Lutfiya Al-Dulaimi**

1972. [Corridor to the Sorrows of Men – Short Stories]. Baghdad Maḥb’at al-Saʿadūn.


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100 Many thanks to Lutfiya Al-Dulaimi who e-mailed me a list of all her literary works published in Arabic.

101 C.f. Salih Altoma. 2010, 47. All stories by Lutfiya Al-Dulaimi published by the Iraqi Cultural Centre and Dār al-Maʾmūn are cited from the same page and source (Salih Altoma 2010, 47).


2015. [Pathways of Women – Short Stories], Dār Al-Mada Li Al-Tibā‘a Wa Al-Nashr Wa al-Tawzī‘.


Samira Al-Mana102


London Sequel]. London: Al-Ightirāb Al-Adabī [Literature In Exile].


1997. [The Oppressors]. Damascus: Dār Al-Madā‘.


102 A special thanks to Samira Al-Mana who kindly allowed me to access her hard copy works during my informal interview with her in London, on 17th of August 2018 and also for sending me copies of her works by post.

103 C.f. Salih Aloma. 2010, 53. All short stories published by the Iraqi Cultural Centre from same source.


Bouthayna Al-Nasiri


2008. لماذا لا نذهب إلى البحر كثيراً ؟ [Why Don’t We Go Often to the Sea?]. Cairo: Al-Hai’a al-‘Amma Li Qaṣūr al-Thaqāfa.


Iqbal Al-Qazwini


Shahad Al-Rawi


Maysalun Hadi


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سعيدة هانم ويوم غد من السنة الماضية، رواية [Saída Hanum and A Tomorrow from Last Year – A Novel]. Beirut: Al-Mu’assasat al-ʻArabiyya Li al-Dirāsāt Wa al-Nashr.


العرش والجدول [The Throne and The River]. Doha: Katara Prize for the Arabic Novel.

**Hadiya Hussein**


وثلوث قصة آخر [And That’s Another Thing - Short Stories]. Beirut: Al-Mu’assasat al-ʻArabiyya Li al-Dirāsāt Wa al-Nashr.


زواج الزمن [The Pane of Time- Short Stories]. Amman: Faḍa’āt Li al-Nashr Wa al-Tawzī‘.


في البيت السكنى [In the Haunted House -Short Stories]. Amman: Faḍa’āt Li al-Nashr Wa al-Tawzī‘.


نساء العتبات [Women At the Threshold -A Novel]. Amman: Faḍa’āt Li a-Nashr Wa al- Tawzī‘i.


Inaam Kachachi


Betool Khedairi


Alia Mamdouh


May Muzaffar


Salima Salih

في ركب الحياة، مجموعة قصصية [In the Wake of Life] (Short Stories). Mosul: Maṭba’at al-Junhūriyya.

1961. لألك إنسان [Because You Are A Human Being] (Short Stories), Baghdad: Maṭba’at al-Talighrāf.


2015. كالفانجو أو الليلة الثانية بعد الألف وما يتبعةها [Kalkanj Or the Night Following the Thousandth Night]. Baghdad/Beirut: Manshūrāt al-Jamal.


Aliya Talib


2001. [Either Here or There]: Baghdad: Dār al-Ḥurriyya Li al-Ṭibā’a.


Haifa Zangana


1995. [In the Corridors of Memory]. London: Dār al-Ḥikma.


