

أصداء الماضي: الذاكرة والحنين في رواية محسن الرملي تمر الأصابع (2014)

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Echoes of the Past: Memory and Nostalgia in Muhsin Al-Ramli's *Dates on My Fingers* (2014)

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المخلص:

يدرس هذا البحث مفاهيم الذاكرة والحنين في صوت البطل سليم، الذي أجبر على التشرّد بسبب الحرب والاضطرابات السياسية في رواية محسن الرملي "تمر الأصابع" (2014). من خلال إبراز تجارب سليم، تُظهر الرواية كيف تؤثر ذكريات الوطن البعيد على الهويات الفردية والجماعية في سياقات المنفى والاعتراب، وكيف يرتبط هذا بالنقاش الأوسع حول الهوية في مرحلة ما بعد الاستعمار. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل كيفية تعامل الرواية مع الذاكرة والحنين من خلال تطبيق نظرية "مكان الثقافة" لهومي بابا (1994) المتعلقة بنظريات ما بعد الاستعمار حول الهوية والاعتراب وازدواجية الذاكرة، وخاصةً كيف تؤثر ذكريات الوطن (سواء كانت شخصية أو موروثية) على صراع الشخصيات مع الهوية والانتماء. تطرح هذه الدراسة فرضية مفادها أن الذاكرة والحنين في سياق السرد يعملان كقوتين مزدوجتين: كعزاء وتذكير بالفقد في آن واحد، مما يذكر الشخصيات بهويتهما من خلال التفاعل المعقد بين الذاكرة والهوية. يسعى هذا البحث للمساهمة في فهم دور الذاكرة في تشكيل الهوية في مرحلة ما بعد الاستعمار في الأدب المعاصر من خلال استكشاف هذه الديناميكيات.

Abstract

This paper explores the themes of memory and nostalgia in Saleem, the protagonist displaced by war in *Muhsin Al-Ramli's* novel *Dates on My Fingers* (originally published in 1967, translated in 2014). The novel highlights how memories of a distant homeland shape individual and collective identities in exile and dislocation, and linking to boarder discussions of postcolonial identity. Thus, this study aims to analyze how

the novel works with memory and nostalgia by applying Homi J. Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (1994) that concern postcolonial theories of identity, displacement, and the ambivalence of memory; more specifically, how characters struggle with identity and belonging are impacted by memories (both personal and inherited) of a homeland. This study hypothesizes that, within the narrative, nostalgia and memory function as dual forces: comfort and reminiscent of loss simultaneously reminding the characters of their identity through the complex interaction of memory and identity. This paper seeks to contribute to understanding memory as playing a role in the formation of postcolonial identity in contemporary literature by investigating these dynamics.

Introduction

In his novel *Dates on my Fingers*, Muhsin Al-Ramli creates a deeply reflective narrative that attempts to explore the intersections of memory, nostalgia, and the complication of identity within the context of exile and displacement. In trying to move on with life in Spain, an unfamiliar and spanning landscape always a reminder of what he has lost, the protagonist, Saleem, also deals with memories of his homeland, Iraq. It is a dynamic of this struggle, of many people caught between two worlds, a deep psychological turmoil. Within the context of this, Al-Ramli creates a story of struggle both of personal survival and of cultural memory.

But the novel simultaneously embodies an intimate and anthropological view of agency and struggle, and an allegory of Iraq's social, political, and hybrid nature of war (conflict and upheaval). Memory and nostalgia are central to the narrative structure and are a site through which characters address their dislocated identities longing to return to a lost sense of belonging. The novel provides a nuanced reflection on how the memory of the past continues to inform current realities, and chronicling present contexts of diasporic life, particularly.

Bhabha's 'Third Space' discussed in his book *The Location of Culture* can help us to understand the fluidity of identity, and the hybrid nature of existence in the protagonist of the play. Bhabha's "Third Space" serves as a conceptual frame to contemplate with the blurring of cultural identities so that cultural identities can be put together, and provides a space in which the traditional binarism of colonizer/colonized, East/West, and past/present is disrupted to emit new cultural identities. *Dates on My Fingers* offers a powerful lens through which to read the themes of memory and nostalgia as its protagonist and his family inhabit the interstices of the homeland and their foreign lives in exile. This 'Third Space' is explored in this paper as a site where memory and identity are renegotiated.

Literature Review

Dates on My Fingers by Muhsin Al-Ramli opens up a radical exploration of memory and nostalgia, while remaining anchored in the



wider structures of Iraqi literature and poetry on the diasporic experience. In the novel, memory is not solely but in many ways it is a means of resistance, identity formation, and cultural preservation. Different scholars have attempted to look at these themes through various lenses to help understand memory and nostalgia in the work of Al-Ramli.

According to Shamkhy and Janoory (2020), memory in *Dates on My Fingers* is a weapon against the oppressive forces of Saddam Hussein's regime among others. Using Michel Foucault's theory regarding the power, they argue that the characters in the novel use the content of their memories as a sort of rebellion to political tyranny. However, not all the forms of resistance are overt; it is contained in the act of remembering itself, in how personal history battles with collective memory in response to the state's attempts to erase or conscript the past.

The paratextual elements in the novel are subsequently taken into account by Ibrahim and Mohammed (2024), who discuss the titles, prefaces and framing device of the novel. These represent the fracture of memory, for the fractured memory they also represent a fractured protagonist, who is temporarily dislocated in an exile. The memories the emotional rupture and the cultural rupture that Iraqis displaced by war experience are hallmarked in the narrative structure, that is fragmented like theirs. The present study highlights the role of memory in the shaping of the novel's narrative, in the ways nostalgia for the past is constructed through the form and content of the novel.

The analysis of memory is further complicated by the comparative study of religion in Hamlet and *Dates on My Fingers*. Both characters in both works struggle with the kind of existential questions that cannot be separated from their memories of the past. Like the characters in Al-Ramli's novel, they are likewise haunted by memories of their homeland and nostalgia takes on the role as a means of psychically re-connecting their current, dislocated lives to a lost cultural and religious identity. In the process of elongating the notion of memory, the latest comparison demonstrates to what extent memory—frequently in the form of nostalgia—is used to provide necessary identity to one's own ruler, to provide for the content of the universal, yet simultaneously to determine one's attachment to larger cultural and religious frameworks.

Together, these studies show how memory and nostalgia bind themselves into *Dates on My Fingers'* narrative as key components in the sense of self and place of the characters. Memory performs a starring role at the thematic center of the novel: whether through resistance, as an act to express cultural dislocation, or a means to hold onto a collective identity.

3. Discussion

3.1. The Intersection of Memory and Nostalgia

Memory and nostalgia are united concepts that deeply affect human constitutions as well as experience. Memory is the way that human beings store, retrieve and use the past. While nostalgia is a sentimental deep attachment to the past from pasted off or glazed over. A relationship, which is at once complex at its intersections, is that of memory as nostalgia and nostalgia as memory influencing how memory is recalled and interpreted.

Memory is the fundamental component of what constitutes nostalgia. Boym (2001) relates nostalgia directly to memory, or in a more specific instance when people think in terms of past experiences that cause a sense of loss or desire for a time that no longer exists (p. 12). As people grow older, we often grow fond of the memories of our childhoods and start dreaming of easier times, memories which become idealized and that we start yearning for. Research in cognitive psychology further supports this link between memory and nostalgia, showing that a particular class of memories—which are said to be 'more likely ... to evoke nostalgic feelings'—are those 'related to personal milestone and important emotion' (Sedikides, Wildschut, & Baden, 2004, 204). The memories don't have to be ones of hardship or challenge at the time, and even though they may be recalled less vividly, they will be imbued with positive emotions.

On top of that, memory is a very selective phenomenon. Generally, the past is remembered in a more positive light than it had in actuality. This is real, this phenomenon is called 'rosy retrospection' and basically, it shows that memory is skewing our recollections and trying to favor the positive and to discount the negative (Mitchell & Thompson, 1994, p. 56). Thus, these are selectively positive memories which fuel nostalgia and so people wish for an idealized version of the past.

While memory can catalyze nostalgia, the process also works in reverse: it can also make us nostalgically remember the past differently. Memories are often remembered in a nostalgic way, sometimes with embellishments, sometimes with real false memories. In their review of nostalgia, Wildschut et al. (2006) claim that nostalgia is not limited to people remembering past events, but rather nostalgia refers to the individual reconstructing the past accordingly so that it matches now that emotional state (p. 977). In other words, creating nostalgia causes people to inadvertently edit their recollections to fit with the emotional desire of nostalgia. Therefore, some things are overstated or changed and that makes for a romanticized version of the past.

Emotional emotion also contributes to the recall of memories, as nostalgia does. Sedikides et al. (2008) note that nostalgia plays an important psychological function, in that it raises mood, increases self-esteem, and fosters a sense of continuity between the past and the present (p. 306). Doing so creates memories that emphasize positive experiences



that coincide with these psychological benefits, nostalgia. For example, if a person was thinking back on their college years, they might remember having made friends and achieved something, while not remembering all the stress and money problems of exams. Consequently, nostalgia is not only altering what is remembered, but also how those memories are subjectively emotionally interpreted.

Personal memory is not the only thing that goes into nostalgia; collective memory—the memorized history of a people or group—also contributes. Collective memory involves remembering what a particular community has or has not done. Boym (2001) differentiates between two types of nostalgia: restorative and reflective. Restorative nostalgia seeks to rebuild a lost home or era, playing to nostalgia for what once was (41), whereas reflective nostalgia embraces a longing and sad feeling for what once was (p. 41). Restorative nostalgia, which often draws on collective memory, similarly makes use of individuals or societies trying to return to a past they perceive as 'golden age', and resurrect traditions or values.

In that way, national or cultural nostalgia usually uses collective memories of important historical moments or cultural symbols. The memories around these were always idealized, seen as taking place when a group or nation was felt to be richer or more united (Assmann, 2011, p. 17). This collective nostalgia can shape not only individual memories but rather national identity and cultural practices. In such a context, nostalgia becomes a powerful apparatus for the construction of the personal and the communal understanding of the past, and for reconfirming cultural continuity and social cohesion.

Memory and nostalgia are a dynamic, multifaceted process, and brings an intersection of the two. Nostalgia is the product of memory, but also the means by which the logic of memory is reconstructed and reinterpreted. Within nostalgia, a process of emotional impact, selective memory recall, and collective memory, individuals and entire societies recreate the past by reconstructing it for subsequent emotional and psychological needs. The understanding of this intersection is where we can learn how people comprehend their personal history and cultural identity, and the tremendous effect memory and nostalgia have on humanity.

3. 2. Memory and Nostalgia in *Dates on My Fingers*

Dates on My Fingers can be understood with reference to Homi Bhabha's concept of the 'Third Space', which is crucial to understanding questions of identity struggles. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha contends that in the 'Third Space' identities are not fixed and are in constant flux. This space, however, breaks the binary between past and present, and tradition and modernity, and practice is possible therein for the production of hybrid identities (Bhabha, 1994, p. 35). The experience of exile depicted in Al-Ramli's novel is particularly relevant to the kind



of reconciliation of a person's past with their present in a foreign land described by this theoretical framework.

This "Third Space" of exile allows Saleem to invent his Iraqi identity while he is living in Spain, where he has taken on identity of difference and where his Iraqi identity is continuously renegotiated. Though the memories are still vivid, they're not functioning as a whole in his head anymore, and the exile is shaped by the hybrid cultural influences of his new environment. Bhabha (1994) observes that 'third space' is a place of both conflict and creativity, a site of negotiation in which cultural difference is not 'givne' but constructed as only a process of dislocating identities(pp.2-4). Here we can see that it's so obvious that Saleem tries to balance his Iraqi heritage with the pressure of his Spanish life, where he has to exist in between two different worlds.

Al-Ramli zooms in on the hybridity, exploring this through the family's collective memory. Noah and Mutlaq, the protagonist's father and grandfather, are staunchly Iraqi, yet their violent and exiled stories lead them to new realities. Though deeply steeped in tradition values, Noah's act of revenge is a reaction to both exile and the pressures of modern life. Mutlaq's memories of his family's history show where tradition does and does not prevail. So too Mutlaq invokes the past: "A thousand mercies upon your soul, O Mullah Abd al-Hamid," (Al-Ramli, 2014, p. 8).

According to Bhabha's theory, the creation of the 'Third Space' supports the blossoming of hybrid identities, identities whose cultural limitations are being questioned. In Saleem's interactions with his new surroundings in Spain there is clear evidence of this. To adapt to their new environment, he has to hybridize, to become neither fully Iraqi nor fully Spanish. In such ways, Bhabha contends that this hybridity is not a sign of weakness, but rather a source of strength (Bhabha 1994, 35-38), because it permits reincirbing of the cultural identity of the subject in relatively novel and explicitly creative ways.

The narrative begins with Saleem's father, Noah, encouraging him to write their family's story: "Write whatever you want... Nothing will happen worse than has already happened. This world is all fucked up" (Al-Ramli, 2014, p. 1). This is not only how the novel gets its reader for what it is going to be but also it signals the arrival of Bhabha's 'Third Space' where memory, trauma, and identity intersect. Saleem lives an unbalanced life, on the edge of a knife between his memories of homeland and his life here in Spain. His struggle to unite these seemingly contradictory identities he is inheriting embodies what Bhabha refers to as the in-between, the space we live in.

One key to Saleem's identity is his fractured sense of belonging which complements Bhabha's theory that cultural hybridity is negotiated



and displaced rather than grounded in fixed identities. That means Saleem's sense of self begins and continues to be influenced by his memories of Iraqi trauma, violence, family honor—colored against a strange land where he tries to build a life. But his craving for Iraq suggests nostalgia for something that never was, and that has been dissolved into nothingness the brokenness of his identity.

A pivotal moment in the novel that illustrates this hybrid identity occurs when Saleem reflects on his father's complex character: "I loved my father without understanding him. I sensed there was more than one Noah inside of him, but he was able to harmonize them perfectly" (Al-Ramli, 2014, p.17). Now this line captures the very heart of Bhabha's idea of hybridity – that is an individual has multiple (often conflicting) identities. Just as Noah's disinterestedness as a violent enforcer of tribal honor and as a protective father mirrors the merging of cultural forces working on Saleem's identity, Saleem's own positions are contradictory.

This memory also ties into the themes of the novel: the way memory forms identity. Saleem repeatedly recalls his family and Iraq. Bhabha's theory argues that memory is not a static record of the past, but is rather a dynamic process which itself continually reworks identity in the "Third Space" (Bhabha, p. 2). Memories of Iraq and his grandfather's legacy, such as what his grandfather taught him about honor: "If a dog barks at you, don't bark at it; but if it bites you, bite it back!" (Al-Ramli, 2014, p 11) , this teaching helps to re-invent a past that stalks Saleem, long after he went into exile.

Saleem's memory of Aliya is intensely emotional as he was nostalgically links himself to his past via memories of Iraq. These memories serve the functions of comfort and psychological solidity within the violence of exile navigating Bhabha's "Third Space" – the space for the formation of identity and experience intersected by the present and what has occurred before. Saleem's reflections about his love Aliya are literally pure and untouched by the violence around the rest of his life.

This term, 'Third Space', draws on the idea of overlap or the hybrid creation of a sense of identity with two or more cultural experiences. This is a space in which new identities find their way in by integrating rather than rejecting the past. Bhabha writes that 'the 'beyond' is neither a new horizon nor a leaving of the past behind: we are in the midpoint of temporary transit, when space and time cross over to generate the figures of difference and identity which we call the 'future'" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 1). memories of Aliya and his emotional attachment to her are used as a prism to negotiate between past and present, what brings him to Aliya also brings him the totality of his life in Iraq, just as he creates his future in Spain.

Saleem's love for Aliya is depicted as unconditional and pure, and he recalls his affection for her with fondness: "Meanwhile, it was beyond me to understand my cousin Aliya even for a day. I loved her unconditionally, without any real reason, only that she had loved me without any hard questions" (Al-Ramli, 2014, p. 17). The simplicity and depth in this passage show how simple and intense their relationship is, away from the complexity and tumult of Saleem's life. In addition to commemorating his emotionally loaded past, Aliya brings to him an escape from Iraq's violence and loss.

Saleem recalls these memories of Aliya as part of his experience of the "Third Space" in which he always negotiates his own identity. In 'The Third Space', according to Bhabha, identity is formed by the "the overlap and displacement of domains of difference—where past and present collide"(p.2). Aliya is a part of Saleem's identity, rooted in Iraq's cultural and emotional landscape, even though he is living in Spain. Now, she still exists as a sort of constant in him, her remembrance influencing how he sees, and now lives through his past and current. Moreover, through this connection to Aliya, Saleem is able to stay connected to a source of emotional continuity, allowing him to reconcile exile with the comfort of love.

As Saleem remembers Aliya, so he remembers the other beloved aspects about Iraq, things like peace, and beauty, that were taken from him before he had awakened to the devastation. Aliya occupied a place in his heart and he now saw her with the same nostalgia he feels for his homeland. Saleem's memories of Iraq are all mixed with trauma, but Aliya stands out as sweetness and tenderness. Significantly, in this context, this illustrates how the "Third Space" brings together memory of trauma and love. Bhabha maintains that 'new signs of identity' are generated in this space through the act of retexturing past experiences in the present (Bhabha, 1994, p. 2).

In addition, Saleem remembers Aliya as being a romantic person, but also as being what allowed him to feel at home, providing him with a sense of belonging. Her love is a link to a better time, of Iraq, wherever that might be, not entirely deadly and violent. Aliya's memory is a reminder for Saleem that there was a time love and beauty existed in a place which is now covered by war. Such duality, the composition of sweet memories within the pain of Iraq, represents the mixture of the emotional bound of the "Third Space."

Dates on My Fingers shows us, through Saleem's sweet memory of Aliya, how love and nostalgia shape his identity in exile. However, these memories don't only provide him his emotional comfort, as a bridge linking his past to his present life in Spain. Homi Bhabha's concept of the "Third Space" allows us to interpret how Saleem's identity is constantly worked through his relationship to Aliya and his wider approach to love



and belonging in Iraq. Such memories, soft with tenderness, portray Saleem's multi layered emotional and cultural construction which emerges from combined past and present.

It is further complicated by the fact that Saleem carries trauma with him. The violence his family endured, such as his father getting imprisoned and tortured, are images of the wider political conflict that blighted Iraq. Saleem recalls how his father kept a bullet as a keepsake from the Tikrit boy's pistol: "He said, 'I'll stick the remaining bullet in it'" (Al-Ramli, 2014, p. 20). This bullet is more than just a survivor; it represents the impossible balancing act to overcome the violence of who Saleem was meant to be and who he is attempting to become in the present, in Spain. Although nostalgic in, nostalgia is not simply a longing for a lost past (as in an unchanging, temporally static idea of the past) but rather a (changing) dynamic force in that shapes the present, especially in a colonial or postcolonial context of asymmetrical relations between the past and the present. For Bhabha (1994) proposes that "the past is never fully behind us; it is always being reinterpreted in light of the present" (p. 36). This is especially so clear in *Dates on My Fingers*, where nostalgia for the war in Iraq is both a source of pain and valuable asset.

Nostalgia, for Saleem, is not for a homeland no more, but rather a widespread practice of holding on to one's identity as a stranger, as an exile. While his memories of Iraq are scattered, they are part of a continuum, part of his sense of where, and who he belongs. He evokes the sense of community that characterized his life in Iraq "We were fewer than one hundred people," (Al-Ramli, 2014, p 150). In Spain, where his identity is always shifting, he doesn't feel a sense of community.

in this sense, nostalgia is a constructive force through which Saleem can move between the complexity of exile and identity. Bhabha's idea of hybridity makes it possible for nostalgia to be a way of bridging the 'Third Space' in which people have to reconcile their past with present to forge new identities. Saleem's reflection on his family's history makes use of his memories of Iraq in order to make sense of what is happening now.

The memory plays a significant role in constructing Saleem's identity. In Spain, only memories from Iraq sustain his connection to his homeland. This emotional dependence on memory deepens his loneliness in exile. "As Saleem says, "In my loneliness, I had invented a complete story for nearly all these pictures, a history, a world" (Al-Ramli, 2014, p. 99)." This quote illustrates that Saleem's exile at the expense of Spain makes him make narratives out of images of Iraq so to escape emptiness. Saleem's imagination, for example, becomes Bhabha's "Third Space" in which Saleem's identity negotiates the past in Iraq and the present in Spain. The pictures represent his hybrid identity in which the two cultures blur into one another.

Saleem's yearning for his homeland is captured in his reflection: "I was content in this world of mine where I lived out my first identity, my nostalgia, and my longing for my mother's embraces, for my siblings, for a visit to Aliya's grave, for swimming in the Tigris River, for my friends" (Al-Ramli, 2014, p. 100). The powerful Intent of this passage is personified in its longing for familiar and 'cultural traits of homeland. As he lives in a foreign country, he is able to use nostalgia as a force against his own Iraqi roots. An important component of identity in the Third Space is the nostalgia for the past which mediates between Saleem's sense of place in Iraq and the reality of his new life in Spain.

Saleem lives in Iraq and in Spain but his identity is torn apart, between the two places he is associated with. He acknowledges this split when he says, "When I was out of my apartment, I was one of them, from this place, and I took an interest in what they were interested in: soccer matches, bullfights, celebrity gossip... But when I returned to my apartment, alone, I was from my people, from there" (Al-Ramli, 2014, p. 101). The last line of this quote shows just how Saleem's public life is indeed spent assimilating to local culture, while his private life is only connected to Iraq. Bhabha's concept of the 'Third Space' where identity is constantly performed rework in which divides are bridged between public and private lives is evident in this division between his public and private identities.

In addition, by Saleem's act of maintaining physical counts of Iraq, he tries to preserve his tie to his homeland. "I would cut out any picture about Iraq that I found in the newspapers. For a period of ten years I hung these up in the apartment, until in the end they crowded the walls of my bedroom, the living room, the hallway, and the kitchen" (Al-Ramli, 2014, p. 99), these images of Iraq serve as tangible reminders of the time when he was there and still somewhere allows him to maintain some sense of continuity, if for no other reason than for physical distance from his homeland. Within the 'Third Space', acts of memory preservation becomes crucial to the construction of hybrid identity for people like Saleem, whose daily life is juggling between two cultures.

Saleem's nostalgia is not only cultural and familial, but also about the personal, about his imagined lost love of Aliya for instance. "That's why I thank God whenever I remember Aliya, and I blame life for taking from me the most beautiful gift it gave, for taking Aliya from me. I blame the river. I hurl rocks, and I cry. Then I throw myself into its embrace, wishing that it would take me to her" (Al-Ramli, 2014, p. 80), this is the kind of passage where Saleem's profound sadness and grief after a loved one has died coalesces with a yearning for Aliya and for Iraq. Such memories then become a part of the continuing struggle over identity in the 'Third Space,' for Saleem never totally transcends his emotional engagement to history, which is a core part of his fragmenting self.



Dates on My Fingers explores, through Homi Bhabha's concept of the 'Third Space,' the complex ways identity becomes negotiated in terms of displacement, memory, and nostalgia. Saleem's life as a resident of two worlds shows us how identity is fluid and hybrid in the "Third Space." The love of his homeland and also of personal loss helps construct his inconclusive negotiation of who he is, the messy intertwining of past and present that forms new identities. Using the themes of hybridity and transformation, characteristic of Bhabha's postcolonial theory, the novel illustrates how the two key themes of memory and exile reflect the themes of hybridity and transformation.

Apart from being an odd sort of space in which identity is forged, it is also a messy interstitial space of clashes between past violence and trauma in *Dates on My Fingers*. In Saleem's depiction of his father Noah, who is physically crippling and scarred from his torture in an Iraqi prison, the past intrudes into the present and forms of identity in highly intrusive ways. Bhabha's notion of the "Third Space" as a site of transformation is particularly relevant here, as Noah's suffering becomes a defining part of Saleem's own identity: "My father took out of his pocket a bullet from the Tikrit boy's pistol, which he would later make into a keychain. He said, 'I'll stick the remaining bullet in it'" (Al-Ramli, 2014, p. 20). The bullet is replete with violence and survival, and is the way by which trauma and memory are carried into the present fusing, as it remains committed to the repair of identity.

Saleem's memory and trauma are intertwined in the novel, revealing how they shape his identity. Rather, he has not just lost the Iraq of his childhood; he's also lost the cultural values his family represents. The memories of the collective suffering of Saleem's family and village during political unrest in Iraq, as he remembers them, are tinged with pride as well as sorrow. In one scene, Saleem recounts a violent clash between his family and government forces: "We were all wearing masks, and one of us responded with a shot, after which the air exploded in a roar of shots exchanged between the two sides" (Al-Ramli, 2014, p. 31). The conflict that Saleem remembers is also a memory of nostalgia: he longs for the Iraq of his memories, but he cannot escape the trauma entwined with it.

This sense of being caught between two worlds is further evident in Saleem's reflections on his father's duality: "I loved my father without understanding him. I sensed there was more than one Noah inside of him, but he was able to harmonize them perfectly" (Al-Ramli, 2014, p. 17). This line, which mirrors Saleem's own experience of living 'in the Third Space,' expresses the difficulty faced by Saleem in endeavoring to understand his father's hybrid identity. Saleem's identity like his father's identity that embodied multiple self.



In the case of Saleem, his life in Spain combines this idea of "moment of transit" very well, that is his identity as an Iraqi expatriate is in permanent negotiation between his love of Iraq and the fact of his daily life lived in a foreign land. The identity of his adult life in Spain cannot contain his identity, as described in the images of his homeland's memories. The idea of the 'Third Space' as Bhabha puts it, is a location where the past and the present, the inside and the outside, inclusion and exclusion, coexist and twist around one another (Bhabha, 1994, p. 2).

Saleem's quote, "I wouldn't have been able to write my family's story and expose its shame if my father hadn't encouraged me" (Al-Ramli, 2014, p. 1), suggests his powerful connection to his past, as he tries to build a new life in Spain. The struggle to articulate his Iraqi and expatriate identity is in line with Bhabha's idea of third space being a place of constant negotiation, then new identities are formed by the fusion of different cultures.

Bhabha explains that the 'Third Space' provides "terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 2). The support that Saleem receives in constructing his identity in Spain is deeply tied to his nostalgic places, his homeland.

Conclusion

Memory and nostalgia are often of a subjective nature and in the case of *Dates on My Fingers*, the novel captures the nuanced complexities of how identity can be so shaped in the 'Third Space' as Homi Bhabha describes. Saleem's experiences as someone who feels connected to everything but belongs nowhere, illustrate how the specificity of personal and cultural history infuses and indefinably intertwines in this space, to create a disjointed sense of self. He longs to go back to Iraq but the memories he keeps hold of are filtered and restructured by his present exile and build a hybrid identity that is neither Iraqi nor Spanish entirely. His nostalgia, a narrative and emotional anchor, is more than just an arm around his fixed spot of being, creating a sense of self that stands intact, isolated, throughout the shocks and stains of dislocation. By depicting Saleem's story, Al-Ramli shows how transformational power of memory can equip us with resilience through solace and a 'false' continuity at the dislocation of exile. In doing so, the novel is not simply a record of individual survival but also of the diasporic impulse to hold fast to heritage within new, though often contesting, aesthetic settings.

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Echoes of the Past: Memory and Nostalgia in Muhsin Al-Ramli's *Dates on My Fingers* (2014)

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