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Adolescent discourse and the construction of identity in *Does My Head Look Big in This?*

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Abstract:

The aim of this paper is to examine features of adolescent discourse in Abdel-Fattah's novel *Does My Head Look Big in This?* and investigate the ways in which such features contribute to the construction of the identity of the protagonist Amal. The study adopts a social constructionist view of discourse (De Fina, 2006) and is informed by the theory of indexicality (Silverstein, 2003; and Eckert, 2008). As the novel is narrated from the first person point of view, both the narrative in the novel as well as the verbal interaction between the protagonist and other characters in the novel are sites where Amal constructs her identity. Findings suggest that interactional behavior such as exchange of insults are opportunities where she constructs an identity of a powerful individual who is able to challenge racism, on the one hand, and as one who is the victim of media stereotyping and prejudice on the other. The stances Amal adopts towards her uncle, and her friend's mother construct her as an insider to the Australian community, with a deeper understanding of Australian norms than the two adults, and also as a Muslim who is knowledgeable about her faith, rather than one who simply follows cultural convention. Furthermore, references to semiotic resources in the narrative contribute to the construction of Amal's identity as a young Muslim, but also as an Australian adolescent.

Key words

Adolescent discourse, migrant literature, identity construction, insults, stance, semiotic resources

Introduction

Randa Abdel-Fattah's novel *Does My Head Look Big in This?* (2005) deals with the various complex problems which a second generation migrant adolescent faces in the host community. Set in Melbourne Australia, and narrated from the first person point of view, the novel revolves around Amal, a sixteen-year-old, Australian-Muslim-Palestinian as she interacts with her family, her peers at school, and her circle of friends and some of their family members. The narrative offers an intriguing example of how identity in narratives is constructed through discourse as well as references within the narrative to semiotic resources. The aim of this paper is to examine features of adolescent discourse in the narrative, based on research on adolescent talk, and to investigate how adolescent discourse together with references to semiotic resources contribute to the construction of Amal's multi-faceted identity as an Australian-Muslim-Palestinian teenager. The study adopts a social constructivist approach which sees discourse as a site for the construction of identity, and a site for social practice (See Bucholtz, 2009; Bucholtz and Hall, 2004; De Fina, Schiffrin, & Bamberg, 2006; De Fina, 2016). Furthermore, it draws on the notion of *indexical order* proposed by Silverstein (2003) and its development by Eckert (2008) as *indexical field* as the theoretical framework of the study. Along these lines, this study attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. How do features of adolescent discourse employed by the protagonist and other persona in the novel construct and index their identity in interaction?
2. What are the semiotic resources employed to contribute to the construction of the identity of the protagonist as an Australian- Muslim-Palestinian adolescent?

Significance and context of the novel

The significance of *Does My Head Look Big in This?* lies in its being a contribution to the growing body of Anglophone ethnic literature dealing with the experiences of first and second generation Arab migrants, and also with the experiences of Muslims, both Arab and non-Arab. While ethnic literature in English flourished in the seventies of the previous millennium, Anglophone Arab ethnic literature lagged behind. However, it has witnessed a noticeable surge in the past three decades or so. Arab ethnic literature for young adults, however, remains sparse. Thus Abdelfattah's novel is a welcome addition to much needed Anglophone literature for, and about, adolescents of Arab and Muslim decent. It gives voice to Arabs and Muslims as an ethnic minority in Australia, and reveals some of the challenges these migrants and their offspring encounter.

Set in Australia, one year after the tragic events of 9/11, Randa Abdel-Fattah's first novel, *Does My Head Look Big in This?* humorously depicts

many of the issues with which Muslim adolescent girls living in Western societies have to deal. Amal, the protagonist and narrator, describes herself as “an Australian-Muslim-Palestinian” which, she states, leaves her feeling she got “whacked with some seriously confusing identity hyphens” (Abdel-Fattah, 2005, p.6). Amal is indeed confused about many issues simply by virtue of being an adolescent, but more so due to the conflicting values she encounters and has to deal with daily. For example, despite the fact that she is a model of a young, practicing Muslim, she is confused about where to set the limits in her relationship with her classmate, Adam, to whom she is attracted. It is her Japanese friend, Eileen, who often reminds her that she is crossing the line and not adhering to the teachings of her faith by getting too close to him. Amal is amused by Eileen’s absorption of the teachings of Islam (with which she herself has acquainted Eileen) and describes Eileen as her “portable Sheikh” (Abdel-Fattah, 2005, p.173). She is also bewildered, by the attitude of the mother of her Turkish friend, Leila, who is constantly trying to arrange a marriage for her daughter despite the fact that she is still in high-school and has high ambitions to get a university degree. Amal cannot understand why Leila’s mother, despite living in Australia, is “following her village culture, not Islam” (p. 88). Furthermore, she sees that “for [Leila’s mother] to go around and tell the world it’s Islam when it’s the exact opposite is so dumb!” (p. 88). She also loathes the unequal treatment of Leila and her brother, Hakan, who is given much greater freedom and privileges than Laila. But most importantly, however, is Amal’s confusion regarding her own identity as an Australian, particularly with regard to being accepted by others as one.

The initial part of the narrative in the novel revolves around Amal’s decision to wear hijab “full-time” as she describes it (Abdel-Fattah, 2005, p. 2), and the consequences of this decision. The rest of the narrative deals with the problems that Leila as an adolescent Australian of Arab origin faces both in school and outside it. Despite her parents’ concerns, she goes to school after the summer break in hijab. Her friends, Simone, an Australian of British and Pakistani origin, and Eileen, an Australian of Japanese origin, are supportive of her choice. However, unfriendly rivals in the class, Tia, Claire and Rita, Caucasian white Australians, bombard her with insulting remarks, with which she is sometimes able to deal, but is at other times totally crushed by. The insulting remarks are not only about her hijab, but also about the practices of Islam, and her ethnic origins. They reflect the prejudices to which many Muslim youth are subject whether at school or in public places. Tia, however, is not only intolerant of Muslims and Arabs, but also of any non-white, non-Caucasian individuals, and thus also makes fun of Amal’s friends, Eileen and Simone.

Outside of school, Amal also has numerous battles to fight related to the prejudices of white Australians against Arabs. When applying for a part-time job in a local food store, the store owner tells her:

“Sorry love, we can’t accept people like you ... That thing on your head, love, that’s what I mean. It’s not hygienic and it just don’t look good up at the front of the shop. Sorry, love. Try somewhere else” (p. 309).

Amal is taken aback by the store-owner’s brazen discrimination, and stereotyping. Nevertheless, she does not have the energy to follow her mother’s advice and file a complaint in the center management. The incident, however, leaves her devastated and humiliated. It strips at her self-confidence as she tells her mother: “I shouldn’t have worn it ... Maybe I was stupid. Where am I going to go now? It’s just going to hold me back” (p. 311)

As the novel is narrated from the first person point of view by Amal, adolescent discourse is ubiquitous. It is found in the narrative designed for the reader, in indirect speech, the presentation of her thoughts and her interaction with other characters in the novel. The vibrant, creative language of the novel provides for much of the humor in portraying the adolescent world. Furthermore, various linguistic features, discourse patterns and semiotic resources work together to portray and construct the multiple identities which Amal projects in different contexts.

Theoretical framework of the study

This study thus aligns itself with a new, yet, steadily growing body of research which views identity, not as a static attribute of an individual, but rather as a fluid and multi-faceted construct, highly dependent on context. The theoretical framework adopted for this study is twofold: first, it draws on the work of social constructionist discourse analysts; second, it draws on the notion of indexicality. Both these approaches to the study of discourse are discussed in the following section.

Social constructionist approaches to the study of narratives

Social constructionist approaches to the analysis of discourse see discourse as a site for identity construction where, depending on context, the salience of one aspect of an identity may be made more relevant than another. They also see discourse as a form of social practice where ideologies are constructed, perpetuated or contested. This approach to discourse represents a break from variationist sociolinguistics which regards language variety as a product of speakers’ geographical location and other demographic characteristics such as social class, age, gender or societal roles. (See for example, Labov, 1966). While variationist sociolinguists focus on the highly structured nature of language variation, and its indication of a speaker’s social identity, they do not pay much attention to the agency of the individual in the construction of his/her identity in interaction, nor do they give much consideration to the role of the receiver in construing the identity of the speaker, or the place of ideology in this process.

The social constructionist approach to the study of discourse has mainly been adopted by discursive psychologists, and ethnomethodologists. More recently, it has also been adopted by discourse analysts coming from a linguistic background. This approach views identity as a construct that is performed, negotiated, and achieved in interaction, rather than a fixed, attribute. (See for example Androutsopoulos & Georgakopoulou, 2003; De Fina, Schiffrin, & Bamberg, 2006 and Eckert, 2005, 2008). Reflecting on the emergent interdisciplinary study of identity, De Fina (2006) sees that it is the result of “intensified contact between different communities” (p. 351) brought about by migration and other social practices. She argues:

The multiplication of the occasions for contact with the other has brought with it a problematization of the concept of identity itself and an effort to understand the relationship between people’s sense of membership in a community, the beliefs and social practices that define that sense of membership and its expression and manifestation in social behavior. (p. 351)

The focus in current research on the process of performing identity, rather than on static social identities based on individuals’ and groups’ demographic features, and on concepts such as speech community, has been described by De Fina (2016, p. 164) as a “paradigm shift” in identity studies.

Indexicality

Another important concept basic to this study is that of indexicality (Hanks, 2000), its related notions of indexical order (Silverstein, 2003) and indexical field as developed by Eckert’s (2008). *Indexicality* as a construct helps in understanding how language variation is to be seen as indicative of identity *being performed*, rather than simply attributed.

Indexicality as a concept emerged within a social constructionist approach to the study of discourse, and has been widely adopted in identity studies. In a brief, yet seminal article, Hanks (2000, p. 124) identifies indexicality as:

the pervasive context dependency of natural language utterances including such varied phenomena as regional accent (indexing speaker’s identity), indicators of verbal etiquette (marking deference and demeanor), the referential use of pronouns ..., demonstrative (this, that) deictic adverbs and tense. In all of these cases the interpretation of the indexical form depends strictly on the context in which it is uttered.

Thus any indexical is related to its context and dependent upon it for meaning and any interpretation of discourse must take into account the cultural conventions and ideologies within the context in which it occurs. Silverstein (2003) proposed the notion of ‘indexical order’ as a concept to help connect “the micro-social to the macro-social” (p. 193). The micro-social could either be a linguistic form or, as Eckert (2005, 2008) contends,

any other material semiotic resource, while the macro-social involves the social meanings, conventions and ideologies.

According to Silverstein (2003) first order indexes are habitual, and unconsciously produced, rather than carefully selected. They correspond to what Labov (1971) described as *indicators*, and as such they signal group membership. Examples of first order indexes are phonological variants, or any linguistic variables, associated with a certain regional or social dialect. In a person's speech, these variables would simply signal a person's belonging to the geographical location where these linguistic variables characterize people's speech, or her/his belonging to a specific social group which employs them. In addition to first order indexes, there are also second, third, fourth and a potentially indefinite number of indexes (*nth* orders of indexicality) which are consciously selected by the speaker.

Second order indexes differ from first order indexes in that they are not habitual. Rather, they are deliberate choices made by the speaker in order to construct a certain identity in a particular situation, or to signal the speaker's stance towards an issue. The choices are interpreted by the members of the community who share the same ideology, and understand the implications of the choices made by the speakers, or, to use Silverstein's (2003) term, they understand what the linguistic choices *index* in terms of meaning and identity construction. Second and third order indexes correspond to Labov's (1971) *markers and stereotypes*. Elaborating on Silverstein's (2003) notion of second and third order indexes and how they differ from Labov's concept of markers, Eckert (2008) states: "The difference between the notion of marker as used in variation studies and the index of Silverstein's treatment is in the ideological embedding of the process by which the link between form and meaning is *made and remade* [emphasis added]" (p. 463). The interpretation of a sign is never fixed, but always changing according to changes in the "indexical value" of these signs. Engaging in discourse entails a recognition that the meaning of a form is never final, but always open to new interpretation as a result of societal, political or cultural changes, among other factors.

Building on Silverstein's (2003) notion of orders of indexicality, Eckert (2008) argues that "meanings of variables are not precise or fixed but rather constitute a field of potential meanings – *an indexical field*, or constellation of ideologically related meanings, any of which can be activated in the situated use of the variable" (p. 454). As such, the meaning of linguistic variants is fluid, context dependent, rather than static, and interpretable in terms of relevant shared ideologies. Furthermore, linguistic variation is seen as social practice, a means of constructing social meaning, which is in itself also constitutive of ideology. According to Eckert (2008) the study of variation in language is the study of style, which, she

emphasizes, should not be regarded in isolation of content. She contends that no distinction can be made between form and content, as form is itself constitutive of content.

Eckert (2008) also argues that variation and style are not limited to linguistic choices. Rather, she contends, there are many types of different 'styles,' such as, for example, "material style ... clothing and other forms of adornment" (p.457) which go along with linguistic style and serve to index identity. (See also Bucholtz, 2009.) In this regard, she contends that "every stylistic move is the result of an interpretation of the social world and of the meanings of elements within it, as well as the positioning of the stylizer with respect to that world" (Eckert, 2008, p. 456). Thus teenagers who adopt a distinct way of speaking, do so because they believe that they are different from adults, and want to construct this difference in their speech. More importantly, they do so because they want to signal their in-group membership with other adolescents.

Eckert's (2008) notion of indexical field is particularly productive in the analysis of the discourse in the novel *Does My Head Look Big in This?* as the adolescents' discursive choices often index a range of meanings, not just one, and second, the linguistic performance of the adolescents in the novel only partly indexes their identity; other material semiotic resources such as clothing, jewelry, and make-up are often referred to in the novel as important definers of adolescent identity, and are the subject of much of the talk between Amal and her friends. In the following section I discuss features of adolescent discourse, both linguistic and interactional.

Features of adolescent discourse

Adolescence is generally regarded as a critical, problematic stage in life where the individual has left childhood, but has not reached adulthood. Adolescents seek to distance themselves from both the world of children and that of adults by adopting their own unique style of clothing, grooming, and speaking (Bucholtz, 2009; Eckert, 2005). The fact that peer pressure is at its highest in this stage of life (Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986) accounts for the rapid spread of new distinctive fashion, music, or way of speaking. Eager to affirm their in-group identity with one another, adolescents are quick to imitate any innovation, and thus contribute to its adoption in other age groups. As a unique stage of life, adolescence has been the object of study in various disciplines such as sociology, psychology and linguistics.

Creative use of language

Within the field of linguistics, researchers have focused on the distinctive features of adolescent speech, whether they are phonological, semantic or discursive. According to Fortman (2003, p.104) "language plays a significant role in defining adolescent social identity." (See also Eckert, 2005). Androutsopoulos & Georgakopoulou (2003) have found adolescent speech to be highly creative and innovative. On the semantic level, adolescents are credited with introducing new words, or appropriating the

meanings of existing words. Due to this, linguists such as Romaine and Lang (1991) and Labov (1971), for example, see adolescents as the forerunners of language change in their societies. Innovation has also been found in the use of “evaluative terms (*cool*) and intensifiers (*hella, totally*) such as the use of the words “cool” ... [and] terms that label social categories or groups” (Eckert, 2005, p. 97).

Another example in English of adolescents’ appropriation of the meaning of existing words is the use of the word *like* in a way which is distinct from its use in Standard English and by adults. The beginnings of its use in a nonstandard way by adolescents goes back to the 1980’s; however, its rapid proliferation and widespread use has drawn the attention of many linguists. Lamerichs and Te Molder (2009) focused on its discursive employment as “a particular kind of self-quotation in adolescent talk” (p. 401). They found *like* to have multiple functions in interaction and an important “conversational resource.” Among its functions is that it is used to preface self-quotations. It also serves as a “balancing act” allowing speakers to “convey bold assessments as mere characterizations and make them available for testing in a number of different ways .. [such as] invit[ing] the recipients to collaborate in the assessment” (Lamerichs and Te Molder, 2009, p. 415).

Also focusing on the use of *like* D’Arcy (2007) studied prevalent attitudes towards the vernacular uses of this word, as in the following examples: “LIKE the people were very friendly ..., And my other cat always sleeps, and LIKE we almost never see him” (p. 391). She found that attitudes to such use of *like* were predominantly negative. She also examined various ideologies regarding the use of *like* as being more a feature of young women’s speech. Based on the data she collected, however, she found this ideology to be unfounded as *like* was also used in non-standard ways by males and by older age groups. The way this word is used by adolescents both in English speaking countries and some European countries has been the object of study by many linguists, as for example, Lamerichs and Te Molder (2009), Romaine and Lang (1991) among others.

In addition to lexical differences between the speech of adolescents and adults, researchers have also pointed to differences in communicative behavior (Robin and Foster, 1984). In their study of adolescent-parent conflict, Beaumont and Wagner (2003) have found that much of the discord prevalent between parents and adolescents resulted from the different ways in which they communicate, and the different conversational styles that each age group adopts. This study also draws attention to another characteristic of adolescents, which is the frequent conflict with parents due to widely differing world views, standards, and values. This often results in the polarization of the adult world and the adolescent world.

Exchange of insults, compliments and identity construction

Ethnographic and sociolinguistic research has shown that the exchange of ritual insults and teasing are typical interactional behavior among older children and adolescents. Likewise, genuine insults are also prevalent among adolescents, but are performed for different interactive purposes from ritual insults. (See Eckert, 2008; Goodwin, 1990; and Labov, 1972.) Discussing ritual insults, Goodwin (1990, p. 185) states that a ritual insult is “an insult about an attribute of the target known not to be literally true.” In fact, a defining criteria of ritual insults is that they avoid referring to attributes that are known to be true, otherwise they are no longer considered ‘ritual insults,’ but rather ‘real insults.’ As such they would move from the realm of verbal play to that of verbal aggression and antagonism. According to Labov (1972, pp. 153-154, cited in Goodwin 1990, p. 322) among the attributes that often occur in ritual insults are negative assessments of age, and physical appearance including weight and clothes. They often extend to wealth, food and sexual activity. The aim of the ritual insults is to make a display of wit and verbal dexterity for members of the peer group to witness, with the aim of generating laughter. Thus ritual insults are a verbal duel of sorts, with the winner being s/he who “leave[s] the other party with nothing more to say” (Goodwin, 1990, p. 185).

Highlighting the essentially friendly nature of ritual insults among adolescents, Eckert (2008) describes them as “highly constrained, specifically in order to limit the potential for real offense.” (p. 100). She elaborates on the mutual understanding between participants in ritual insults saying:

Although the recipient of an insult is expected to assume that the insulter believes that the content of the insult is untrue, the insulter is expected to avoid content that could be potentially true. It is specifically this trust and this restraint that binds the group, allowing the insults to emphasize solidarity through the mutual acknowledgment in the face of potentially face-threatening acts that this is ‘just play’ (Bateson, 1972). (Eckert, 2008, p. 100)

Insults, however, differ from ritual insults in that the intention is to hurt the recipient of the insult. While they share with ritual insults the display of wit and verbal dexterity of the participants, an insult is an act of aggression, performed to humiliate the target. The attributes made fun of, then, are either actual or close to actual attributes in the target. Insults are also generally publically performed between members of rival groups and in front of an audience of other peers. Unlike in the case of ritual insults, insults do not result in laughter. However, as in the case of ritual insults, the exchange of insults ends when one of the parties cannot answer back.

While the majority of research on insults among adolescents has focused on males (see Labov, 1972; and Dundes, Leach, & Ozok, 1972), Eder, Evans &

Parker (1995) found that junior high school girls publicly exchanged insults at school. Furthermore, Goodwin (2002) found that white middle-class girls actively insulted one another in face-to-face encounters. (See also Fields, 2002 cited in Eckert, 2005).

Analysis of the novel

This section is an analysis of the novel to examine the features of adolescent discourse based on the literature on this type of talk. Specifically, I attempt to investigate how adolescent discourse indexes Amal's identity and how it is compared to other persona in the novel. The analysis is conducted on two levels, the linguistic and the semiotic. For the linguistic analysis, given the limitations of space, I focus on the use of *like* in non-standard ways, and the use of novel categorization labels. Furthermore, I will investigate the exchange of insults between Amal and her adversaries at school as a kind of interactional behavior typical of adolescents. I also look into the circumstances that occasioned such insult, and how the whole speech situation becomes a site for identity construction. I also investigate the stance adopted by Amal and her cousins towards Uncle Joe's mode of dress, a semiotic resource, and use of slang to claim authenticity as an Australian, and how this stance in itself indexes a certain identity. As for the semiotic analysis, I will discuss the images on the covers of the two editions of the book, and references to semiotic resources, particularly clothing, within the narrative

Linguistic and interactional features of adolescent discourse

The novel is replete with examples of adolescent language described in the research on this form of talk, as for example the non-standard use of the word *like*. Describing how their English teacher is looking at them proudly when they win the debate with another school, Amal says:

Extracts 1- 4

1. I am pretty sure Mr. Pearse is having a this-is-why-I-became-a teacher moment, because he's looking at us *like* we've sewn up the hole in the ozone layer. (p. 319)

In another context, Amal tries to justify why parents want their children to be lawyer and doctors. She says:

2. It seems like a group of barristers and doctors patrol the maternity wards telling expectant parents that eternal bliss, the answers to all life's mysteries, and honor and prestige will be granted to their children if they study medicine. *Like* society would really function if everybody were qualified to either cure the sick or sue the doctor. (p. 319)

It is not only Amal who uses the word *like*, but also her peers. When Amal goes to Adam's birthday party, Tia who is also there asks her:

3. “What are you doing here? ... isn’t this, *like*, sinful for you?” (p. 239)

Also, when her friend Simone tells her about the exchange of messages between her and their classmate Josh, she also uses the word *like*. She tells Amal of what went on in her mind as she was thinking of “something witty or cute to say back” (p.341):

4. The more I thought about it the longer the time was passing between the reply and I was freaking out because before it was *like* instant replies and suddenly there’s this huge, long pause. (p. 341)

In these examples and many others throughout the novel, *like* is used in a non-standard way. In extracts 1 and 2, it has the meaning of “as if”, whereas in examples 3 and 4, it is used as an approximator (See Lamerichs & Te Molder, 2009), with the two contexts, however, being quite different. In extract 3, Tia uses the negative, loaded word, “sinful,” to describe Amal’s going to Adam’s birthday party. Because using such a strong assessment would cast Tia as insensitive to Amal and aggressive, she mitigates the force of the word sinful by the use of *like*. Lamerichs and Te Molder (2009) label such use of the word *like* as “extreme case formulations” (EFCs) (p. 410). They elaborate that when *like* is used in this manner, it gives what follows it a “preliminary status.” According to Lamerichs and Te Molder, an assessment prefaced by *like* “is conveyed as a mere characterization rather than an established point of view” (p.410). In this situation, however, as Amal and Tia are bitter enemies, the move to mitigate the adjective “sinful” by prefacing it with *like* is only a pretense. In fact, Tia is being sarcastic and this is not lost on Amal, who describes Tia’s voice as she speaks to her as “an intoxicated mix of smugness and haughty amusement” (p. 239).

Lamerichs and Te Molder (2009) also note the frequent use of *like* between friends when they are gossiping. This best describes how it is used in extract 4 between Amal and her friend Simone. It is more of an interactional device used habitually, and as such merely an “indicator” of adolescence.

Likewise, the use of novel categorization labels, is also a feature of adolescent discourse which is prevalent in the novel. For example, when describing Adam, Amal attempts to categorize him. She says:

Extract 5

As this is high-school it is important to understand what type he is. He is not the loner type. Not the ostracized-nerd type or stuck-up brainiac type. He’s not the pot-head type, just-wants-to-bonk-girls type, teacher’s-pet type, personally- unhygienic type. He’s pretty popular as any guy who’s good at sports usually is. In that sense, he’s the sporty type. Plus everybody knows he wants to be a doctor and needs to pretty much ace every subject to become one. So he’s also an ambitious-but-retains-coolness-type. (p. 42-43)

The innovation is seen in the creativity involved in coining these hyphenated categories, and combination of disparate adjectives, such as *loner type*, *personally-unhygienic type*, *sporty type*. Other structures are reflective of action rather than attribute such as *just-wants-to-bonk-girls type*. The comic effect is achieved by the unexpected use of a clause to categorize a person. This creative use of language is another feature of adolescent discourse which at the same time is an indicator, identifying the speaker as an adolescent.

In addition to the use of *like*, and creative, innovative language, and categorization, the novel is also replete with interactional behavior typical of adolescents such as the exchange of ritual insults, genuine insults and compliments. As the narrative is told from the perspective of an adolescent, the prevalence of this discourse in the novel comes as no surprise. In terms of orders of indexicality, the discourse of the entire novel in general can be seen as a first order indexicality, indexing Amal as a member of the social group of Australian adolescents. In addition, other orders of indexicality and indexical fields are suggested by the discourse, and contribute to the construction of the multiple identities that also define Amal.

Exchange of mocking statements, insults, and sarcasm

Construction of a powerful persona

School life is of paramount importance for adolescents. It is the pivotal site for their socialization, identity construction, and also the place where they look for self-esteem. Group membership is one of the most important organizing structures in schools, with groups often competing on many levels, both academic and social (Eckert, 2005, 2008). Exchange of sarcastic remarks and insults between groups at school is one of the interactional moves by which the members publicly adopt stances towards one another and, in the process, make claims to identity. Furthermore, this interactional behavior is a display of verbal dexterity, and in addition to displaying antagonism towards one another, individuals engaging in this behavior attempt to display their superiority over others by means of their superior verbal skills.

The situation at school for Amal is no exception. Throughout the novel, the two rival groups, Amal and her two friends Simone and Eileen on the one hand, and Tia, Claire and Rita on the other, frequently make sarcastic remarks to maliciously tease one another, and also exchange insults. While some of these insults and remarks are blatantly racist, others are related to the behavior and appearance, specifically weight, of members of the rival group; such issues are reported to be a main preoccupation of adolescents (See for example, Bucholtz, 2009 and Eckert, 2008). In extract 6, Tia makes fun of Simone's heavy weight and her obsession with diets. At

the same time she brags about her own slim body, feigning concern about gaining weight.

Extract 6

“Ugh! I feel like a disgusting slob!” Tia groans, clutching her non-existent stomach and sneaking a look at Simone as we stand around waiting for our biology teacher to arrive.

“I ate a whole sandwich I feel so bloated. I could just kill myself from guilt.”

“You don’t look fat!” Claire reassures her.

“Yeah, you look gorgeous,” Rita gushes.

Tia flips her long, shiny jet black hair to the side and flashes them a Colgate smile.

“No, honest girls. Feel this pot. Look.” She lifts up her shirt to reveal a stomach as flat as a cutting board. “What do you think, Simone?”

Simone looks horrified and stands with her mouth gaping open, her eyes fixed on Tia’s stomach. The absence of even one millimeter of fat has taken the wind out of her.

“You’re right, Tia,” I say in a sickly sweet tone. She darts a lethal look at me, her eyes narrowing as they scan me up and down.

“*Excuse me?*”

“You’ve put on weight. You should watch your figure. Have you been eating a lot of salt lately? Your face is all puffed up. My pregnant aunt has a good water-retention remedy. Would you like me to get the name for you?”

She sneers at me and I turn away to take a seat. (pp. 76-77.)

Unlike in the case of ritual insults where the performer of the insult avoids mentioning a true attribute of the target, in this round of teasing, Tia refers to an attribute of Simone which is true, known to everyone in the class and causes her embarrassment. The context of the exchange affirms the actuality of the attribute which is being mocked: Simone is standing with her friends eating a carrot, as presumably, she is on a diet. Tia’s words are echoic of Simone’s words elsewhere in the narrative, where she expresses guilt about eating, and was probably overheard by Tia. Tia thus mocks Simone by imitating her. While being over-weight is one of Simone’s real attributes, it is not one of Tia’s. Hence the cruelty of her teasing in feigning to be concerned about having gained weight when she says: “I ate a whole sandwich I feel so bloated. I could just kill myself from guilt.” Her verbal performance is reinforced by her action of lifting her shirt to expose her stomach to display her supposed fatness. The cruelty in the action is that she knows that there is no fat to display. Thus far her mimicry of Simone is only implied. However, she intensifies the scale of her verbal aggression on Simone by directly asking her “What do you think, Simone?” In this way,

she clearly makes Simone the target of her mockery. Simone, however, is too embarrassed to respond, and her silence is a proof of Tia's victory.

Amal, however, does not want her friend to be crushed by Tia's words, and thus responds to Tia. Amal's response to Tia is significant in many ways. By taking on the difficult task of responding to Tia with equal force of Tia's attack, she constructs herself as a fighter, and one who is not intimidated by Tia's aggression. Moreover, by "filling in" for Simone, Amal shows solidarity with her friend, and aligns herself with her against Tia. The verbal tactic which Amal adopts is quite simple, yet dexterous. She uses Tia's own words against her, and simply agrees with what Tia says about herself, telling her "You're right, Tia. You've put on weight. You should watch your figure." But then she goes one step further to provide more evidence to the statement made by Tia that she "feel[s] bloated" by referring to her "puffed face" and offering remedies.

Research in conversation analysis has shown that the preferred response for a negative self-evaluation is to disagree with it (see Liddicoat, 2007; and Pomerantz, 1984). This is what Tia's friends do; Claire disagrees with Tia's negative self-assessment, and provides a counter statement to it saying: "You don't look fat!" Rita then upgrades the assessment to a compliment: "Yeah, you look gorgeous!"

Amal, on the other hand, agrees with Tia regarding the remarks she makes about her own appearance, and tells her "You're right, Tia ... You've put on weight. You should watch your figure." In this move, Amal appears to be aligning with Tia, as agreement, in general, is a preferred response and shows alignment with the speaker. However, since the assessment is a negative self-deprecatory one, Amal's agreement to it is actually a *dispreferred* response, tantamount to a face threatening act (See Brown and Levinson, 1987), which embarrasses Tia. In this round of insults, Amal is victorious, and also saves Simone's face. Thus Amal ingeniously, counter's Tia's mockery, while on the surface, she appears to be aligning herself with her.

However, as research into adolescent girls' aggressive behavior in school has shown, insults are dialogically performed, constantly building on, and referring to previous interaction, and on the relationship between the insulter and the target of the insult. So, it comes as no surprise that Amal says: "Later in class, she gets me back" (p.77). This time the target of Tia's mockery is not Simone, but Amal herself. The object of mockery is Amal's appearance, and more specifically her head-cover, as can be seen in the following exchange:

Extract 7

"**I just don't know what I'd do without** my long hair!" she says to Claire and Rita, loud enough for us to hear. "**I mean, what's a woman without**

hair? You have to have a model's face to get away with covering up. Don't you think so?"

They nod like obedient puppies and I let out an exaggerated sigh.

"I just don't know what I'd do without a brain, Simone!" I say. **"I mean, what's a person without one?"** (p.77, emphasis added.)

As pointed out by Bucholtz (2009), Eckert (2008), and Goodwin (1991), appearance is often an object of insult among adolescents and older children. Du Bois' (2007) reference to "dialogic syntax" can be invoked to arrive at the force of the exchange of insults in this interaction. According to Du Bois "dialogic syntax looks at what happens when speakers build their utterances by selectively reproducing elements of a prior speaker's utterance" (p. 140). Amal uses Tia's own words against her; she repeats what Tia says, using the same lexical choices and syntactic structure, but substitutes the word "brain" for the word "hair." By doing so, she is able to successfully respond to Tia's scornful comments about her hijab and her appearance. Elaborating on the force of employing dialogic syntax, Du Bois contends:

the stance utterance of a subsequent speaker is constituted as bearing a close analogy to the stance utterance of a prior speaker. As stances build on each other dialogically, the analogy implied in their structural parallelism triggers a series of interpretative and interactional consequences. (Du Bois, 2007, p. 140.)

The analogy here is that just as a women's hair is indispensable to her appearance, a brain is indispensable to a person. However, the latter situation, (that of not having a brain) is much more deplorable in its connotations of stupidity, or even worse, in being less than human. Amal's response is all the more forceful in terms of the shared knowledge among the students in the class. Amal is known in the class for her "brains" as she is one of the high-achieving students.

Amal's verbal dexterity in the interaction in exchanges 6 and 7 is significant at both the first order of indexicality, and at the second order, indexing a range of meanings. At the first order of indexicality it indexes her membership in the social group of adolescents, who regularly exchange insults, to the extent that this behavior is a defining feature of adolescent discourse. (See Androutsopoulos, 2005; Dundes, Leach and Ozok, 1972; and Goodwin, 2002) At the second order of indexicality, it indexes a range of meanings (see Eckert, 2008; and Du Bois, 2007). Amal indexes her alignment with Simone, and simultaneously indexes an adversary relationship of disalignment with Tia. She also constructs for herself the identity of a person who would put her own face at risk in order to save that of a friend, that is, a noble, self-giving person. Furthermore, she constructs herself as an intelligent (brainy), strong, fearless, young adolescent who is not easily defeated or put down by the insults of a bully in a rival group.

Construction of a victimized persona

The role of the media in constructing and perpetuating stereotypes of Muslims

In other encounters of verbal aggression with Tia, Amal does not always come away as the powerful winner. In most cases, this happens when Tia exploits media discourse about Muslims and highlights the negative representation of Muslims to implicate Amal. In the following extract, Amal describes her emotions when Tia tells her, in a voice “loud enough for the boys to hear” of a magazine article “about Muslim girls getting circumcised in Nigeria” (p. 167). Tauntingly, she asks her whether she too has undergone this procedure. Amal does not respond to her, and describes her rage in the following extract:

Extract 8

My neck is bright red. Flushed **so hot** that I can almost feel my necklace **melt down** my body. I don't know what to say. If I start explaining how it's culture not religion, she knows she's got to me, that I've dignified her with a response. But the thought of ignoring her makes me **want to throw up**. The humiliation of everybody looking at me, wondering if I've gone through with it, makes me almost **giddy with sickness**. **I hate** her. How dare she? **I hate her so much my eyes feel blistered** and **I want to evaporate back to Hidayah**, back to bed, **away from this classroom** of people staring at me, waiting for an answer. (p. 168, emphasis added.)

Amal's reaction to Tia's mockery may be interpreted in the light of Du Bois' (2007) discussion of stance, subjectivity and evaluation. The affective verb “hate” which occurs twice in the extract: *I hate her*, and repeated with intensification: *I hater her so much my eyes feel blistered*” is an evaluation of Amal's feeling towards Tia. Du Bois (2007 p. 153) argues that evaluations, as expressed by the use of an affective verb such as *hate*, are inevitably related to positioning. A verb of affect, he argues, “serves to position the subject, but it also commits the stancetaker to a certain evaluation of the object” (p.153). Thus, subjectivity expressed by verbs of affect must also imply “an orientation to a specific object.” As such with affective verbs, evaluation and positioning take place at one and the same time. Amal evaluates Tia as an object worthy of contempt, and, simultaneously positions herself as one who has been subjected to an extremely humiliating experience.

The intensity of Amal's humiliation goes beyond emotions of pain to physical pain. The acuteness of her physical pain is expressed in her feeling of intense heat, so strong that it appears to be “*melt[ing]*” her necklace. Furthermore, she feels like “*throw[ing] up, giddy with sickness*” and “*[her] eyes feel blistered.*” The intensity of the pain culminates in her desire “*to evaporate*” and simply be “*away from [the] classroom.*” The poignant description of her emotions underscores the intensity of the humiliation.

The identity constructed here is that of a weak teenager who is the victim of racism and prejudice.

The role of the media and its impact on how Amal is treated by others is emphasized throughout the narrative. When Amal learns at school that a nightclub in Bali, Indonesia has been bombed, the news leaves her feeling as if there is “a sandpit in [her] throat” (p. 244). As she hears the school principal advising the students to seek the help of the school counsellor, to help deal with the horrific news, she wonders: “Was I going to be incriminated for their crimes? Was I going to be allowed to share in my country’s mourning or would I be blamed?” (p.245). Unlike her peers at school, she is unable to show her true emotions for fear of mockery. In the following extract, she voices the agony she endures:

Extract 9

I cry, but it’s bizarre because I can’t even break down and grieve without wondering about what people are thinking of me. I wince every time Ms. Walsh says the word “**massacre**” with the word “**Islamic**” as **though these barbarians somehow belong to my Muslim community**. As though they are **the black sheep of the flock, the thorn in our community’s side**. It gives them this legitimacy, this identity that they don’t deserve. **These people are aliens to our faith**. (p. 245 emphasis added.)

Amal expresses her rage by her choice of words and imagery. The association of the word *massacre* with *Islam* is a source of agony for her. Furthermore the imagery used to describe the terrorist: *black sheep of the flock, thorn in the community’s side* casts them as if they were indeed members of the community, but troublesome ones. What she wants people to know is that they are *not* part of the community at all, and emphatically states: “these people are aliens to our faith.”

Amal’s narrative abounds with examples where media discourse vilifies Muslims, and she finds herself implicated in acts of terror. When she is on the public bus on the way to school, she notices that the driver has turned up the volume on the radio, and she hears “words of outrage about ‘Muslims being violent’ and how ‘they are all trouble’ and how ‘Australians are under threat of being attacked by those Koran-wielding people’” (p.157). The driver looks at her in the mirror “as though [she were] living proof of everything being said” (p.157). As in previous occasions, she is overcome with humiliation and “feel[s] faint with embarrassment,” as if she were responsible for their actions. In this situation, and in others throughout the novel where Islam is negatively depicted, she constructs herself as one who is a victim of prejudice and who suffers both emotionally and physically on account of negative media representation of Islam. The identity she constructs in this context, is totally different from that she constructs when she stands up to Tia’s insults.

By referring to these real instances of terrorism and how they impact migrants, particularly vulnerable adolescents, the narrative is a social

practice, pointing to the challenges encountered by Arab second generation migrants. However, it is due to mounting pressure such as that which Amal experiences that many migrants go to extremes to assimilate with the host culture and leave behind their own ethnic culture, as in the case of Amal's uncle, Joe. In order to avoid being treated as outsiders, Joe and his wife Mandy go to extreme efforts to assimilate with the host community. Their assimilation takes place on many levels, linguistic and cultural, and includes style of dress and grooming among other behavioral habits. Amal recounts her uncle's efforts to assimilate with Australians, and adopt a new identity. These efforts begin with his adoption of an English name, Joe, to replace his Arabic name, Ismail. Likewise, his Palestinian wife changes her name from Aysha to Mandy, and their two children are given the English names, George and Samantha. The stance Amal adopts towards her uncle's assimilation to Australian society, reflects on her perception and construction of her own identity as she casts her identity in opposition to his. This is discussed in the following section.

Stance towards adults and identity construction

Amal's evaluation of her uncle's style of dress

According to Du Bois (2007, p. 139) "Stance has the power to assign value to objects of interest, to position social actors with respect to those objects, to calibrate alignment between stancetakers, and to invoke presupposed systems of sociocultural value." The stance that an individual adopts towards another is indicative of how this individual perceives her/his own identity in relation to others. Amal's evaluation of her uncle's style of dress as inappropriate to his age is indexed in the way she describes him when he first appears coming down the stairs in his home, where Amal and her family have been invited for dinner. She states:

Extract 10

Uncle Joe follows, his **gold chains** hanging down his shirt, tufts of black curly hair **finding their way through the gaps between his shirt buttons**. He's wearing **flip-flops and jeans**. He's fifty years old and **uses more *New Wave Gel* than the guys at school**. (p. 178, emphasis added.)

Uncle Joe's combination of a tight shirt, jeans, flip-flops, gold chains, together with the excessive use of hair gel are all semiotic resources which are used in excess and reflect his exaggerated attempts to adopt the identity of an Australian. Amal's disapproving stance towards her uncle's hyper-use of these semiotic resources, is reflected in her noting that her uncle is "fifty years old and uses more *New Wave Gel* than the guys at school." Amal evaluates her uncle as crossing the line of appropriate style for his age, whether it is in his clothing (the tight shirt, jeans and flip flops), objects of adornment (the gold chains), or his style of grooming (the excessive use of hair gel). In doing so, she assumes not only a disapproving stance, but also

one of superiority. In adopting such as stance, she constructs her identity as one who is more knowledgeable than her uncle about Australian culture, and the socio-cultural norms that operate within it. She also positions herself as one who is more perceptive of the fine nuances of the use of resources to assimilate into Australian culture. Thus, for example, the use of *New Wave Gel* is not the problem, but using it in excess, even more than youth do, is problematic. As such, Amal indexes an identity that is more Australian than her uncle, despite the fact that she holds on to her Arabic name, and wears a head-scarf. Amal bolsters her disapproving stance towards her uncle, and appeals to additional evidence to support her evaluation of his behavior by referring to his linguistic performance and his daughter's attitude towards it. The stances that both Amal and her cousins, Samantha and George, adopt towards Joe's practices reflect the common conflict between adolescents and their parents resulting from disparate world views, and from the general tendency of adolescents to polarize the adult and adolescent worlds.

Amal and Samantha's aligned stance towards Joe's use of slang

Commenting on the use of slang Holmes (2008, p. 174) states: "slang is another area of vocabulary which reflects a person's age. Current slang is the prerogative of young people and generally sounds odd in the mouth of an older person." Thus while the use of slang by adolescents is a marker of in-group membership, and hence desirable within the group, its use by adults is seen as inappropriate, and unnatural, a pragmatic slip. Likewise, the use of slang by social groups other than adolescents, as for example members of the working class, is seen as the prerogative of native speakers belonging to that class. Coming from migrants, it sounds strange, affected and inappropriate. In his continuous efforts to be seen as Australian, Amal's uncle peppers his talk with Australian slang. Extract 5 is an example of how he does so. The exchanges in extracts 5 and take place at Uncle Joe's house right before dinner, to which Amal's family has been invited, and to which Joe has also invited his boss, Alan.

Extract 11

[Addressing Alan]

"Would you like a drink before dinner?" She [Mandy] asks.

"Yeah *mate*, want a VB?" Uncle Joe interrupts in a let's try-an-ocker-accent. "You'll probably *cark it* if you don't get the *grog* in soon, hey *mate*?" He roars with laughter, slapping his hand on his knee. **Samantha and I lock eyes and try not to gag.**

"Oh, of course," Aunty Mandy gushes. "I'll get you a beer, Alan."

"No thanks. Have you got any soda water?"

Uncle Joe and Aunt Mandy look puzzled. **Samantha lets out a titter and slams her hand over her mouth.** (p. 180, emphasis added; Italics indicate slang, and bold indicates stance.)

The interaction in this brief exchange between Uncle Joe, his wife and their Australian guest, Alan, reflects that Joe and Mandy both have

stereotypical concepts regarding Australians; namely, that all Australians have an alcoholic drink before dinner, hence, Mandy's announcement that she will get Alan a beer, rather than asking him what he would like to drink. Even more extreme is Uncle Joe's assumption that Alan would break down if his alcohol is delayed. Much to their surprise, but not that of the two cousins, Samantha and Amal, Alan opts for soda water. Furthermore, Uncle Joe's linguistic behavior is totally out of place. In an attempt to impress his boss with how Australian he is, Joe inappropriately uses the slang words *cark* (to break down and die), *grog* (any strong alcoholic drink), and *mate*, and exaggerates in his reaction as to what might happen to his boss if he does not get his drink, by laughing loudly and slapping his knee. No one else laughs.

The aligned stance of the two adolescent girls towards Joe's practices is indicated by their locked eye contact. According to Du Bois (2007, p. 145) alignment is "the act of calibrating the relationship between two stances, and by implication between two stancetakers." In addition to signaling a joint stance towards Uncle Joe, Amal and Samantha's eye contact invokes their shared sociopragmatic knowledge of the contexts for using slang and indexes a field of possible meanings: first, that Joe's general behavior is embarrassing, second, that they both agree that his verbal behavior and gestures are inappropriate as an Ocker accent is spoken by an uncultured Australian male, and third, that they are even disgusted at Joe's behavior as they "try not to gag." Furthermore, Samantha's giggling and covering her mouth when Alan requests soda water reflects a condescending stance towards her parents, and even betrays a reveling in seeing them crushed.

Based on their joint stance, and its indexical field of meaning, Amal and Samantha construct their identity as authentic Australians who are cognizant of Australian culture, and insiders to this group. Mandy and Joe on the other hand, are outsiders to the group; they are not authentic Australians despite their exaggerated attempts to assimilate. The stance that Samantha and Amal adopt is a social act which indexes their alignment with one another but nonalignment with Joe and Mandy.

While it is deemed inappropriate for Joe to use slang, Samantha and Amal freely adopt slang in their interaction, seeing it as normal verbal behavior for their age group. This is made clear in the following interaction which takes place at the dinner table.

Extract 12

[Joe addressing Alan]

"Mandy knows how to cook all kinds of recipes. Not just Middle Eastern food. She knows Spanish, Chinese, French. She's a very *well-rounded Australian*."

Alan doesn't know what to make of Uncle Joe's outburst and smiles awkwardly. "Yes ... I'm sure she is ..."

"Mandy is, *mate*. A *Fairdinkum* cook who knows all kinds of recipes."

"Come off it Dad! Samantha groans. You sound like the Crocodile Hunger guy!"

"See Alan, how my daughter talks to her *old man*? No respect"

"Dad called himself old!" George yells in delight.

"*Old man* is what we say about you Samantha says [emphasizing the pronouns]. You're not supposed to say it! You're just insulting yourself."

Uncle Joe looks embarrassed and a blush creeps over his neck.

...

"*Bloody hell*, when's he ever going to get over the slang?" Samantha whispers to me.

"When he realizes that flip-flops and a Bonds singlet aren't going to make him more *Aussie*."

"In other words I am doomed to hear him say *fairdinkum*, *crikey* and *mate* for the rest of my life!" (p. 183, emphasis added; Italics indicate slang.)

Despite his attempt to claim an Australian identity by changing his Arabic name to an English one, socializing with Australians, wearing clothes and jewelry worn by Australian youth, his verbal performance, particularly his inappropriate use of slang, gives him away as a non-Australian, and underscores his non-belonging to this group. His children, on the other hand, are more knowledgeable than he is; his young son laughs at his error, while his daughter instructs him on who can use the phrase "old man" and the implications of its use.

The meta-discourse on Joe's language reflects Amal, Samantha, and George's stance towards him particularly with regard to his deficient pragmatic competence. By virtue of their native-like proficiency in the English language, they cast themselves as insiders to this speech community who are aware of the intricacies of the language and are fluent in it, while he is not. In extract 11, the two girls share their evaluation of Joe's speech privately between themselves, in extract 12, on the other hand, they publicly correct him, causing him much embarrassment as he "looks embarrassed and a blush creeps over his neck" (p.183). Furthermore, while it is deemed inappropriate for Joe to use slang, Samantha has no qualms about swearing saying "*Bloody hell*", and Amal freely uses the slang term *Aussie* to refer to Australians. Samantha's comment that she is "doomed to hear him say *fairdinkum*, *crikey* and *mate* for the rest of [her] life!" (p.183) further positions Joe in a negative light, as someone who is unable to fluently master the language and is not expected to in the future.

Amal, Samantha, and George's reaction to Joe's inadequate linguistic competence can be seen in the light of Spotti's (2006) research on ethnolinguistic identity in a Dutch Islamic school. In his study, Spotti found that for most migrant children participating in the study, "speaking Dutch is

regarded as a marker of achievement in comparison with older family members” (p. 193). For some students, this gave them a feeling that they could “[contest] parental authority through the Dutch language.” Likewise, Amal and Samantha adopt a stance of superiority over Uncle Joe as a result of their higher proficiency in English, and their greater familiarity with Australian culture.

Not all first generation migrants want to assimilate to the host culture like Uncle Joe. Leila’s mother is the opposite extreme. She holds on to the lifestyle of the Turkish village from which she came, refusing to accept any other way of life. She keeps attempting to introduce her daughter Leila to eligible Turkish suitors, and cannot understand why her daughter does not share her enthusiasm in meeting the young men, and is so keen on getting a university degree. This inevitably leads to conflict between Leila and her mother. Amal sides with her friend Leila, and cannot understand why Leila’s parents want to arrange a marriage for her, or why they restricts Leila’s freedom. Amal’s stance towards Leila’s mother is revealed in how she refers to her in extract 13:

Extract 13

- a. The next morning at fajr I pray that Ms. Walsh lets me wear the hijab and that Leila’s parents *grow some brain cells* and quit pressuring Leila about marriage. (p.54)
- b. Our shopping spree is cancelled because Leila’s mum woke up this morning and *decided to lose all her brain cells* and get by purely on *liquid membrane*. (p.86)

By evaluating Leila’s parents as needing to “*grow some brain cells*” and making this one of her prayers, Amal adopts a condescending stance towards them. If Leila’s parents have no brain cells, then they cannot think. She, on the other hand, has brain cells, and is able to evaluate them. Similarly, describing Leila’s mother as having made the active decision to “*lose her brain cells and get by purely on liquid membrane*” is yet another negative evaluation of Leila’s mother which casts her in a negative light as an incompetent person. At the same time Amal assumes a superior stance as she casts herself as one who still has the brain cells to see that what Leila’s mother is doing is wrong. Amal’s statement is also an example of hyperbole, typical in much teenage discourse, and of adolescents’ polarization of the adult world and their own.

Material semiotic symbols: the hijab, clothing, make-up, and activities
The centrality of the hijab as a semiotic symbol of identity

Language is only one of the many semiotic resources used by Abdel-Fattah to construct the identity of Amal as an adolescent. References to material semiotic resources such as clothing, make-up, music and jewelry are profusely used throughout the novel to build the world of adolescents,

and identify them as a distinct age-group. In *Does My Head Look Big in This?* centrality is given to the hijab within the narrative as a semiotic symbol which Amal uses to index her identity as a practicing young Muslim woman. So crucial is this semiotic resource, that it is the focus of the title of the narrative: *Does My Head Look Big in This?* (with the deictic demonstrative article, *this*, referring to the hijab.) The image on the cover of the book is also another semiotic resource used to highlight the importance of the hijab as a defining item of clothing for the protagonist. It is made salient in the images on the covers of two editions of the book. (See figures 1 and 2 below). In one edition (figure 1), the image on the cover is an extreme close-up showing the upper part of an adolescent female's face: her eyes, forehead, and her head, covered in a dark red head-scarf. The head-scarf is given prominence by its occupation of center position on the book cover, and also by its red color. Furthermore, the color red is a highly saturated color and one that attracts attention. (See Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) for the achievement of salience in images.) Even more emphasis is given to the head-cover by the upward look of the young woman wearing it, Amal, as if she were attempting to look up at her head to see if it does indeed look big in the hijab. The vector made by her eyes rolling up in the direction of the head-scarf directs the viewers to focus on the head-scarf too, and invites them to participate with Amal in deciding whether or not her head looks big in the head-scarf. The question itself reflects Amal's need for reassurance regarding her appearance (a common need for adolescents in general) and particularly when wearing the hijab. The front cover is echoic of various parts of the narrative where Amal voices her concerns over how she appears in the hijab.



Figure 1

Figure 2

In another edition (figure 2), the cover shows the image of an adolescent girl placing a pin to hold her hijab in place. The image is that of the protagonist, Amal, taken from a close-up shot, showing her head and shoulders. She is wearing a purple hijab, with a white head-band, matching the white blouse she is wearing. Her image is foregrounded by its large size, and its position; it occupies the bottom center and right space of the cover. Furthermore, she is facing the viewers and locking her gaze with them as she smiles. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), a shot of an individual taken from a front angle, with the person looking in the eyes of the viewers, makes a demand on the viewers. Here, Amal commands our full attention, as she stands cheerfully adjusting the hijab.

Behind Amal in the background is the full image of two adolescent girls sitting on stairs, facing each other and talking. Their image, however, is much smaller in size than that of Amal, and it is also not focused. So, we do not see their facial features or expressions. Like the image in figure 1, this image is also reflective of many parts of the narrative where Amal is constantly referring to matching the head band with other items of her clothing, and adjusting her hijab. Extract 14 is an example of the reference to donning and adjusting the hijab as a semiotic resource indexing her newly adopted identity of being in hijab “full time.”

Extract 14

I've decided on a navy blue veil and baby blue cotton headband to match my jeans and blue cardigan. I pull my hair back into a low bun and put the headband on. I need the headband as the veil is a silk fabric and will slip off without the headband to grip it underneath. ... I fold the veil in half, into a triangular shape, and even it out over the headband. (p.26)

Amal not only describes the veil, but also the other accessories needed to keep it in place, and the entire process involved in wearing it. Her detailed description is a semiotic resource employed to underscore her identity as a Muslim, taking an additional step in practicing her faith. The image also captures the presence of her two friends, Eileen and Simone, in her school life.

Reference to clothing in particular is a recurrent theme throughout the narrative, where Amal observes and comments on both her own clothes, those of her peers, and of adults (as in the case of Joe's style of dress, discussed above). Amal is also judged by others based on her attire. When her Aunt Mandy sees her for the first time after she wears the hijab, the following interaction takes place:

Extract 15

Full on religious look now, hey? She says playfully, looking me up and down. It's the first time I've come to their house wearing hijab as a full-timer.

Yeah, because a jean jacket and cargos are really Koranic injunctions. (p. 178).

Amal sarcastically contests her aunt's evaluation. Despite wearing the hijab, she does not want to be seen as having a “full on religious look;” she still wants to be seen as a fashion conscious adolescent by wearing the jeans jacket and cargo pants.

The narrative reflects Amal's oscillation between confidence in wearing the hijab and even taking great pride in doing so, to fear of discrimination on account of the hijab and fear of how others will construe it. When her parents attempt to dissuade her from wearing the hijab, she tells them: “so what? I can deal with all the crap ... I want to try ...and I want that identity. You know that symbol of faith” (p.24). At one point she says: “If I survived a polka-dot dress experience on a primary school camp,

then something tells me that I've got it in me to survive wearing the hijab" (p. 97).

Conclusion

Adolescence is a stage of life fraught with difficulties, particularly in terms of the challenges of dealing with peers at school and identity construction. This paper has attempted to identify adolescent discourse in Abdel-Fattah's novel *Does My Head Look Big in This?* with the aim of examining how it contributes to identity construction. The novel offers insight into the challenges that an adolescent faces, but these challenges are even greater when the adolescent belongs to an ethnic minority that is subject to negative stereotyping, as in the case of Amal. An investigation of the interaction in the novel in the light of a social constructionist approach to the study of discourse, and in the light of the theory of indexicality sheds light on the many facets of Amal's identity as an Australian-Muslim-Palestinian. The features of adolescent discourse, such as the use of *like*, novel categorization labels and innovative language operate at the first order of indexicality to identify Amal as an Australian adolescent. Furthermore, interactional behavior typical of adolescents, such as for example the exchange of insults, are a site for power struggle and identity construction for Amal and her peers. Successful responses to insults proved to be an occasion for Amal to acquire an elevated status among her peers. Conversely, exchange of insults and mockery are a site for intense humiliation and degradation when she is not able to deal with the insults and respond to them in a way that would save her/his face. Amal oscillates between success in responding to insults, and thus laying claims to a powerful identity, capable of withstanding the challenges of the host community, to one who is crushed and humiliated by the insults of racist peers.

In addition, the stance Amal adopts in relation to other adults in the novel, such as her uncle, Joe, for example, constructs her identity as an authentic Australian. Her disapproving stance towards her uncle's inadequate knowledge of Australian culture, his inappropriate style of dress, and his affected use of slang, cast her as an insider to the Australian community, and one who is knowledgeable of the socio-cultural values of the society. She also sees and adopts the stance of a more knowledgeable practicing Muslim than her friend Leila's mother, who follows cultural norms rather than the teaching of Islam. In this regard, Amal positions herself as one who is superior to some of the adults she interacts with. Furthermore, references to semiotic resources such as the hijab, and style of clothing index Amal's identity as a conservative, yet fashion conscious Australian Muslim adolescent.

الملخص:**خطاب المراهقين وبناء الهوية في هل يبدو رأسي كبيراً في هذا؟
نادية عبد الجليل شلبي**

لهدف من هذه الورقة هو فحص سمات خطاب المراهقين في رواية عبد الفتاح هل يبدو رأسي كبيراً في هذا؟ وبحث الطرق التي تساهم بها هذه السمات في بناء هوية بطل الرواية أمل. تتبنى الدراسة وجهة نظر بنائية اجتماعية للخطاب (De Fina, 2006) ، وتسترشد بنظرية المعيارية (Silverstein, 2003) ، Eckert، 2003) ، (2008 نظراً لأن الرواية تُروى من وجهة نظر الشخص الأول، فإن كل من السرد في الرواية وكذلك التفاعل اللفظي بين بطل الرواية والشخصيات الأخرى في الرواية هي مواقع تبني فيها أمل هويتها. تشير النتائج إلى أن السلوك التفاعلي مثل تبادل الإهانات هي فرص حيث تقوم ببناء هوية فرد قوي قادر على تحدي العنصرية من ناحية، وكشخص ضحية للقوالب النمطية والتحيز الإعلامي من ناحية أخرى. المواقف التي تتبناها أمل تجاه عمها، ووالدة صديققتها تبنيها كمطلعة على المجتمع الأسترالي، مع فهم أعمق للمعايير الأسترالية من الراشدين، وأيضاً كمسلمة على دراية بدينها، وليس كمسلمة يتبع ببساطة الأعراف الثقافية. علاوة على ذلك، تساهم الإشارات إلى المصادر السيميائية في السرد في بناء هوية أمل كمسلم شاب، ولكن أيضاً كمراهق أسترالي.

الكلمات الدالة

خطاب المراهقين، أدب المهاجرين، بناء الهوية، الإهانات، الموقف، الموارد

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