

Maysoon Malak

## Playing Monopoly in Baghdad

Those were different times in Baghdad....

Those were times when the streets of Baghdad – not only what is now called «the green zone» – were embroidered with palms and eucalyptus trees, and when its gardens, full of jasmine, roses, mint and basil, quenched their thirst from the waters of the Tigris, bringing yet new life to our ancient city.

Those were different times in Baghdad, when the spring rain brought with it the sweet smells of orange blossom and wet earth, and in the early mornings, the milk women carrying their milk and cream, secured in small baskets placed on their heads, proudly marched into the city, looking very much like those statues that were looted from the magnificent Iraqi Museum during the recent invasion of Iraq.

Those were different times in Baghdad, when the gates of Baghdadi homes were wide open in anticipation of friends, who would come into the cool living rooms and comfortably join in what

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tever was taking place, and when often, someone would produce a lute in the evening, and a singing party would quickly start in the garden, and more friends and neighbors would join.

Those were different times in Baghdad, when children came home from schools to smiling parents and hot lunches, and felt safe as they climbed up to the roofs of their homes and lay on beds covered with sheets embroidered with the Rose of Damascus, and shared the moon and the stars until they went to sleep, not knowing that they were learning about the beauty of the skies and the secret serenity of silence.

**W**hy do I choke as I write about those times in Baghdad?

It was in those times that I was given a brand new bicycle, and a cousin taught me how to cycle with my hands floating in the air like a rope dancer, another took me to exhibitions to see the paintings young Iraqi artists were producing, and yet another taught me to enjoy Tchaikovsky's Nutcracker and his Sleeping Beauty. In those times in Baghdad, summer was the time for pleasure. When August came we would gather in the evenings, old

To Nazik al Malaika, my cousin who taught me the dignity of being rooted, and Pierre M. Peron whose friendship convinced me to re-open memory drawers that I kept locked for a long time.

and young, carrying candles glued to tiny wooden pieces, to have a boat trip in the Tigris. Once we were all on board and the boatmen moved their boats into the dark waters, we would light our candles, carefully put them in the river and make wishes we wanted to come true as we watched the little lights floating away from us.

**H**ow sure we were then that no wish was impossible!

It was in those times in Baghdad that one early morning my grandfather woke me and my brother up and asked us to dress quickly because he wanted to take us to see a thief who had been caught in the neighborhood.

When my mother objected, he told her that he had once heard me saying that I was afraid of thieves, and therefore we had to see a thief to know that he is human. "Do you want your children to live with fear?", then he winked, "except for the fear of God of course!", and we dressed and walked by his side: a man in his seventies, still very good looking and tall and straight like the old palm in our garden, taking with him two teenagers to prove to them that a thief is only a man.

Decades later, as I watched on a television screen tanks marching into my city, a fear like the Great Flood swept over me, but my grandfather suddenly entered into my Time, hurrying me to get dressed to see a thief, and as I walked beside him I knew he was taking me in his Ark to the land where no fear can break the soul.

It was in those times that I began to love my city and its people and its gardens and its trees and its river and its bridges and its palm groves and its old buildings and its mosques and its churches and the cool darkness of its bazaars, with men sitting on Persian carpets in their small shops, looking like masters of the world, but who would stand up politely when my mother approached to buy goods for our home or clothes for the feast.

It was in those times in Baghdad, when I was

still at intermediary school, that one summer my brother and I were given an English game that had newly arrived to Baghdad. It was called «Monopoly».

I still remember our excitement when the game's intricacies were explained. We had in front of us a world of make-believe: we could buy houses and hotels in London, win hundreds of British pounds with a stroke of luck that came through the Chance Cards, and sometimes we would lose all the assets we won, again with a simple stroke of luck. It was hard for us, though, to understand why houses in Mayfair were more expensive than those in Strand, and why did we have to pay for them in British pounds, but our elders explained that the game, designed by English designers, was originally thought of for English boys and girls who had fruits bought for them from Covent Gardens, who shopped at Oxford Street, and who would spend weekends in hotels in Mayfair if their parents were rich.

That summer, Monopoly became our favorite pastime. Every day, as Baghdad became solemnly quiet under the heaviness of the summer heat and our elders enjoyed their siesta, we would invite cousins to share Monopoly with us.

One day during that summer, a twenty-seven-year old cousin, Nazik al Malaika, an established poet in the Arab region, arrived from the United States after receiving her Masters Degree in comparative literature. All the young generation in the family adored her because she was a very loving person who always had unusual stories to tell us. Once she arrived we started to spend our afternoons in her study, where books covered every wall.

We would sit around her listening with awe to the new stories she told us of her life in that far-away country Iraqis called «America» then. She told us how autumn leaves were the colour of fire in a place called Virginia and how she and her friends made a snowman during a Christmas holiday in another place called Wisconsin. In between

there she told us stories of her experience with those American men and women who were so generous to this young Iraqi who came from an ancient land, seeking knowledge in their new country. I still remember a story that caught my imagination for a long time.

«I was sitting in the tenth row of the university hall during a music lecture. The professor was discussing Beethoven's works so sensitively that I almost cried. Suddenly, he stopped his lecture and walked towards me and held both my hands and whispered: it's alright my child... Let's have coffee together after the lecture. I was struck! How did he sense how I felt? I don't know, but maybe souls do speak with each other across geography and culture. After the lecture, he took me for a coffee and we discussed Iraq and the United States, music and poetry, and that was the beginning of a strong friendship between a sixty years old American professor and a twenty seven years Iraqi student»

Were those different times too in «America»?

But life usually goes back to its normal rhythm, and my cousin gradually became busy with her work and poetry, and we went back to our Monopoly game.

One afternoon, while six of us were playing, she visited us to borrow some books from my grandfather's library. As soon as we saw her we stopped playing and begged her to tell us a story but she said she was tired and sat quietly in a corner of the room, watching us. A week later, she phoned and told me she wanted to see us, and we rushed to her house expecting a surprise. When we arrived, she walked to her study, opened the door, and with a sunny smile she pointed to her desk.

Walking closer to the desk we were spellbound, for there was another Monopoly there that had on it the names of Baghdad's streets, all written in Arabic: Abu Klam where we lived, Abu

Nuwass, where we took walks during sunsets to watch the changing colours of the sky, Bab al Sharqi, where my school was located, Al Kadhimia where my father took us to visit the Great Mosque. That was not all. The «money», in this Monopoly, was in Iraqi Dinars.

Why do I choke as I remember the day when we received our Iraqi Monopoly?

Is it because for the last twenty-three years I have never stopped dreaming of the day when I will be back to my city, enter a storage room, look inside my ancient trunk where the first love letters I received are kept, and take out that Iraqi Monopoly to give it away to my daughters who are now too old to play with it, but who may hand it over in future, with its story, to my grandchildren?

Later, my cousin told us how she made this new game. She asked a carpenter to make the board, a calligrapher to write the street names and the paper money, and then she herself wrote the text in the Chance Cards. There was one more thing, unlike the sober messages on the Chance Cards in the English Monopoly, the new one included jokes, which she herself wrote, to make sure – she told us – we would laugh when we played!

I still remember that whenever the game gave me the chance to buy a hotel, I would proudly announce: «I am buying a hotel next door to my school and shall soon invite my friends to eat kabab sandwiches in its restaurant!» As I made this important announcement, I felt immensely happy because I would imagine «Ma Mère» the French nun who was the strict principal of my school, looking angrily at this teenager, brimming with too much life and dreams for a student of her school, standing at the gate of her hotel and inviting her best friends to those forbidden kabab sandwiches!!!

And I would giggle with the thought that she could do nothing to stop me buying a hotel next to her school, for I was playing with my Iraqi Monopoly....

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Martina Kamp

## Die Re-Konstruktion des Irak

### Demokratisierung zwischen Konfessionalismus, Ethnizität und Geschlecht

Wie viele Staaten im Nahen Osten entstand der Irak nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg. Die damaligen Grossmächte Grossbritannien und Frankreich setzten eine imperiale Neuordnung der Region durch, mit der unter der Ägide des Völkerbundes Mandate errichtet wurden.

De facto unterschied sich die britische Mandats Herrschaft über den Irak kaum von anderen Formen kolonialer Herrschaft. Sie war durch ein System der Differenzierung entlang religiöser und ethnischer Zugehörigkeiten und Patronage einzelner kooperierender Eliten gekennzeichnet, die zwar wenig politische aber beträchtliche wirtschaftliche Macht erringen konnten. Bis zur formalen Entlassung des Irak in die Unabhängigkeit 1932 und der anschliessenden britischen Oberherrschaft über die irakische Monarchie bis zum Juli 1958 hatte ethnische und/oder religiöse Zugehörigkeit vielfältige sozioökonomische und politische Bedeutungen und wies einen Einfluss auf den Zugang zu Bildung oder die Möglichkeit politischer Partizipation auf. Unter den nachkolonialen Militärregimes traten diese Unterschiede zunächst in den Hintergrund. Doch die Macht der Baath-Partei stützte sich spätestens seit dem Krieg in den achtziger

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Jahren auf ein System von Repression und Patronage, in dem auch religiösen und ethnischen Differenzen wieder stärkeres Gewicht beigemessen wurde. Das Baath-Regime wurde im Frühjahr 2003 durch die von den USA angeführte Militärallianz zerlegt. Diese hat ein komplexes Modell politischer Repräsentation entwickelt,

das erneut ethnische und religiöse Zugehörigkeit als Bezugspunkte für politische Beteiligung fest schreibt.

Während die ethnische und religiöse Heterogenität häufig im Mittelpunkt der Forschung über die irakische politische Entwicklung im 20. Jahrhundert steht, wird die Geschlechterordnung als weitere Strukturkategorie von Machtverhältnissen zumeist vernachlässigt. Wie ethnische und religiöse Zugehörigkeit sind aber auch Geschlechterordnungen soziale Konstruktionen und historisch wandelbar. Auch lassen sich Geschlechterordnungen in muslimisch geprägten Gesellschaften nicht durch eine Gegenüberstellung von Tradition und Moderne erklären. Sie werden vielmehr zwischen verschiedenen Akteuren ausgehandelt und auf vielfältige Weise in nationalstaatliche Politik eingebunden. Wie Geschlechterkonstruktionen im Spannungsfeld von konfes-