



Article

## Studying the Mechanisms of Nonverbal Communication in Hoda Barakat's Novel 'Night Mail'

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**Abstract:** Words are no longer just a means of communication; there are other tools and mechanisms for people to connect and interact. What are most important from this perspective are non-verbal communication and its role in narratives, carrying significant semiotic meanings alongside verbal communication.

The novel, as a literary genre, is extremely remarkable and important in portraying the realities and discourses present in societies. It has attracted all communicative types, rhetorical techniques, and stylistic methods from other literary and visual arts. Novelists, due to the multiple artistic purposes such as completion, diversification, execution, refinement, emphasis, and embodiment, use non-verbal communication mechanisms; these include facial expressions, hand and body movements, and other gestures and non-verbal signals.

This study, in turn, attempts to examine this significant semiotic phenomenon in the novel 'Night Mail' by Hoda Barakat, winner of the Booker Prize, in order to uncover the extent to which these tools are employed, the functions they serve within the text, and the reasons that necessitated their use in depicting states of fear, anxiety, loneliness, escape, occupation, and war conditions that Lebanese, Syrians, and Iraqis have recently endured or in the modern era as a whole.

This novel used the epistolary form for narration and to convey thoughts and conversations. Due to the importance of the letters and the transmission of content, it benefited from non-verbal communication mechanisms alongside verbal communication mechanisms. The conclusion reached is that the Lebanese novelist, who used letters as an important tool to deliver her novel and the contained opinions and content—from isolation, alienation, loneliness, nostalgia, despair, displacement, war, and destruction to the reader—employed various non-verbal methods, such as expressions of the body, hands, eyes, face, and others, to convey significant content and opinions in the novel.

**Keywords:** Novel, message, semiotics, nonverbal communication, Night Mail, Hoda Barakat.

**Citation:** Abdulrahman, A. S. Studying the Mechanisms of Nonverbal Communication in Hoda Barakat's Novel 'Night Mail'. American Journal of Social and Humanitarian Research 2026, 7(1), 165-178

Received: 03<sup>rd</sup> Oct 2025

Revised: 18<sup>th</sup> Nov 2025

Accepted: 24<sup>th</sup> Dec 2025

Published: 21<sup>st</sup> Jan 2026



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### 1. Introduction

Communication, in its technical sense, refers to the process of transferring ideas and experiences, and exchanging knowledge and feelings between individuals and groups. This communication may be intrapersonal or interpersonal. It may be based on agreement or on opposition and disagreement. Communication, as a process of transmission and information dissemination, also presupposes a sender, a message, a receiver, and a code, the encoding and interpretation of which are agreed upon by both the speaker and the receiver (listener). It also presupposes a referential context and the intentionality of the message. Charles Cooley defines communication as the mechanism by which human relationships exist and develop. It encompasses all the symbols of the mind, along with the means of transmitting them across space and reinforcing them over time. It also includes facial expressions, body language, gestures, tone of voice, words, writings,

printed materials, trains, telegraphs, telephones, and all the latest discoveries in space and time [1]. Communication or connection is an artificial noun derived from the root "wasl," meaning that the parts have a common boundary where they meet. Communication, as a general concept, encompasses a range of different processes that occur between a sender and a receiver, where they exchange information to reach a mutual understanding [2]. This understanding is then based on the intended goals behind the message exchanged between them. Communication has existed since the dawn of life on Earth. By nature, humans are social beings who need to communicate with others of their kind to confront natural forces and to understand ways of life. Therefore, methods of communication have varied, ranging from signals and drums to symbols indicating approaching danger or preparation for war, and other means of communication prevalent at the time [3].

Human communication is one of the most important indicators of human sociality, whether verbal or nonverbal. Accordingly, human communication occurs through two systems: a verbal system represented by spoken and written language, and a nonverbal system encompassing behavioral patterns and various forms of expression such as body language, clothing, rituals, colors, architecture, and so on, thus enabling human action to take place on a broader scale [4]. Communication that utilizes nonverbal mechanisms is the most prevalent, important, and successful type of communication. In our current era, we find independent studies on body language and its importance in communication across political, artistic, and social spheres. It serves as a crucial indicator for assessing the success of any given communication. We can analyze novels, narrative texts, poems, and all literary pieces in terms of their inclusion of these mechanisms. Similarly, we should evaluate non-written social interactions according to this fundamental indicator.

A text that employs and utilizes this mechanism in its specific and appropriate contexts, with precision and diversity, transforms that text into a living discourse that incorporates successful and artistic means of connection. Based on the importance of body language or nonverbal communication mechanisms, literary texts, particularly novels, can be studied. Novels are a literary genre closely linked to society, and they often feature characters who speak and converse with one another. This dialogue and interaction should incorporate nonverbal mechanisms. Therefore, this study, given the importance of nonverbal communication mechanisms and body language in conveying narrative content and its inherent meanings, attempts to analyze the novel *\*Night Mail\**, one of the most important recent novels about war and destruction in the second decade of the 21st century, by examining the use of nonverbal communication mechanisms, their meanings, and functions. It seeks to answer the following two questions:

What are the nonverbal communication mechanisms in *\*Night Mail\**?

What functions and meanings does the novelist intend through her use of these nonverbal mechanisms?

### **The Background of study**

Given the importance of the theory of nonverbal communication, studies have been written in recent years on Arab novels based on this issue, including a 2020 article, "Nonverbal Communication in the Novel 'Minor Death' by Muhammad Hasan Alwan: A Semiological Study," authored by Masoud Bawan Buri and colleagues. This study attempted to analyze the novel 'Minor Death' from the perspective of patterns of nonverbal communication, including facial expressions, eye movements, hand gestures, head movements, and so on, adhering to the semiotic approach, the significance of this novel lies in its winning of the Booker Prize in 2017, and its semiotic review was a main necessity for this article. According to the research results, nonverbal cues were used to express states such as anger, fear, anxiety, distress, and so on. In addition, other media and devices also participate in conveying the author's messages. Most of these messages also have a substitutive function.

Article (2021) "The Structure of Expression in Ali Badr's Novel 'The Cloud Player' in Light of Jakobson's Theory of Linguistic Communication," by Abdulaziz Hammadi and colleagues. The current research was conducted using the descriptive and analytical methodology, aiming to study Ali Badr's novel 'The Cloud Player' and to present the instances where his precise and skilled use of expression through linguistic

communication functions is observed in light of Jakobson's theory of linguistic communication. We found that his narrative and dialogue were suitable for advancing the objectives of our research, which helps us understand the specificity of language and its functions in his novel. One of the main findings of the study is that 'The Cloud Player' provides a wide scope for research in the field of language; we found the dialogue subject to the process of communication according to the six components of the theory and the six communicative functions, uncovering the places where the theory is manifested in the novel. The novelist Ali Badr focused in his discourse on communicating with the audience in both narrative and dialogue in alignment with the elements of language and communication functions.

And an article (2023), "Semiotics of Nonverbal Communication in the Novel The Road to Tell Matran by Ali Badr," by Masoud Bawan Bouri and Majid Awad Salman Al-Daraji. In this research, the researchers attempted to study the novel The Road to Tell Matran from the perspective of nonverbal communication expressions, including facial expressions, eye expressions, hand gestures, head movements, and so on, using the semiotic approach and adhering to the descriptive-analytical method. The research results showed that Ali Badr used a total of 171 signs in this novel. He made the most use of various cases of vocal behaviors, facial expressions, and gaze expressions, and the least use of physical appearance. Ali Badr used these signs to express things such as fear, anxiety, sadness, hiding something, obtaining information, and so on. Also, the substitutive function had the highest frequency, while the refutation function had the lowest frequency. About the novel 'Night Mail,' which won the 2019 Booker Prize, and the exploration of non-verbal communication mechanisms within it as an epistolary novel that focuses more on content and message than the rest of the novel. No study has been conducted so far on this message in terms of this subject, so it is a new and unexplored topic.

#### **The theoretical framework of the study**

Communication is one of the most important human activities and one of the most significant aesthetic purposes in literary works, whether narrative or non-narrative. Communication, or contact, is the process of conveying ideas and experiences and exchanging knowledge and feelings between selves, individuals, and groups [1]. It is clear from this definition that the main purpose of communication is to convey information; it is a process of sending and receiving information, ideas, and opinions (a message) between two parties (sender and receiver) [5].

Rahmiyya Aissani defines verbal communication as the communication that takes place through the use of spoken or oral language (speech) to convey a message or information to the recipient. It is communication that uses words as a means that enable the sender to deliver their message to the recipient, whether written or unwritten, such as memos, letters, reports, books, seminars, and conferences. It is often conducted face-to-face, and is also called oral communication [6]

By verbal communication, we mean the type of communication that takes place through the use of spoken calls. There is no doubt that this form of communication is one of the broadest aspects of interacting with others. It encompasses communication between two individuals, communication within a group, communication between groups, and general mass communication [7].

Nonverbal communication is defined as a set of nonverbal methods or media, including signals, symbols, images, gestures, facial expressions, and body movements, all of which help in distinguishing, receiving, or hearing information at its various levels, supported by the use of language and speech rules as a cognitive organization for the communication process [8]. It is also known as communication without words, and it includes clear behaviors that appear through facial expressions, eyes, touch, tone of voice, and other less obvious means such as clothing, posture, and the spatial distance between two or more people [9].

Nonverbal communication is defined as "that type of communication in which behaviors, gestures, facial expressions, and visual symbols are used, all of which are meaningful symbols. Often, a gesture plays a role in conveying an idea or expressing a feeling, and it may support verbal expression. A gesture is any movement of any part of

the body and consists of visible or observable signals or signs performed with the hands, arms, head, or through the face and eyes [10]

Nonverbal messages have six functions, and here we explain these six functions:

**Completing:** Some nonverbal messages are synchronized with verbal messages, in addition to complementing a verbal message, enhancing it, and making it clear and useful to the audience; for example, when you see a friend saying, 'I am happy to see you,' while at the same time hugging them, the message sent will be stronger and more effective.

**Executing:** Some nonverbal messages violate, deny, divert, or contradict the verbal message. When verbal and nonverbal messages conflict, people tend to believe the nonverbal messages; for example, a person may say in a cold and hostile tone, 'No problem.' Here, the tone is one of the key nonverbal elements that reveal their lie.

**Repetition:** The nonverbal message that repeats the verbal message is a type of message that can function independently. For example, if there are no words, when you order two meals in a restaurant, you also show it with two fingers. In fact, nonverbal messages repeat verbal messages and vice versa.

**Control:** Verbal interactions are regulated due to its dominance and direction. This control element works best when combined with nonverbal messages. Nonverbal monitoring includes the following: looking at or away from another person, raising a finger while pausing to indicate the end of the conversation, and raising or lowering the vocal pitch.

**Domination:** When nonverbal messages are sent instead of verbal messages, the phenomenon of domination occurs: a hostile look at someone plays a role similar to saying a negative sentence to them.

**Emphasis:** Nonverbal messages are used to emphasize, reinforce, rely on, or highlight the message. A pause before speaking indicates that what is about to be said is very important; these six functions do not always occur separately, but can occur simultaneously [11]. It is worth mentioning that non-verbal communication in narrative or written texts occurs through words; it is not a visual form but rather a literary and digital type. However, in this context, the writer uses parts of the body to convey meanings through words and related expressions.

## 2. Materials and Methods

This study utilizes a descriptive–analytical approach based on semiotic and discourse analysis to investigate the apparatus of paralinguistic communication in the novel *Night Mail* by Hoda Barakat. Methodologically, this is primarily a close reading of the novel itself, with special attention to narrative contexts to which an otherwise nonverbal element points us within the epistolary form. The analysis systematically recognizes and interprets as they occur within the letters and narrative portions of the text nonverbal communication cues—including eye gaze, facial expressions, hand/ head movements, vocal behaviors, and body posture. The semiotic significance and narrative roles of the indicators are investigated in terms of their communicative functions, namely completion, substitution, emphasis, repetition, control, and expression of emotion. The study is theoretically grounded in nonverbal communication studies, semiotics and narrative theory in order to provide an integrative interpretation of how verbal language operates amidst bodily and paralinguistic cues. This analysis is then supported and contextualized with framings from primary texts translated from Arabic as well as secondary source (academic) literature that delve into nonverbal communication, semiotics, and contemporary Arabic narrative studies. It focuses on understanding the ways in which non-verbal mechanisms help expound on themes of exile, war, alienation, fear and psychological fragmentation. The methodology permits an analytical synthesis that situates *Night Mail* as a communicative text whose meaning is posited not just in the speech but through an interplay of gesture, tacitron and corporeality, elaborating the novel's artistic as well as semiotic subtleties.

### 3. Results

In this section of the article, we analyze the mechanisms of non-verbal communication in Hoda Barakat's novel 'Night Mail,' across six indicators, in the following order:

#### 1. Eye contact

The eyes are considered one of the greatest keys to personality, genuinely revealing what goes on in the speaker's mind and thoughts. Eyes can transcend all languages and can convey what the tongue cannot, as they are a clear mirror reflecting all emotions and confessing secrets [12]. The eyes are among the most influential facial features in the communication process. The meeting of gazes between acquaintances is different from that with strangers. Mutual glances can help in understanding thoughts, as well as indicate or clarify signs of interest and attention. Whether a glance is fleeting, inclined, or sideways, it forms a basis for inferring the viewer's interests, intentions, goals, and even attitudes. Additionally, a glance can convey observation, focus, scrutiny, concealment, attraction, and calming of situations [13]. The eyes are among the most influential facial features in the communication process. The meeting of gazes between acquaintances is different from that with strangers. Mutual glances can help in understanding thoughts, as well as indicate or clarify signs of interest and attention. Whether a glance is fleeting, inclined, or sideways, it forms a basis for inferring the viewer's interests, intentions, goals, and even attitudes. Additionally, a glance can convey observation, focus, scrutiny, concealment, attraction, and calming of situations every living narrative text should use eye contact in an impactful way within its narrated text, and the important thing here is to use it in its proper and appropriate place, where it conveys an aesthetic significance.

Hoda Barakat, in her novel 'Night Mail,' relied on mail and letters, which is evident from the title of her novel. The characters involved in the narrative text are interested in the letter and in conveying details, content, and concerns in the best possible way.

It is essential to use all possibilities and circumstances to establish a connection between these displaced and suffering characters who were uprooted by wars. They found it difficult to speak freely in all areas, so they relied on their eyes and other means of communication to create relationships with others, in addition to providing the narrative and text with vitality, splendor, and impact. In the following example, we see the use of the eye as an influential tool to convey the message from the perspective of the male character that has separated from his mother and observes issues and topics from his own viewpoint:

"I do not have the talent for reporting news. I do not tell anyone anything useful. People are only driven to listen to others by curiosity. Or I talk a lot and continue talking as long as the listener's eye continues to seek the news. That excitement that sticks to my life or the life of someone whose absence we agree upon." Here we find the use of the eye as a sign to convey the intended meaning. The novelist mentioned the phrase 'continuity of eyes,' which indicates care and constant attention. The narrator suffers from alienation and homelessness, and the attention of people, as he says, is noticeable and important to him, even though he did not continue sharing news about himself after the continuity of eyes toward his story was interrupted, or the people's interest in his news ceased. Here, the narrator expressed attention and lack of attention through a body part and a non-verbal communication mechanism to convey the intended meaning. Or as we find in the following example:

Well, as if no man has ever been in love with you before! As if I am the only man on this Earth! You lowered your eyelids and smiled coyly and awkwardly.

Here, the novelist used the eye once again to communicate with others. The construction used here is 'lowering the eyes,' which indicates humility and contentment. The man here addressed the woman, and she expressed her satisfaction, but the expression was not in words, rather through the states and shapes taken by the eye and mouth. The writer depicted the eye on the page of the novel in a way that indicates satisfaction and approval, and based on this, we find an emphasis on visual power and an increase in vitality in the narrative text due to its inclusion of nonverbal elements. Thus, we find the use of the eye and interaction with it to convey another theme and it says:

There is a man who can't stop looking in my direction. He goes out to the balcony with his eyes on me. And behind its glass, he stays for a long time, completely turned towards me [14].

Here, Hoda Barakat uses the eye once again in the first message from the character's perspective, and this repetition indicates the writer's attention to non-verbal elements in the text, especially the eye. Eyes speak in exile and homelessness, and the character always consults them to convey her intention and purpose. Here, in the construction 'his eyes on,' we find focus and observation. The homeless character who is used to observing matters finds someone who observes them perfectly and does not stop looking at him.

The writer conveys from this issue that his eyes are on it, meaning he does not divert his gaze from it. Here we find the use of the eye for communication, and this indicates both the strangeness of the subject as well as the strangeness of the character, who is foreign to the people in the strange country; for this reason, they dwell on it. This issue leads the Arab character to feel solitude and estrangement. The use of the eye here is more effective in conveying the narrative space and the themes of migration literature that Barakat wrote a novel about and its issues than any other means. We also find in the second letter of the novel, in which the novelist narrates the letter of the fifty-year-old woman, and on the first page of her letter, she says:

I stare at the cabinet door and follow the wood's grain until my eyes water. Then I move to the drawer of the small table next to the bed.

The writer narrates about the staring of the eyes, which symbolizes a certain state, as well as conveying the tears of the eyes, which has a clear meaning in the narrative text. We understand the significance clearly when we focus on the narrative space where this form of the eye is used. The painful, strange woman in her fifties, for whom symbolic things hold special meanings and connotations in her life. Here, the character stares at the wardrobe door, and this staring indicates concentration and attracts her attention because of the wood and wooden objects, as everything wooden stops her for contemplation and reflection. After this, as expected, the character begins to cry after observing the various types of wood. The character that spends her life in a state of sensation and estrangement is moved to tears by all the things that connect her to the past. In the following sample from the last letter, we find the use of the eye to show humility in a different way, and the Lebanese novelist says:

I look at my daughter in front of me. She is alone and I am alone. I have become more alienated since she came into my life. She watches TV with wandering eyes; I don't think she is mute

The Lebanese writer here used another expression, which is 'the wandering eyes,' which clearly indicates the fluctuation of mood and the impact of alienation on a person. Here, due to the surrounding words in the text, we can understand the intended meaning or significance present in eye communication. The character suffers from loneliness and alienation, and this state ends in muteness and deafness. For this reason, we find that in the context of portraying the character and their condition in a detailed manner, all the possibilities of language were employed, especially eye communication, to achieve the intended purpose.

## **2. Hand movements**

The second indicator we discuss in the study of communication and verbal interaction is the use of hand movements to convey meanings and narrative intentions. Hand movements and finger gestures have a significant impact on communication, as they carry messages through both silent and spoken language, with neither being separate from the other, working together to deliver the intended message to the recipient and embody and clarify the meaning. Clear signals appear in this narrative representing communication through gestures, signals, or hand movements, which are fundamentally based on humans' ability to move and act. This language may accompany spoken language and complement it. Hand movements and gestures can sometimes describe a person's emotional state. Sometimes it replaces speech, and at other times a gesture or movement can serve as an expression of respect, threat, or issuing commands. The hand is an extremely important tool for communication among the deaf and mute. It is also used in

cases of long-distance communication, in crowded and noisy places, or among wealthy individuals who recognize certain signals to conceal their intentions from others during conversation [15]. Here we search for the employment of some of these models from this indicator by the Lebanese novelist. The novelist, in his pursuit of the most effective way to convey the message, with the main purpose of this epistolary novel being to convey personal concerns and opinions to both private and public audiences, utilized all linguistic and non-linguistic resources. The novelist, in the many examples, benefited from the hand and its various gestures to convey his purposes, as we find in the following example: "Even when it comes in dreams, it is like nightmares. These are places eaten by scabies, even leprosy, crumbling and falling from memory like the fingers of lepers, barren and sick with their poverty, and the time for healing has passed."

The novelist speaks about memory, which still accompanies her and stays with her, appearing to her like nightmares and never leaving her. The novelist drew on this subject through the hand and its movements and likened this nightmare and referenced the memory of the male character who suffered from it during childhood or at a time when he was living in his homeland or Lebanon, to the fingers of lepers. That is, the finger here appears in the narrative text with the specific attribute added, namely, the lepers, and taking on a special form. In addition to this attribute, we find other linguistic elements and descriptive words such as 'barren' and 'withered.' But the use of a non-verbal expression or the employment of a body part contributed most to embodying the subject. We also find in the following example when Hoda says:

I wanted to ask you, how did all this passion feel easy for you? This rare passion, and that desire for me to lie with you dozens of times, hundreds of times, didn't you feel it? The writer here talked about making love, which is a romantic act suitable for romantic love scenes. The man here complains about the lightness of love and how ordinary he feels to his beloved, as if she has forgotten those repeated lovemaking sessions that have happened hundreds of times.

This hand gesture indicates the intensity of love at a certain time and its decline in the present period. The author, as she wants to talk about the transformations and changes she faced during homelessness and exile, benefited from non-verbal communication in order to measure this past and current state. Hand movements communicate as one of the most important textual links in the text in conveying meanings, and we find that the author incorporated them in all parts of the novel, including in the five letters of the novel, where she says:

"My beloved father, words were always difficult between us, and I used to think that the love I held for you was enough to untie the knot in my tongue. I used to dream of sitting close to you; of holding your hands in mine."

Here, Barakat spoke about taking hand in hand, and this indicates friendship. The author here talks about a son who suffers from sexual deviation and, because of this, was expelled by his father. The narrator or the son here addresses his father, seeking to return home and be accepted despite these personal sexual circumstances. He is the opposite of his father, who alienates him; he loves him and hopes and wishes for friendship, unity, and the improvement of destroyed relationships. The hand and its movements here are the most effective means for him to embody this inner intention, and he spoke about a special case of the hand that signifies his purpose and desire. Thus, the hand and its specific movements contributed to conveying the meanings and themes.

### **3. Facial expressions**

The face is considered one of the fastest means of conveying meanings from the sender to the receiver. Facial features are the greatest source of non-verbal communication because they convey to us the emotions or feelings of others toward us and reveal our own emotions or feelings toward them at the same time [16]. Paul Ekman explains that the face, as a whole, is an integrated system. The forehead, eyes, nose, ears, lips, chin, and mouth are interrelated in such a way that they all perform functions that none of them could perform alone. In addition, each contributes to forming the overall appearance of the face, whose expressions play an important role as a key source of information about human emotional states, such as joy, fear, surprise, sadness, anger, disgust, and contempt [17]

Thus, this aspect of nonverbal communication is among the most comprehensive or prominent forms of communication, and each part of the face functions and contributes to conveying the meanings of the narrative text.

Hoda Barakat, in her attention to employing non-verbal communication mechanisms, used this aspect of communication in many parts of her novel. We should not forget that the pen of the eloquent and articulate writer, and her ability to narrate the details of events and character, led to the use of this aspect in the appropriate contexts in the first message when the man talks about his past romantic relationship with his beloved, mentioning one of the facial features as he says:

“But when I caught the scent of sleep in the house, I decided that your insistence needed a pause for a comprehensive reckoning. Frying eggs, or opening a can of sardines, no big deal. But garlic? Garlic ruins the whole dish, a blatant repulsion, leaving no room for resistance. Indeed, who could resist a woman who kisses with a mouth that reeks of garlic?” Here we find the act of kissing that is done with the mouth, and this act, alongside other verbal and non-verbal communications in the first letter based on love, passion, longing, and sadness, embodies another aspect of this relationship. The inner narrator is the man who always remembers his memories with his beloved of all kinds, even kissing her mouth that smells of garlic. In another example, in the third letter, a man writes to his beloved, in which he observes in her letter the events and issues related to her at the airport, issues connected to his tragic and painful state, and for anyone who experiences loss and pain, it is significant. As he describes a Sudanese woman bidding farewell to her son at the airport while he cries:

This woman is Sudanese, and she will cry when the young man standing solemnly near her leaves her, her son, and goes inside. And this young, chubby blonde who keeps bouncing and never stays still will jump with joy as she hugs whoever will welcome her

Barakat here observed through the narrator's brush, an insider who is a man distant from his mother, wandering in foreign lands, and living in a corner of the airport, along with other similar events, until it is confirmed that the pains narrated from his side are more comprehensive and extensive than his five narratives. In fact, we continually find similar events of displacement, migration, and wandering. Here is the depiction of a weeping woman, and the writer benefited from the state of crying and facial expressions to illustrate the situation of the Sudanese woman. The state of the young man and the son beside her was more embodied and showed a clearer utilization of facial expressions. He benefited from the term 'Wajam' here, which means: a person was silent and unable to speak due to extreme anger, fear, anxiety, or astonishment. 'The man caused his face to frown due to deep sadness and remained silent [18]. The writer took the opportunity to choose a specific facial expression to address the topic, about displacement, forced migration, and the sorrow that people experience in such situations. Silence can convey more than any word to embody the weight of grief and sadness, and this state, as the novelist emphasizes, reflects her inner self and the inner selves of all those who are forced to leave their country. In the first message of the novel, we find these situations resembling an exact depiction, and the novel, as it attempts to document forced migration and displacement, mentions facial expressions to provide a more vivid representation of the subject.

And that sunset remained in my mind no matter the hours of the day. It is the same sunset where the sun disappears at the horizon, where all children cry, and all kind romantics grieve, from Ihsan Abdel Quddous to Rilke. A melancholy that envelops beautiful, gentle beings with no explanation. Writes the lady specializing in child psychology: Do not be alarmed, dear lady, by the six o'clock crying fits. It is a test. The child instinctively knows that, alone and abandoned by his mother, he will inevitably die; his crying is a call to ensure their existence: that she is here, and therefore he will not die. And from that moment, my mother was no longer there.

Crying and wailing embody two specific states of the reported character, and the novelist always tried to observe these states appropriate to migration and displacement. Especially considering what the novelist seeks through these states the composed conditions that immigrants from every country suffer under occupation, wars, and

destruction. Or as we find in the following example, the novelist uses the mouth as the last part of the face.

And you have probably come to know that I only say what jumps into my throat when I open my mouth. I see in front of me in the café a man sitting on a wooden chair, and I go on about the history of woodworking and the differences between types of wood and their uses. Here we find the mouth always suppressed, and the writer talks about its silence and its unwillingness to speak in exile except when it opens in moments where something jumps into it. This is a kind of use of the face and its expressions alongside other expressions and states that indicate exile and the broad delicacy in the novel and the characters that were present in it.

#### 4. Head movements

The head is one of the most important parts of the human body after the tongue, in expressing concepts and sounds, and it is important in conveying non-verbal communication. The head, with its various movements, contributes to revealing human behaviors, as it plays an important role in interpersonal communication. It is established that the head is the vault of the body and the gatherer of the five outward senses, from which signs manifest, marks become visible, and indications can be confirmed. The head also assumes forms that convey different meanings depending on psychological states and context, such as a movement indicating rejection, another indicating acceptance, a third indicating mockery, a fourth indicating denial, and a fifth indicating greeting [19].

This part of the body is of great importance, and the diversity in conveying meanings and Lebanese narration has been utilized in some places. This is because the characters speak to them individually, and the head is mostly used in verbal exchanges or in dialogue. However, in some instances, when the characters are depicted talking to other characters in their individual messages, we find the use of this communication mechanism, as in the following example, and the writer uses the nod of the head to emphasize a specific and particular meaning [20]:

“I had to listen to your words. I had to bow my head and always be obedient. I don’t know now if my father’s repeated beatings, with the leather belt or the stick”

The excerpt is taken from the third letter, in which a man writes a letter to his mother to tell her about his sorrows and worries after leaving home and being expelled by his father, who does not accept him due to his sexual orientation or inappropriate behavior. Here, the man emphasizes and tells him to listen to his mother’s words or bow his head in response to her words and guidance. The bowing here signifies obedience and blind imitation, and the words and expressions that come before and after this passage indicate this matter.

Contrary to what she believes, here the author advised her audience to follow blindly, because in these circumstances there is no other way out. The displaced characters, due to the pains and problems they faced, are no longer considered revolutionary fighters but rather are condemned for what they did and disobeyed. For this reason, the head, through its own movement, indicates this content and blind imitation. Or as we find, less clearly, in the first letter:

You will not take my head to your heart and pat it. Why are you so cruel? And how can you believe my regret and tears after I hit you?

Here we find the act of bringing the head closer to the heart, which indicates tenderness and compassion. But here, the displaced characters are deprived of this gesture or trait. For this reason, we find that he did not bring his head to his heart and complains about this issue and about the loss of his compassion and tenderness. This communicative mechanism, as we mentioned, has been frequently used in dialogues, especially in the second chapter of the novel at the airport, where we find the characters conversing. We notice the use of this type more than in the long first chapter, and on this matter, the author says:

It ended with me hating him and hating the many complexes he seemed to have dreamed up from his miserable childhood in his troubled country. His loneliness, which would have called for my tenderness, became a stubborn obsession gnawing at my mind.

I didn't know a single close friend of his; or a lover who stayed with him for more than a week

Here, the novelist used the expression 'head boring,' which means to talk a lot or to confront a talkative person. The novelist has portrayed characters that resemble them. There is misery, stubbornness, loneliness, and alienation when a person sees another person with whom they want to talk a lot and show their pain and suffering; because of this, the listener becomes angry at these repeated conversations and recounting of sad experiences.

##### **5. Vocal behaviors**

The other indicator we want to talk about is one of the mechanisms of nonverbal communication, which are vocal behaviors. Changes in the voice indicate a person's internal state in terms of feelings, thoughts, and personality traits. Therefore, the voice has a significant impact on verbal language in the communication process. This occurs through the tone or pitch of the voice, changes in vocal registers by rising and falling, as well as pauses within certain phrases, and the degree of roughness or softness. The rhythm and variability of the voice: The tone of the voice is what conveys persuasion beyond the structure of spoken words, and the emotion carried by the tone of the voice has a stronger impact than the emotion conveyed by the words themselves: Vocal behaviors include all verbal signals in speech except for words, and they encompass non-linguistic phenomena such as voice quality, shouting, laughing, crying, coughing, and silence. This non-verbal behavior plays a very important role in life

Here, an attempt is made to analyze some of the evidence based on the vocal behaviors in the novel 'Night Mail'.

Hoda Barakat in her novel makes use of sound and vocal behaviors in many instances, and the displaced narrative characters use sound in various ways to express their beliefs, behaviors, and anxieties. In the following example from the first letter, we find the whisper that indicates fear and loneliness in the narrative text. "And speaking in a lowered voice between two closely situated heads, of the kind of confessions, to break the isolation and ward off loneliness from the hearts of sensitive beings who cannot bear solitude, etc..."

Here, the novelist used a low voice; that is, the voice is low and soft, not loud, and this specification in expressing and narrating the voice indicates the use of vocal behaviors to convey the essence of fear and loneliness arising from isolation and exile from the country, or more accurately, from fleeing the homeland. It doesn't take long until the novelist explicitly emphasizes the word 'loneliness.' This indicates the presence of destructive isolation in the narrative space. In the next example, we find laughter in a louder voice, contrary to the subdued tone in the previous example, which is something strange and unusual, as the other character responds with a slap.

"You really don't feel me, except when I am in front of you, and alone. No definition, for example, that when you laugh loudly at another man, it means I want to slap you."

Here we find two characters, one of whom is laughing loudly, and this act is unusual in a narrative space characterized by isolation and loneliness. For this reason, we see an appropriate reaction from the other character, who wants to slap him after he laughs. This space demands silence and whispers, not laughter or loud guffaws. A response to «That silence in communication in different cultures can represent various concepts such as anger, loss, oppression, frustration, thinking, depression, agreement, disagreement, respect, etc.

This eerie silence may dominate the narrative and lead to quiet psychological behaviors, even in situations that require a person to laugh heartily and loudly, we do not find this; it is as if laughter has disappeared from the characters.

"This calls for a roaring laughter that opens the lungs to the fullest, gulping down air like a drain. Sometimes one has to laugh instead of sighing and being depressed."

We find that the character is faced with situations that require laughter, but he is unable to do so and instead falls into depression and silence. The displaced characters depicted by the Lebanese novelist suffer from many pains and crises; even laughter and giggling are absent from them, and they engage in it only rarely. Vocal behaviors are expressed through whispering and silence and do not reach shouting. Acute and critical

circumstances call for two states of sound: silence and shouting. However, in many instances, the characters have lost their ability to shout or voice objections, which is why silence and lowering of the voice dominate them. Yet, at certain times, the voice may escalate to its highest point, emanating from anger and hatred, as we find in the following example.

She got angry and started cursing me on the phone, saying that her patience had run out and that my kind words wouldn't solve the problem. I asked her if she wanted me to work as a prostitute, and she hung up on me.

Here we also find the contrast between the low voice and the high voice. The character has reached a point where a gentle voice does not solve the problem, and they must shout, get angry, or swear loudly. They may manage to get their rights by raising their voice higher than others. Essentially, they do not have the opportunity or the motivation to remain silent. This silence is deadly for them, and they are no longer able to restrain their anger. Anger is the source of many social developments, and events and developments reach a point where the character reacts with anger. However, the low voice, subdued and fitting with isolation and alienation, comes to dominate most pages of the novel, and the author says in another passage of the novel:

So I go to the window as if we are going there together. I lift the curtain to watch the rain. I almost spoke to him out loud before realizing that all I lack now is to talk to ghosts! Perhaps I intended to let out my voice to escape the sky of the sound of rain.

The writer here depicted vocal behavior as if it was speaking to ghosts, and this expression is another indication of a low voice. The character wants to raise their voice even above the sound of the rain to be heard, but this escalation is forced and not in an ordinary way.

#### **6. Body posture**

The recent indicator attempts to employ nonverbal elements mechanisms such as body posture and the presentation of the body in particular to convey certain meanings and themes. 'Body posture is defined as the specific position and orientation of parts of the body, such as bending the upper part of the body forward or backward, placing the hands in pockets, sitting, or putting one foot over the other. Body posture also includes continuous and ongoing movements of the body that reflect the personality of individuals during regular communication. An upright posture often suggests strength and self-confidence.' [Abtlatt, Mastur Salem, 'Secrets of Body Language,' p. 106] Hoda Barakat, in her creative narrative, despite focusing on the inner states of the narrative characters, does not overlook the important meanings found in depicting certain bodily forms and their specific postures. For example, in the following instance, when describing a person and their bodily positions, the focus centers on hunger and displacement, she says:

"I was of no use, neither for milk nor for meat. I was just an empty mouth. Then they sent me to a place she knew nothing about."

The author presented the first character in the story as being characterized by despair, nihilism, disappointment, and worry, where she defines herself in a way that is unhelpful. The physical posture was embodied in the description 'just an open-mouthed belly,' and this posture of the character indicates disappointment, hunger, and displacement, with no way out; or he is suffering from hunger after fleeing his homeland. In this situation, the writer tries to depict the tragic and painful experiences that the characters go through during their separation, escape, or migration from the country in times of war and devastation. Not everything goes according to their wishes; rather, they suffer from numerous disasters and problems before reaching peace or they never reach peace and tranquility and die, suffocated under this pressure. In this regard, elsewhere, the narrator describes himself and wants to define his character by explaining the state of the body, as he says:

"I know that I am a man of average looks, or even slightly below. It also happens that I can be a little impolite, or let's say lacking intact, as I do when I call you at the last minute to cancel our appointment, saying that I am sleepy and have no desire to go out, without inviting you to come over to me, while you according to my careful calculation of time –

have already dressed up and gotten ready. I apologize while yawning, ending the call without setting another date”

This narrative moment, alongside other scenes and shots, indicates the dominance of disappointment, nihilism, and the cessation of movement and activity in the characters that have been displaced from their country. The character describes him as rude, lacking in politeness, and sleepy. We do not yet know the full significance of these bodily traits, but later, the character emphasizes his unwillingness to go out and his inclination away from any movement or activity, as he yawns heavily, making speech difficult for him as well. The author has depicted disappointment and loss in a comprehensive manner, highlighting the body's position as the main means to convey these deep-seated feelings in the characters displaced from their homeland and exiled from their country. Nervous problems and constant anxiety in the characters described by the Lebanese novelist are among the most important elements in the new narrative epistolary existence created by war and terrorist conditions. For this reason, we find the use of bodily positions to express these issues, as illustrated in the following example:

“I was going to tell you how I don't wait, I mean even at the dentist's. I mean that, while I wait, I actually fall asleep. I wasn't like this before; I used to be full of patience and get tense when the person I was meeting was late, and I would line up in my head words of blame and anger.”

Here we find the word 'tension,' and this word refers to a particular condition and state in the body, indicating the spiritual level that many migrated and exiled individuals suffer from. Tension is the opposite of calmness and stillness, and 'an increase in sensitivity and quickness in an aggressive reaction close to agitation, an apparent tendency to quick emotional outbursts, and mood sharpness.

The writer wants to embody these themes in the novel and carry out the spiritual treatment of characters displaced from their homeland. The character is extremely sensitive, has little patience, and his mind is filled with harsh and bitter words. The tension here reflects the state of a character that cannot stay in one place or sit calmly; rather, he walks, moves, and never has peace. This displaced character, suffering from the pains of homelessness, revolves around him, and the novelist is keen to show other physical states to illustrate his psychological condition, as we find in the following example:

And being alone in an air that no one else breathes but me, to the point that I started to get an electric shock, as if my own actions had stung me, I almost scream in pain

Here we find that the character was revolving around itself as if it were an electric current or a snake bite, yet there is neither electricity nor a snake. Rather, it is loneliness; the writer depicted the character in these physical states to show us the effect of loneliness and alienation, which was no less than electricity or a snake. The displaced characters and those who have been uprooted from their country suffer from many pains resembling a snake bite, and in addition to the simile and analogy, she benefited from the arched shape of the body to illustrate the intensity of the pain of alienation and loneliness. Overall, tension and unrest are among the most important qualities that the novelist follows in portraying the situations of displaced characters, as she describes the characters with physical states that indicate this significant theme. She says in another passage of the novel: “I bought a newspaper to pretend to read, and here I am glancing at my watch repeatedly, then going to the illuminated boards announcing the times of arriving flights, and then returning to my seat. Thus, anyone observing me will think that the plane of the passenger I am waiting for has been delayed, and will leave me...”

Here, the novelist described the character in a tense manner. The man does not sit still or remain in one state; he walks, sits, reads the newspaper, stops reading, goes back, leaves, ascends, descends, and constantly watches the planes and their landings. Usually, such people have different thresholds for tolerating disruption and pressure. According to the writer, these displaced individuals could not handle stressful situations well. This issue depends on personal aspects of individuals, especially from their point of view and their interpretation of stress-causing factors, their resilience, and their limited tolerance toward turbulent situations. When circumstances escalate such that the level of stress exceeds

what a person can bear, some neurological and bodily illnesses occur; and the novelist has accurately observed these illnesses and issues in his novel 'Night Mail.'

### **The result**

The novelist presented the situations faced by the characters, such as horror, loneliness, and homesickness in exile, in the novel through eye contact and expressions specific to the eyes, wandering eyes, and tears. These situations contributed to embodying the characters' conditions and the novelist always seeks to depict pain and suffering through these tangible elements.

Barakat made use of facial expressions to embody feelings of nostalgia and homelessness, and this part of the body became the most expressive section for reporting what individuals experienced in exile.

So, alienation, silence, and other expressions were employed in the novel by the novelist to convey their narrative meanings. Another part of these expressions pertains to narrating past events related to the characters' homeland, and this part also does not stray from pain and sorrow.

Head movements are among the least used forms of nonverbal communication in the novel 'Night Letters,' as the story mostly unfolds in solitude and in an epistolary-monologue style. For this reason, we rarely find it relying on head movements as a means to create interaction and connection between characters.

Vocal behaviors are often defined by silence and whispering, which correspond to states of isolation, alienation, loneliness, and fear. The Lebanese writer observed the fear that may capture the voice, as well as the loud laughter and the triumphant and arrogant voices of displaced individuals. They follow a destructive path that has led them to despair and depression; therefore, they speak in whispers and low tones and mostly avoid laughter and loud sounds.

The writer benefited from body language or expressing the conditions and positions of the body to illustrate another aspect, and one of the most important themes of the novel is the lack of stillness and calm, as well as the nervous and restless problems that occurred after displacement from the homeland and the suffering they endured throughout the journey. Barakat relied on the state of tension, restlessness, and rapid movements to highlight these issues in her novel and characters in a unified manner, as it encompasses the suffering and nervous problems resulting from the pains of displacement, exile, war, and destruction.

### **4. Conclusion**

Thus, this paper argues that nonverbal communication is central to the semiotic and narrative framework in Hoda Barakat's *Night Mail*, serving as a decisive prescriber to conveying psychological depth, emotional tension, and the experience of displacement, exile, and belonging. These results show that Barakat makes use of a large arsenal of nonverbal behaviours (i.e., such as eye gaze, facial expressions, gestures accomplished with hands and head, vocal behaviours, and posture) to supplement, reinforce or occasionally replace verbal language—especially as the novel is structured as an epistolary. Such approaches successfully materialize states of fear, solitude, nostalgia, grief, and inner conflict, offering the film as an active communicative environment where non-verbal signs and bodily expression can be as meaningful as words. This research reinforces the idea that the non verbal elements of *Night Mail* are not just decorative, but a purposeful artistic device to promote realism, amplify emotional effect, and deal with ruptures in communication through trauma and fragmentation. This research sheds light on the need to integrate nonverbal and semiotic analysis in current narrative studies, particularly of war-, migration-, and trauma-inflected texts. In addition, the results compel a view of the novel as a multimedial signifying system instead of a word-based one. This method might be applied to empathisisn nonverbal communication in other epistolary or postconflict novels; compare reception of the consumption of nonverbal signals; or utilize quantitative and interdisciplinary lenses to enlighten the narrative roles

of nonverbal communication in contemporary literature, as a whole or as an ensemble of texts.

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